

Beacon, the blue ribbon and the quest for victims' rights.



According to the Crime Survey of England and Wales, only one third of victims report crime to Police. This would equate to some 152,000 Hertfordshire victims each year attempting to deal with the impact of crime for themselves. For some, they will consider the crime a 'trivial' matter not worth reporting. For others, there will be a desire not to be labelled as a 'victim' and to cope as best they can. More troubling though, there are people who are intimidated or controlled and unable to contact police for help and then there are those victims subject to manipulation and abuse who do not even realise they are a victim. Irrespective of the cause or situation, the Police and Crime Commissioner holds the responsibility to ensure that appropriate and adequate services are in place to ensure that all victims of crime, irrespective if they have reported or not, have support to cope and recover from the harm caused. In developing the Hertfordshire Victim Care Centre, it was important to take into account the various reasons why victims may be unable or unwilling to engage with support services and with this in mind, to develop a brand that would signify a place of guidance and support that is both accessible and non-judgmental. Thus Beacon was created. A space where multi-agency practitioners work together to provide the best level of support for victims of crime, some of whom, may be embarking on a journey through the Criminal Justice System, often for the first time. Therefore an important aspect of Beacon is to help guide those giving evidence in a criminal court case and ensure they have access to information and support, which might include measures to assist with giving evidence within the court, which in itself, can be a daunting experience. The British Judicial system is both complex and adversarial in nature. Evidence is 'tested' beyond reasonable doubt and the process can be unnerving for witnesses. Fortunately, victims and witnesses of crime have entitlements as set out by the Code of Practice for Victims and Witnesses which covers not only how police should notify developments in their case, but how the Criminal Justice System interacts with the witness. Disappointingly, not many victims are aware of their rights under the code but an issue the Police and Crime Commissioner is keen to address. In some countries, a Blue Ribbon signifies (amongst other causes) Victims' Rights and it seemed appropriate to embellish the Beacon logo with the blue ribbon. It was shortly before the launch of Beacon that one single horrific act emboldened the idea to include the ribbon in the logo.

On 24th March 2015, Germanwings Flight 9525 was flown into the Swiss Alps. It was when it became known that the co-pilot was responsible for the atrocity that the issue of victims' rights for those bereaved by this crime became an important international agenda. The ribbon became a potent symbol in support of those seeking justice that spanned several years and across continents.



The Blue Ribbon was formally introduced into the Beacon logo at its launch on 1st April 2015. Specialist Case Managers not only provide tailored support plans for those victims most harmed by crime but will advocate on their behalf, ensuring that their rights under the victims' code are upheld.

A brand can be meaningless unless its offer is underpinned by delivery in practice, so it was heart-warming to recently receive an account from a survivor of Domestic Abuse writing about the quality of care received by their Case Manager; "She is a Beacon and shone light into my life, giving me the help and support I needed". This one statement encapsulates all that we ever wished of the service.