

Newsletter

Edition DECEMBER 2020

free for SURVIVORs
who are Members
of CIS'ters



£12 p.a. subscription for non-members
or organisations

www.cisters.org.uk

CIS'ters IS NOT a therapy group: it is an organisation run by survivors, for survivors:
“we might be victim/survivors, but this is not all that we are, or can be”

2021 = Top Up Your Tank

Email: helpme@cisters.org.uk

Phone: 023 80 338080

The year continues to be challenging and many of us are running on empty – so the key message is to try to top up your tank (emotionally and physically).

As an organisation we are still responding to 700% higher demand than usual – and focusing our efforts on meeting that need. October 2020 saw the retirement of Helen from our small office team (see previous edition of this newsletter) and we have now been joined by Cathie. Many members and others assume that we have a large team but the reality is that we have a very small team and the majority of these are volunteers, including our Manager Gillian.



In recent weeks we have sent out a survey form to all of our members, plus also to external organisations/others that we have contact with.

Forms have been sent out either by email or by post – and if yours has not arrived please let us know as YOUR feedback is important to us. The output from the survey is to help us plan for the future.

Hi Gillian et al, I hope this finds you safe and well. Something I was thinking about the other day, regarding face coverings.

When it became mandatory to wear them in enclosed public spaces unless you had a genuine reason not to, CIS'ters quite rightly pointed out that extreme distress due to having one's nose and mouth covered triggering memories of an abuser's hand over one's face is a perfectly genuine reason not to wear one. My difficulty is going to be the reverse. I am fine with wearing a face covering - I have several that I have made myself, so that I can wash them after wearing and still have a enough clean ones to go on with. Added to my Transitions spectacles and a wide-brimmed hat, I'm managing to go shopping with my husband when I need to.

But what am I to do further along in time? Presumably there will eventually come a time when face coverings are no longer required. I know this may be many months into the future, if not years; but I fear I will feel so exposed that I will once again be afraid to go out. I like the feeling of anonymity that a face covering gives me - in the highly unlikely event that I was to bump into someone from the past in the shopping mall, they wouldn't have a scooby that it was me. I'm really not going to want to give that up! Any other members feel the same, I wonder? Kind regards, and stay safe. **Janie (400)**

A message from Cathie (143)

*I joined **CIS'ters** in 1997, so have been a member for many years. I was recruited to the Office Team in October 2020 on a six month contract (which will hopefully continue if the funding becomes available). To give the small team more resilience, some of the role previously undertaken by Helen (220) has been shared amongst the office team, though I have the key task of maintaining membership data.*



*I have reflected on my journey within **CIS'ters**. Over the years I have attended various events held by the charity and for a time also attended Core Group. I have always been passionate about the work undertaken by and within **CIS'ters** including raising awareness. Seven years ago I joined the board of trustees which was a role I took great pride in but necessarily have had to give up now that I am in a temporary paid role (part-time).*

***CIS'ters** gave me a response to how I was feeling and allowed me to recognise that I was a child when my abuse started. Like so many of us, I stayed silent for complex reasons (including fearing that my dad would go to jail for murdering the perpetrator). So I kept that secret (in common with many other survivors) for many years (in my case 40 years). I still have days when it comes to mind, but I remind myself, that I'm still here, I'm a Survivor and I've done good in my life. I'm still using education as a tool to enrich my busy, muddled life and I love it.*

*Gillian, Kate and the others in our small team gave me a warm welcome when I started. There's so much to learn and I'm thoroughly enjoying it. There's so many ongoing challenges for **CIS'ters**: funding, time and support, but we will come through it.*

As those of you who speak to me will know, or find out, I have my roots in Scotland. I arrived in Southampton in the 70s and my employer at the time, allowed me time off for furthering my education. I'm now in my 'golden years'. I sometimes use my 'Warrior Music', particularly, Labi Sifre, 'Something Inside So Strong' and Lena Martell's 'One Day At A Time'.

We can all be strong. We are women who have lived through difficult childhood experiences as female children which have caused us problems as adults (including physical health issues, not only emotionally). Some of us, with help, have managed to create a quality of life. But I know that for some of our members/other survivors that help has not always been as accessible as it ought to have been from the statutory services (as children and as adults).

*I look back at my own journey and am amazed that I found the time and energy to run a home, have a career, plus juggle childcare and the needs of others. Amongst all of this I have always ensured that I have other interests, all keeping me busy (or as a welcome distraction). I have also been fortunate enough to have created a number of friends, inside and outside of **CIS'ters**, who are part of my support system. From the time I came into contact with **CIS'ters**, in the late 90s I have been supported, often from a distance, to be the best I can be.*

Don't let anyone say 'you can't' – you can. Sometimes it is about finding the right solution, for you!

Wishing all our Members and those that they love, a healthy, happy and great 2021.

***Cathie (143)** member, and now part of the office team.*



WELL WORTH A LOOK ! IICSA have developed a downloadable guide to 'well being' for adult survivors. If you would like to view it or download, it can be found at:

<https://www.iicsa.org.uk/key-documents/9006/view/your-wellbeing-independent-inquiry-into-child-sexual-abuse.pdf>

AN IMPORTANT CONSULTATION – YOUR VIEWS ARE IMPORTANT – deadline 19 Feb 2021

The government are seeking views to help them develop an updated strategy for “Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls” – which includes sexual abuse.

If you feel able, the government would like those with lived experience to complete their online survey form > <https://ipsos.uk/VAWGsurvey>

They are particularly keen to hear from people who may feel under-represented in previous strategies or who feel their circumstances were not supported by existing services. In addition to those with lived experiences of these issues, they are also seeking the views of those with expertise in working with victims and survivors, those involved in preventative activity, and those involved in providing services. This includes relevant professionals, such as those working in social care, education, law enforcement, local government, public health and healthcare.

Full background and information on how to contribute to the Call for Evidence is in the link below: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/violence-against-women-and-girls-vawg-call-for-evidence>

You can contact officials either by email > VAWGStrategy2021@homeoffice.gov.uk

Or write to: Interpersonal Abuse Unit, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Team
5th Floor, Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF

What About Male Victims ? – the consultation includes the following statement:

“Despite the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy capturing all victims, the Male Victim Position Statement, published in 2019, was needed to explore the particular challenges and barriers male victims experience to seeking support, and points to resources which are useful for local commissioners, while maintaining that violence against women and girls is a disproportionately gendered crime. It is in our commitment to male victims of these crimes that we would like responses to the call for evidence to better consider how these crimes affect male victims. Only by understanding the key issues can we truly reflect the experiences of male victims in the in the new Strategy, which will consider the approach, treatment and support that this group needs.”

Dear Gillian and Team Members, I don't know if this is appropriate for the newsletter, but please use it if it is.

In the run up to Christmas, I read an article about Marcus Rashford's childhood, about a television documentary behind his motivation to campaign for free meals for school children. The way his mother struggled alone to feed her five children in a position of poverty has been widely reported.

What resonated with me as a survivor is this quote from Marcus, “when you come from a place of struggle and pain, a lot of the time it switches and it becomes your drive and motivation”. This echoes the radio show “Past Imperfect” earlier in the year with Alice Thomson and Rachel Sylvester where high-achievers reveal how they survived and came to terms with trauma and adversity. The premise of the radio programme is that it is a false assumption that bad beginnings in life must necessarily lead to failure and continued adversity in adulthood.

Sometimes I feel health care providers, or social services, or the police or whatever type of person it may be who has decision or influence and impact on survivors can label us and write us off as failures. It's patronising, stereotyping and disabling. For years, I saw myself as tainted and worthless. We all deserve better than that. We have proven resilience. We have lived through and survived. I refuse to be written off as damaged. There are days with set-backs and self-doubt. There are unhelpful labellers. There are echoes and spectres of the past.

The thing that keeps me going in these times is the inner nugget of survivor gene that is really strong in me, stronger in me than in non-survivors. My unmasked resilience gene gives me insight, tenacity, hope and empathy. I can choose to use it for the good of others like Rashford has done during COVID.

In 2021, my resolve is, like Rashford, to turn my struggle and pain into my drive and motivation and use it to help others. Best wishes, **Claire (884)**



The Truth Project is part of IICSA

<https://www.truthproject.org.uk/share-your-experience>

More than 1,000 survivors of child sexual abuse have now shared their experience with the Truth Project over the phone.

At the Truth Project, survivors of child sexual abuse can share their experiences with the Inquiry, and put forward suggestions for change.

The Truth Project will draw to a close next year so we are asking victims and survivors to get in touch if they would like to take part.

Deadlines to Register:

For an In Person Session – by 8 Jan 21 > All sessions will have taken place by 31st March

For phone or video session – by 31 Jul 21 > All phone / video sessions will finish by 30th Sept 2021

Or you can send a submission in writing: this needs to have been received by the Truth Project before 15th October 2021

Contact Details for the Truth Project >

via the website <https://www.truthproject.org.uk/share-your-experience>

Phone: 0800 917 1000 (Mon-Fri 8am-10pm and Sat 10am-noon)

Email: contact@iicsa.org.uk

A Poem from **Amy (1581)** – called “ You Are Enough”

It's so easy to feel the pressure,
like a weight on your shoulders,
It can be from external factors,
Or it may be you placing the boulders,

Before it gets overwhelming,
Take a step back and see,
You need to do what's right for you,
Whatever that might be,

Give yourself a quick break,
And realise you are worthy,
Who cares what Karen's doing,
Comparing yourself to others,
make the lines blurry,

If you know what you want from life,
Put it in easy achievable stages,
And understand that it doesn't matter,
Even if it has taken you ages,

Nobody knows what you've been through,
To get where you are today,
So pat yourself on the back,
You are still here and that deserves a hooray,

Think about the small things you do,
That you achieve on a daily basis,
Whether it's cleaning one room,
Or making a start on that book,
You've heard is one of the greatest.

Instead of putting pressure on yourself,
To be a perfect as can be,
Remind yourself you are doing great,
Let go of it's weight and be free.

INQUIRY INTO SELF-GENERATED CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IMAGES

A National inquiry into increases in self-generated child sexual abuse images has been launched amid warnings of online communities “devoted” to contacting and grooming children.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Media announced on 9th November 2020 an inquiry into the rise of “self-generated” indecent images of children online. Self-generated content can include child sexual abuse content created using webcams, sometimes in the child’s own room, and then shared online. In some cases, children are coerced, deceived or extorted into producing and sharing a sexual image or video of themselves. In many cases this goes on without the victims’ parents’ or guardians’ knowledge.

The APPG’s inquiry - “*Selfie Generation: What’s behind the rise of self-generated indecent images of children online?*” will investigate the causes behind this phenomenon and recommend ways to combat it and protect children.

The UK Safer Internet Centre, a unique partnership of three world-leading charities (SWGfL, Childnet, and the Internet Watch Foundation) will lead the inquiry as secretariat of the APPG. In October 2020, the IWF revealed that in the first six months of 2020, 44% of all the child sexual abuse content dealt with by the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) involved self-generated material.

Images and videos of online child sexual abuse can be reported anonymously via the following website <https://report.iwf.org.uk/en>

Advice from IWF is that:

- Reports to the IWF are anonymous.
- Do report images and videos of child sexual abuse to the IWF so that they can be removed.
- Do provide the exact URL where child sexual abuse images are located.
- Do report to the police if you are concerned about a child’s welfare,
- Do report only once for each web address – or URL. Repeat reporting of the same URL isn’t needed and wastes analysts’ time.
- Do report non-photographic visual depictions of the sexual abuse of children, such as computer-generated images. Anything of this nature, which is also hosted in the UK, the IWF can get removed.

Comment from Gillian (00): *I initially couldn’t get my head around the topic of ‘self-generated’ as it felt in some way to be a blaming perspective. The young people of today have so many pressures aimed at them through online imagery and also online grooming. Others prey on children and young people, encouraging them or blackmailing them to take ‘selfies’ which are to meet the gratification needs of others. A manipulation of the child/young person. The result is that the image is ‘self-generated’ and also then shared. We live in a time when the internet and technology have both helped us, but also is used to create and inflict harm on children and young people and vulnerable adults.*

Are you a sexual abuse victim who lived in the same home as the abuser and was previously barred from claiming compensation because of the ‘same roof rule’ ?

Many victims of sexual abuse are still unaware that they can submit a claim for criminal compensation. But many were also then barred from what was called the ‘same roof rule’, which discriminated against victims who were living in the same household as their abuser. Following campaigning and also a 2019 IICSA report, this specific barrier was lifted – but there is a deadline for applying:

- Where the crime took place between 1 August 1964 and 30 September 1979
- The victim lived within the same family home as the offender when these crimes occurred
- **You have until 13 June 2021 to submit a claim**

<https://www.gov.uk/claim-compensation-criminal-injury/victim-lived-with-attacker-before-october-1979>

You can also contact your local Victim Support Service to ask for their help to complete the paperwork if you do not have access to the internet. <https://www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help/support-near-you/south-east/hampshire-and-isle-wight>

A message from Sarah (1411)

I've had a lot to deal with in the past year and a half but as a positive I came across this poem and was so inspired that I use it and adapted it to my own. I use this when I have feelings of love for my children and also just to remind me of the reasons why I left my ex-partner.

True. I did defend your behaviour, but worse, most of the time I kept quiet, and I didn't tell people, and I suffered in silence. I loved you so much, I tried my best, but I realised I couldn't fix you.

You created a narrative that didn't exist. Only for me to fall in love. When you got me, you isolated me, and tried your best to tear me down, to abuse me and to control me. While everyone outside, falling for your charm, admiring you as the sweetest and greatest guy.

No-one knew about your rage, the name calling, the lying, the put downs, the criticism, the manipulation, passive aggressiveness, the emotional rollercoaster and psychological punishment you would put us all through. I gave up my army career to take care of our baby because that is what you wanted. I was alone, no friends, no job, no family, I was exhausted. Confused. I thought I had met my soulmate.

It was hard to leave but worth it. It's still a work in process, but it's getting better. You wanted me back, but I never looked back, and I went no-contact. I had heard it all before. You'll never change.

I am too strong, too smart. Too much self-love and too much self-respect.

I am sure you are telling yet another sad story about me, where you are the one being the victim.

I feel sorry for the next woman. You might strategically find someone that is easier to manipulate and control this time. I hope she is equally smart and have the strength to see through you and to get away before you completely break her spirit and soul. I can only hope.

Yes, you managed to get me,

but you couldn't keep me.

No more defending.

No more abuse.

Never.

I am healing. I'll get there. I will love again.

Better times ahead.

*Thank You to **Louise (615)** who sent us this picture, resulting in a much needed smile*



Thank You To Focus Group

We currently have an external consultant, Jenni, helping us to develop a Digital Strategy, and she is also part of our Business Plan Project Development Team. We want to thank the members (local and national) who spoke to her, their views are personal but will also be reflective of members in general. Trustees will be reviewing the draft report at their next meeting when we can then move to Stage 2 of the project, which will include creating some podcasts.

There are a huge number of podcasts 'out there' already (on a variety of topics, including created by survivors) that are helpful to members, and many of you might have favourites or see gaps. Your help is needed, please, to help us create a list of what podcasts/short films are helpful already and what topics are missing. **Helpful to have your thoughts and insights re podcasts**

Email us > helpme@cisters.org.uk or ring us 023 80 338080



JANUARY 2021

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DECEMBER 2021

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TEARS, FOR TIERS

as at December 2020

I am very aware that this is a time of tears, for tiers. Many of the ongoing phone calls and emails contain major distress at the loss of ability to spend time with loved ones over the forthcoming Holiday and/or the limits placed on the numbers who can gather and where (indoors or outdoors) etc.

Trust is at the core for many survivors and others who have experienced interpersonal trauma. Many feel that they distrust what they are being told about covid-19, and that anxiety escalates. I at times have struggled with low mood due to the ongoing restrictions and do my best to focus on the positive, but it is somewhat like being on the beach and being hit by another wave and struggling to stand up afterward. So, being able to stay focused and unwavering is asking a great deal of us, as individuals – and as a small charity made up of survivors. BUT I am able to appreciate that whatever the politics during this present time must be incredibly difficult.

None of us have a crystal ball and whilst we can all look backwards and say 'should have/could have' that is the easy bit. Making the decisions is the hardest bit. Decisions made elsewhere that affect us can feel unjust. BUT there is no alternative, at this time, especially as we await the roll-out of the vaccine.

Meanwhile I hope you will join with me in sending best wishes to Nicola who is one of our small office team. As I write this, she is in ICU with covid-19. Only 10 days ago she was laughing and joking and in reasonable good health. Someone who took the restrictions seriously, protected herself and others – and acted responsibly at all times.

The restrictions and the cause, covid-19, are impacting on us far longer than we thought would be possible. But, necessarily I will continue to take the required precautions to protect myself, my husband, by colleagues, my friends, my family and also that which I hold most dear – those that access CIS'ters.

Sending love and virtual hugs, Gillian (00) p.s. my number is '00' because number 1 was allocated to the 1st person to join the group I set up, and it felt wrong to grab it back for me. Hence a I am forever = '00'

I Have Grown

I have grown, aged, matured
During my journey into the past
The guilt and shame are no longer mine.

My abuser is named
His reputation blown
Father, policeman, child rapist.

I am free to move on
To continue to evolve
Released from 30 years in chains.

Young girl, woman, me
Now able to explore who I am
Future, present – new life created.

The shambles of my life before
Gradually being erased as
I mature into who I should have been

Before his evil intervention.
I have grown, aged, matured

I am a victim no more.

Gillian (written in 1997)

THANK YOU

Thank you everyone for your support and help,
Because of you all I feel no longer to shout,
I know I'm not alone there's kind people out there,
Reading the newsletters it shows people do care,
With kind, love and understanding you've all showed me a way,
To enjoy my life and be myself I will say,
Thank you for being there for myself and everyone,
With help I've learned you're not alone and now my life has begun,
Together all of us we stand,
Maybe holding to a friend's hand,
Keep up the good work I'll say,
Because it helps to live another day,
I can now talk my mind,
Without the help it would be hard to find.

By **Rosemary (1484)**

Stay Strong

When you see no-way out and everything in your life is going wrong,
Fight it don't self-harm because it's now you need to stay strong,
Even if it feels like you're going out of your mind,
Hang on to hope because you can have a future I find,
Bad things (Abuse) happens in life but you learn to fight on,
Even if you know everything you've been through is wrong,
I know how it feels to self-harm and not wanting to be around,
Please don't try to kill yourself and fall to the ground,
Life might seem like a nightmare today,
But keep fighting and you'll find a way,
Just think of your friends and family when you're low,
Because you are loved and like a rose you'll grow,
Day by day you'll get stronger and want a life,
Not hurt yourself with tablets, razor or knife,
Out of the darkness there is a light,
You can start fresh and everything will turn out right.

By **Rosemary (1484)**

Hope!

Hope for the future
That
I might walk
Taller
In the knowledge that
I am a
Survivor
Full of
Courage
And wisdom
To know that
I have stretched
Myself
To achieve
Unbelievable
Steps forward
To be
What I am now
A thriver
Nurturing my gentle
Beginning
To a new world.

Gillian (*written in 1995*)

This Life ?

Who could have known
Who could have predicted
That, this, would become my life
A life filled with pain, still
But also hope – for the future

Who could have known
What could be achieved
Now and in the future
When others put up barriers
To the possibility
To the thought
To the suggestion
That survivors might have a voice
Be heard

Who could have known, but us
That survivors could provide
Many of the answers
To creating improved
Responses
To meet the needs
Of victims and survivors

Gillian (*written in 2000*)

Yesterday – is done; today is here; tomorrow is on the horizon



What is an ISVA ?

Many specialist support agencies offer an **Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA)** service to victims/survivors of rape and sexual assault/sexual abuse. The Independent Sexual Violence Adviser role was commissioned by Baroness Stern through the Home Office Violent Crime Unit in 2005.

An ISVA is trained to a professional standard and their aim is to help victims/survivors who are facing difficult situations including whether or not to contact the police. It is a confidential service and they can help provide a necessary insight into how the criminal justice process works – and if the individual then decides that they do want to contact the police, the ISVA can help them do this. An ISVA is there to provide with information only so that the victim/survivor can make the right decision for them, at that time. The aim of an ISVA is to provide information and that statutory services are providing a response that is trauma aware and victim focused.

<https://www.thesurvivorstrust.org/independent-sexual-violence-advisers>

A massive thank you to all the individual members/others who have continued to make donations (finance and/or other support) to us this year. Your ongoing contribution to our work means so much to us (emotionally and physically).

Finally, in common with other small charities we are also incredibly appreciative for the grants we have received during the past 12 months, without which we would not have survived financially (e.g. our monthly rent for office plus electricity is over £1,000 per month !)

We are continuing to update our website www.cisters.org.uk including adding new items, so please do take time to look at it periodically. Plus if you notice something missing or would be useful to consider for inclusion, please do let us know.

TRUSTEES HAVE THEIR NEXT MEETING IN MID January 2021, and planned agenda includes ongoing discussions relating to resuming face to face peer group meetings. Further updates will be included in our February 2021 Newsletter.

Editorial Statement: We welcome letters from Survivors and from those who support them such as friends/allies/counsellors/social workers etc. While every effort will be made to keep contributions complete and unedited we reserve the right to make amendments when necessary, and will note it as 'edited'. Decisions about the inclusion & amendment of contributions are the responsibility of the Editorial Team, and are final. Contributions do not necessarily reflect the views & opinions of **CIS'ters**, members of the Trust Board, or the Editorial Team. Inclusion of any reference to an individual, book list, or organisation resource is not a recommendation.

The contents of this newsletter are for information and support purposes only.

This newsletter is not a substitute for individual therapy or professional supervision.

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