

Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Bill

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Sacro's experience in providing a restorative justice service as part of the *Time To Be Heard* initiative suggest that the creation of a National Confidential Forum would be a positive development. In particular, survivors of abuse who worked with us frequently described feelings of invisibility, of not having their experiences recognised, and of not having the importance of their history and experience validated. By recording and acting as a depository for these stories and histories, the proposed forum would be an important source of validation of survivors.

It is important that the forum has a clear identity and avoids being too closely associated with another body. However, it seems unlikely that staffing levels would be such for a stand-alone body to provide good value for money. Therefore, the option to establish the forum as a separate unit within the MWC seems the most practical one.

The perception of independence by those coming into contact with the Forum is crucially important, not least because many survivors hold strong views that the Government and its agencies failed to protect their interests in the past. Independence would assist the forum in being perceived as having a genuine aspiration to record and reflect the experiences of survivors.

Participants should have the opportunity to access a restorative justice process, such as that provided within *Time To Be Heard*. This would provide the potential for them to receive an apology from the responsible agency, to assist in ensuring that similar abuse does not recur, and to register with the agency the personal impact of the historic abuse.

Given the traumatic experience of many survivors of abuse it is likely that some will be reluctant to revisit painful memories. The support of organisations such as the Care Survivors Service Scotland would be useful in supporting people both when considering whether to participate and during the process itself.

Access to appropriate support and counselling services should be an integral part of the process, and participants should be able to access this before and after their engagement with the Forum.

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8 April 2013