

Reflections on working with ISVAs

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Registered Intermediary

IfJ Course 'ISVAs and RIs Working Together'

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Professional background



- **Speech and Language Therapist** specialised in young people (neurodivergent, young people who offend, young people with social emotional mental health needs)
- **Registered Intermediary** assist vulnerable witnesses
(+7year olds - adults, ASD, ADHD, Learning Disability, Developmental Language Disorder, anxiety, depression, PTSD, complex PTSD, attachment needs, plus no diagnosis)
- **IfJ CPD Programme Lead**

Presentation focus



- Reflect on my RI practice in working with ISVAs/ChISVAs and vulnerable witnesses
- Consider relevant RI and ISVA documents
- Share changes I've implemented to the way I work

RIPGM 2024



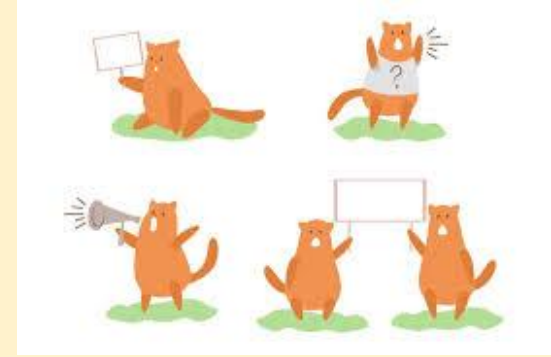
- *‘It is crucial, in the interests of the victim, for an RI to work together cohesively and communicate openly with ISVAs.’*
(RIPGM. 2024 7.6)
- *‘An RI should also make reasonable effort to ascertain whether ISVA presence has been granted through making contact with the police force or court-based witness services, particularly prior to arranging a pre-trial visit.’*
(RIPGM 2024 7.7. [\[Title\]](#))

The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 and ISVAs [isva-guidance.pdf](#)



- *‘The Act requires persons who have functions of a public nature relating to victims or any other aspect of the criminal justice system (“relevant professionals”) to have regard to this guidance in the exercise of their functions.’ (2)*
- *‘Relevant professionals should regard ISVAs as a key partner in the support of victims and have a clear understanding of the ISVA role, including their independence.’ (84).*
- *‘Relevant professionals should consider using the expertise of ISVAs to enhance the support provided to victims and ensure that their actions are informed by a clear understanding of sexual violence and sexual abuse.’ (85)*

Reflection points and actions

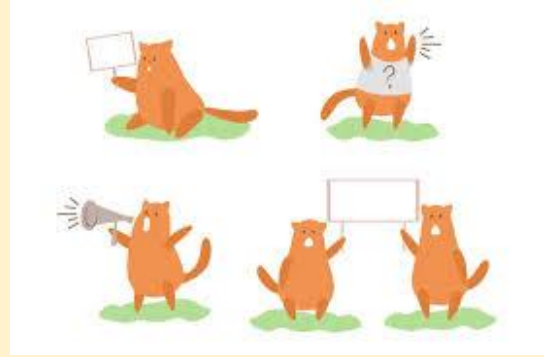


- Understand the ISVA/ChISVA role

‘an ISVA should deliver specialist, victim-centred emotional and practical support to victims of sexual violence and sexual abuse.’
(16) (The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 and ISVAs [isva-guidance.pdf](#))

- Ask OIC/paralegal on initial contact if ISVA/ChISVA already involved and make contact if they are
- Put ISVA/ChISVA on RI consent form routinely

Reflection points and actions



- Explain the ISVA/ChISVA role to witness
- Ask the witness if they wish to have an ISVA/ChISVA
- Partnership working:
 - Contact the appointed ISVA/ChISVA
 - Help the ISVA/ChISVA understand the RI role
 - Copy them into emails re planning PCV

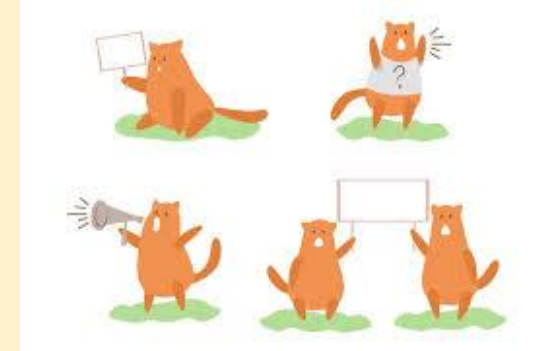
Earliest case with an ISVA

Adult: dyslexia and PTSD

Investigation: Previous VRIs and RI assisted with final VRI

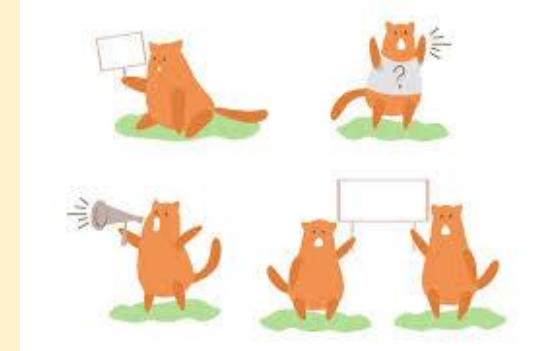
Trial: out of area: home ISVA and local ISVA
no review of XX questions granted
2 days to complete memory refreshing
1 ½ days adversarial annihilation
judge did not intervene





Reflection points and actions

- Home ISVA unable to attend
 - RI failed to use the home ISVA's knowledge of the witness
 - Local RI and ISVA explained their roles to each other
- '7.6.... An RI should seek to explain their role so the ISVA understands how they are qualified to assist the victim with communication and that this may include emotional regulation. [Title]' RIPGM*
- The ISVA can **NOT** be the responsible 3rd party for the RI



Reflection points and actions

- RI provided the specific emotional regulation techniques (movement, scents, music, breathwork)
- ISVA provided general emotional support for the witness and RI
- Access to emotional intermediary supervision for RI crucial
 - 41.1% of RIs access regular supervision
 - 58.9% RIs have experienced vicarious trauma/burnout

(‘People not just books An Investigation into the Knowledge and Experience of Trauma Informed Practice in the Justice System.’ IfJ Conference 2024. Dr Catherine O’Neill. Christ Church Canterbury University CCCU.).
- What supervision do ISVAs access?
(Zoe’s Theme 3 Self care and Well-being)

The 'Appropriate Companion' or 'Advisor' for a witness



Criminal Procedural Rules allow, if granted in the GRH for an appropriate companion or advisor (i.e. ISVA or IDVA) to sit next to or near the vulnerable witness when they give evidence

'3.8.7(c) an adviser or other companion must not—

- (i) discuss the evidence with the witness,
- (ii) advise the witness on how to answer a question,
- (iii) give the witness legal advice,
- (iv) address the court unless asked to do so, or**
- (v) interrupt the hearing'**

[crim-proc-rules-2025-part-03.doc](#)

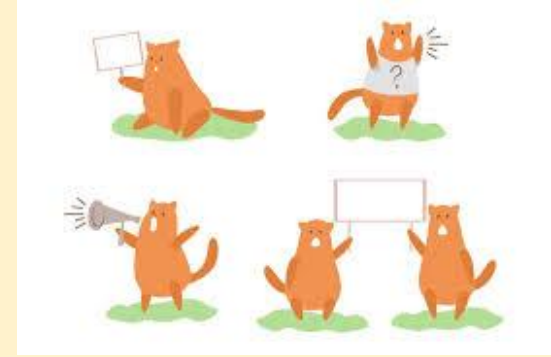
RIPGM 2024



‘It is good practice for the RI to include in their court report how the emotional support needs of the witness can be met in court.’

(RIPGM 2024 7.1. [\[Title\]](#))

Reflection Points and actions



- Ask the witness and ISVA (separately) about who is best placed to assist the witness' emotional needs (Zoe's Theme 2 Partnership Working Case Study)
- Check if ISVA could provide any emotional regulation activities for breaks
- Check if ISVA can reinforce any RI led emotional regulation strategies in their ISVA meetings
- State in the RI report
 - where the ISVA is best placed to be during XX (to enhance the witness' communication of their evidence) with rationale
 - who will do what (emotional support and emotional regulation) with justifications

Sibling Case example



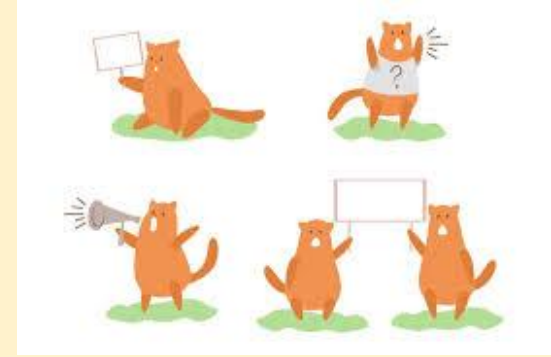
Child witness A: language difficulties, awaiting neurodivergent assessment, working below level 1 in school. ISVA

Child witness B: Dyslexia and mental health needs. School attendance low. Academic deterioration.

ChISVA intervention: healthy relationships and internet safety

- 2 different ISVA organisations and offers of Ch/ISVA assistance
- RI, ISVA and ChISVA attended a joint PCV for the siblings
- Joint ISVA/ChISVA and RI approach
- RI addendum report supported ChISVA being in link room if witness wished:
 - Mental health needs key
 - Witness had worked a long time with the ChISVA
 - Witness had no attention needs

Sibling Case Reflections and actions



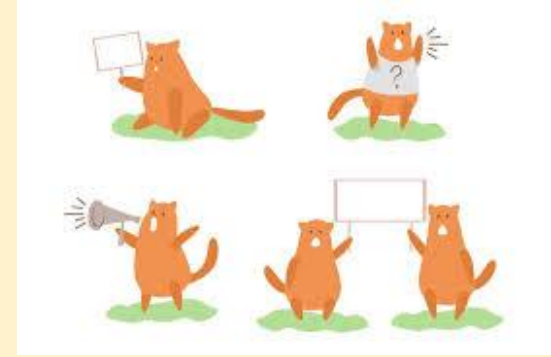
- ISVA case managed: initiated contact with me, shared 2nd ChISVA contact, updates and witness views
- Expectations (siblings/ISVA/ChISVA/RI)
- ChISVAs work differently by organisation
- Helpful for ISVA and RI to talk about what they will each do
- RI shared court resources for preparatory work and offered emotional regulation strategies (Zoe's Theme 1 Stronger Together)
- ISVA referred for therapeutic input for witness

Case

- Adult: Learning Disability, suicidal ideation and anxiety
- ISVA requested CPS RI referral
- Witness did not understand they had an 'ISVA'
- Original PCV for local court
- Trial out of area
- Discussed best place for ISVA for s28
- Police ill health



Reflections and actions



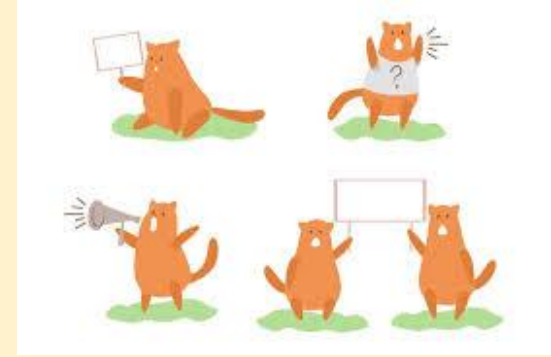
- Helpful for RI to know the ISVA's name prior to meeting as a reminder for witness
- ISVA took lead in contact with witness when police unavailable
- Initially most ISVA contact by phone until RI suggested face to face communication easier for this witness
- Consent needed for RI sharing witness communication information with ISVA
- ISVA reinforced information at RI request to aid understanding of court process
- ISVA a restricted travel budget to attend out of area court
- ISVA worked jointly with RI and Wit service manager to keep witness calm waiting for s28

Adult Case



- ADHD awaiting ASD assess
- ISVA suggested RI needed
- 1st PCV and Pre-trial CPS meeting arranged prior to RI involvement (RI unable to attend, witness forget PCV)
- Witness requested combined special measures
- 2nd PCV with RI and link familiarisation arranged (ISVA unable to attend but reminded witness to attend)
- RI completed addendum report
- Judge deemed combined special measures 'not practical'
- OIC, ISVA and RI worked as a team to gain witness views and argue for what needed
- GRH new Judge granted combined special measures

Case Reflections and actions



PCV with ISVA restricted to showing the room(s)

PCV with RI is part of the witness assessment process and includes link familiarisation

Email updates between ISVA, RI and OIC essential

In rare situations an ISVA may attend the GRH at Pros request

ISVA can help to:

- Prepare witness for court visits
- Gain witness' views on special measures
- Ensure witness replies to OIC messages
- Remind about meeting dates

Overall reflections



- ISVAs and RIs are each witness focused and stronger together
- We need to
 - Understand each other's neutral roles and be able to explain them to the witness
 - Ask to find out who is already involved and suggest referral if needed
 - Prompt OIC to discuss ISVA/RI referral with witness
 - Arrange the PCV so ideally both the ISVA and RI can attend (**unless this would overwhelm the witness**)

Overall reflections



- RIs can help the ISVA understand the witness' communication needs (with consent) so the ISVA's work is tailored and effective
- ISVAs may reinforce RI's work to help witnesses understand the court process
- Check who will do what to assist emotional regulation and support, and where the ISVA will be for evidence giving, for that particular witness
- Be open to joint working and be respectful
- We are both needed and want the same end result!!