

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”

2020 = Hidden Harm

Email: helpme@cisters.org.uk

Phone: 023 80 338080

When faced, in March 2020, with an unknown and unpredictable situation – we had no idea what the future would hold for us. Within **CIS'ters** our initial dilemma of would we have sufficient funding, was an obvious priority and also the need to prioritise what we could continue to do, and what we would need to halt or postpone – and what we could safely deliver from outside of the office.

Since being set up in September 1995 the landscape has changed. There are now more opportunities for survivors to reach out for help. Awareness raising continues with amazing results (the existence of IICSA being just one). With that in mind we were not sure if **CIS'ters** continued to be relevant or needed. March 2020 was a sort of decision point. During 2019 we had looked forward to the year 2020 as September was our 25th anniversary. So, we had a determination that we would make it that far, at least.

It was a wobbly start, and we were not sure where funding would come from, if at all. We updated our website and have sent out additional editions of the newsletter reminding our members we are there if needed. What has been clear is that victim/survivors of familial sexual abuse during childhood have been overwhelmed – and **CIS'ters** is still relevant and needed.

During the past six months (April – September 2020) the **volume of contact** (predominantly by email) has **risen by 700%** compared with the same period in 2019. The central message from our members and other survivors has been that there continues to be increased feelings of anxiety, isolation and an undercurrent of concern for the children, of today, who are victims of familial sexual abuse. The true depth of the Hidden Harm within our society.

I want to reassure you that CIS'ters is still here – and responding to emails and phone calls. It can take longer than you might be used to – but we will get back to you. If you haven't already, contact us and tell us about the sad and crap days – and we also love to hear about the inventive ways many have found to keep going..... (thank goodness for Netflix is the common theme)

57% of **CIS'ters** members live in Hampshire and IoW and the remainder across England and Wales – plus Scotland. Whilst we have had members who have been shielding due to underlying health issues, many of these continued to work from home delivering essential services. In addition we have other members working in NHS/health, schools, postal services, shops/supermarkets, care homes, and working with the vulnerable (including animals), counselling services, delivery drivers and so many other key areas – and not forgetting the members who responded to the call to stay at home to help keep others safe.

Covid continues to affect our daily lives in so many ways – and is ongoing. But I am still hopeful for the future and look forward to 2021 and properly celebrating (with you) our 26th Year. In the meantime, sending best wishes and virtual hugs, Gillian (founder of **CIS'ters**).

Dear **CIS'ters**, I have just read our newsletter. Though I receive it, I don't always read it fully. This time I thought I would drop you a line. I have made a small donation as I feel the work we do is very good and rewarding to the people who receive it.

You have always been there when I have been in crisis and that has been helpful to me. As you know I have been a member for several years and have not taken full advantage of member meetings and member workshops. That being mainly because of wanting to keep myself protected and not really fitting into some of the topics. Before I retired I could attend non-member events but within my role of a professional, this again was a protection against my inner world. This pandemic has at times thrown me as, I have seen others fall into fear, isolation and depression. However I consider myself to be ok (!!) and as always keep the mask well in place so the world cannot see my inner turmoil.

Best wishes from – Glen (261)

Hi there,

Thank you so much for the email and the August 2020 newsletter, it has really helped me this evening. I hope you are well and safe in this tough time. I am going to write those songs out that Louise (1497) mentioned and give them a try. I also love rock choir's version of something inside so strong and eight years ago sang it with rock choir on Wembley football stadium's pitch. I have signed up to the trauma conference (mentioned in the same newsletter) and am hoping to catch some of them. I definitely aim to come to the Weekend Workshop in May 2021. I start counselling on the 7th September 2020 and am hoping that it will help me to deal with the past.

It's been a weird old day filled with mixed emotions

At some points it felt like I was drowning in the deepest ocean,

But what I've learnt today is that it's okay to feel down,

it's okay to be angry it's okay feel whatever you do,

As long as you realise there are people there to talk to,

So if your day is not perfect,

And things are a bit hard,

Take a deep breath,

You have come so far, don't forget,

Best wishes from Amy (1581).

Dear Gillian @ CIS'ters

The newsletter is amazing. It is so diverse and interesting.

It is really clear the good CIS'ters does for so many.

I hope you are okay and some day in the not too distant future I hope to see you in person again.

Take Care, Karen Dawes, OPCC (Hampshire, IoW, Portsmouth and Southampton)

In the August 2020 newsletter a member called Lou mentioned that she wanted to attend the weekend workshop in May 2021, but that there was a family event that clashed – and she didn't know how to explain why she should/couldn't attend (her preference was the weekend).

Nicola (1125) sent us the following in response:

“Please will you let Lou know that if I explain my whereabouts when I am going to a cisters weekend I just say it is a training event for work. I don't know if this will help. I know it isn't pleasant to lie, and it should be a last resort, but I have backed out of things at the last moment saying I have a migraine.”

We passed on the message to Lou, and her response was also shared with Nicola:

“That was so kind of Nicola to write in. I hadn't thought of saying I'm on a work event. Great idea. Please thank Nicola very much.”

I sit and look at the ships moored nearby

Colossal cities that sit empty other than a small crew

In my mind I am sailing away, on a much needed holiday

To Barcelona, Venice, or someplace more exotic

Swayed to sleep with the gentle rock of the ocean

With no other cares, than what to eat

This year has robbed us of so much, the hurt runs deep

At times it has been difficult to hold on to the positives

Then I comfort myself with the thought of 2021

And being able to celebrate what I do have

Not what I have lost.

Thank you for being there, for listening, for caring

As I sit and look at the ships moored nearby

Travelling to places I have yet to see

And people I have yet to meet

So many changes

Too many to count or share

World and self-unbalanced

As we seek to find our way

Through the uncertainty

That surrounds us, still

Change brings new opportunities

New challenges

Mountains and valleys

With small plateaus on which to

Draw breath

Loss is always painful

Of people, of places, of time

Draw breath, and move forward

Dear **CIS'ters**, thank you for latest newsletter. I really enjoy it and find it comforting. It couldn't have arrived at a better time recently as I was having an increase in flashbacks and panic attacks.

Thanks for all your help, Louise (1497)

'You shouldn't have to get to the end of your tether, or the end of yourself, for someone to say, 'I can help you now''

The National Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) has published new research exploring the challenges faced by victims and survivors in accessing statutory, private and voluntary sector support services.

The report analyses the support service experiences of over 180 victims and survivors. It considers a number of key areas including survivors' awareness of the services available to them, barriers to access and reasons for not doing so, as well as the effectiveness of services in meeting the needs of survivors.

<https://www.iicsa.org.uk/news/inquiry-research-finds-most-child-sexual-abuse-survivors-face-barriers-accessing-statutory>

Survivors of child sexual abuse can share their experiences with the Inquiry's Truth Project in writing, over the phone or by video call. The Truth Project is drawing to a close next year so that all of the experiences shared can be used to inform the Inquiry's Final Report and recommendations, due for publication in 2022, so children are better protected in the future.

Visit www.truthproject.org.uk for more information or email share@iicsa.org.uk.

You might like to know that: The Dogs Trust are still running the project to foster dogs where their owners are victims of domestic abuse. To learn more <https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/hope-project-freedom-project/freedom-project>

RESPONDING TO THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC WITH COMPASSION – Dr Sarah Temple

Please take a look at the coronavirus information page compiled by Dr Sarah Temple as a resource for parents and very relatable for adult victim/survivors of csa. <http://www.carersupportmatters.co.uk>

ALWAYS GOOD TO HEAR FROM MEMBERS, BUT SOMETIMES SAD TOO:

- 1. Dear CIS'ters, thank you for August newsletter. Just to update you, I have been diagnosed with Dementia, part of which is finding it difficult to concentrate when reading, among other symptoms, and would like to cancel my membership and receipt of the newsletters. I send my best wishes to everyone and I know you are a great support for others. I send my love and best wishes for the future.*
Member (136)
- 2. Dear X I am SO sorry to read your news. So many of our members have increasing health issues. We will delete you from our membership list – and in the meantime I just want to say that I really do value the fact that you trusted us enough to make contact all those years ago and hope that we have helped you in some way. Best wishes for your life going forward – and sending virtual hugs as well, Gillian et al CIS'ters*
- 3. Hi Gillian, Thank you so much for your kind reply and understanding. It means a lot. You and Helen are the only members I remember, and I have always thought of you both with much fondness. So many women have found support with Cisters over the years, including me, long may it continue. Take care of yourselves and stay safe! Love from past member (136)*

As you will know from the letter/emails we sent out in September, Helen has recently retired from her paid role with us, to focus on family and other priorities. Helen (221) is continuing her involvement with **CIS'ters** as an member which, as you will see from below, has been a very important part of her life.

My Journey within CIS'ters. By Helen (221)

I first contacted **CIS'ters** in September 1998, having been given the contact number by my health visitor. I rang many times before completing the whole number, when I finally did, I talked to a lady called Gillian (who as it turned out was the founder of **CIS'ters**.). The call was a blur but I was asked if I wanted to become a member and was sent a joining pack. Once this was filled in and returned I was offered the chance to meet a volunteer member of **CIS'ters**, and a few weeks later met up with a lovely lady called Alison.

I recall being very nervous, I was going to speak to a stranger about something so personal, dark, dirty and shameful that at that point in my life I had told very few people about. I didn't know how I was going to do it. All I can say... now... is that I am very glad that I took the chance and that I did. Alison put me at ease right from the moment I met her. Knowing I was speaking to another survivor helped me loads and I found it easier than I thought to talk to her. That first meeting has stayed with me all these years and I will always appreciate the time she took to meet with me.

The very first thing I attended as a member was a workshop on self-esteem, again I was nervous as I didn't know what to expect and I was really scared I'd meet someone that I knew....I did!! After panicking for about 20 minutes internally and thinking "now this person knows this about me", I realised actually she was in the room for exactly the same reason and was probably feeling the same way. I calmed down and learnt a lot at the workshop, and later we became good friends.

After that first workshop and spending time in the same room as other survivors it dawned on me that I wasn't alone with this anymore, which is what I'd always thought. There were other people who'd had a similar childhood to me. This was a very sad realisation but also a comfort in knowing I wasn't alone anymore and that they totally understood and got me. It was a huge moment for me and I asked to join Core Group (which met twice a month) right then.

I spent around 18 months attending Core Group meetings and although at first it was a very hard and scary place to be, being with and learning from other survivors was so valuable to me. I learnt so much about myself and the reasons I thought the way I did and felt the way I did and how to cope with things I was still struggling with. But more than that I met some really amazing women who taught me how to trust, and I remain very good friends with some of them to this day.

When I left Core Group I didn't leave **CIS'ters**, as I had found something too precious to give up.

So I started to volunteer (one of many) as it was important to me to be able to give something back to **CIS'ters** and to other survivors. At first it was small things like helping to collate and send out the Newsletter.

Then six months after I left Core Group I became one of the helpers at Core, while I learnt how to become a facilitator, which I later became. It felt really good to be able to give something back to the newer Members. Especially as it was something which had helped me so much.

I also became a team member at the Residential weekend (now the Weekend Workshop) which I did for 9 years running, my last being 2008. I only stopped being a facilitator at Core and the Residential because my personal circumstances changed and I could no longer give my time in the evenings or weekends.

Over the years I had also volunteered, with others, at numerous awareness events: the Members Art shows we held, the stall we had at the Balloon Festivals (1999-2003) organised by the City Council. I recall **CIS'ters** other times (many years ago) where we marched through Southampton to the Bar Gate waving awareness banners plus collecting signatures in the Marlands Centre. In 2000 we undertook 7 street collections across Hampshire. Various market stalls, including (for many years) a visible presence at the charity card fair held each November in Romsey (amongst all the other charities we did stand out !) which on occasion made others uncomfortable – but survivors did find us, reach out to us (in confidence).

I also attended set-up meetings in London with Gillian for some of the Survivor rallies (from Marble Arch/Hyde Park to Trafalgar Square); plus helped on the day (as part of a **CIS'ters** team) (1998-2002). Again taking part in events delivered by The Survivors Trust, such as the awareness picnic parties in the park plus some of their early conferences.

At this time I was volunteering in the **CIS'ters** office doing admin at this time and Gillian invited me to attend, with her, national meetings up and down the country with professionals working with and for survivors. Not everyone is aware that **CIS'ters** was one of the five organisations that founded what went on to become The Survivors Trust. Gillian invited me to go to the initial meetings that were held in London at the premises of One in Four UK. I was also a member of a panel of survivors at C.E.O.P.

(more on next page)

I travelled to southern Ireland in 2002 with Gillian to help deliver training that the Samaritans had commissioned from us - in Cork and Galway and then returned a second time a few years later, with Gillian and others, to visit the offices of One in Four in Dublin as part of a meeting set up by The Survivors Trust.

In 2003 I was offered a job working 12 hours a week as P/t Administrator in the **CIS'ters** office, which I accepted on a term time contract. Over the years the hours increased to 20 hours a week, still term time. Gillian also asked me to help her when she was doing the training events to train the professionals who were working for and with survivors, which I really enjoyed doing, because it was my way of still being able to help other survivors without working directly with them. I was one of the volunteers at Members workshops and the many conferences we held both for our Members and Professionals. I also had the honour of going up to a Buckingham Palace garden party with Gillian, Alison and Shelagh in recognition of the Queens award that **CIS'ters** had received in 2005 for all the hard work our charity had done and continued to do for survivors.

During all of these things and many more, too numerous to mention, I had the privilege to meet loads of amazing people, some of which taught me more than others. I will always be thankful to everyone I have had the pleasure to meet over the years.

I was asked to take over the specific role of Membership Secretary when Shelagh emigrated, so my job became both the p/t admin and the Membership Secretary and this has been something that I took great pride in. As Membership Secretary I was also in the privileged position to be able support one of our Members by accompanying her when she went to make her statement to the police, though I did not go in while she made the actual statement, it meant I was there for her both before and after she had made her recorded statement to the police. I also accompanied two members when they went up to the House of Commons to speak to the MP Sarah Champion.

Through the volunteering and Membership work I have done during my 22 years I have had the honour to have some contact in one way or another with most of our Members and it is something that will always stay with me and will always hold a special place within my heart. Thank you to you all and I wish you well on your journeys, wherever it may take you, as I now look forward to continuing on mine (still as a member of **CIS'ters**)

With love to you all Helen (221) P.s Thank you so very much to everyone who sent in such lovely words for me they were put together in a beautiful book which I shall value always. Love Hxx

REPORTING CHILD ABUSE – film produced by police

Reporting to the police that you have been a victim of child abuse is a huge decision. Whilst some victim/survivors do report, the majority never do. This is one of the most difficult choices to make.

The police do recognise that not every victim or survivor of child abuse will feel ready, feel able, or even want to report to the police. Understanding what happens once police are contacted can help a victim of child abuse make a decision. The National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) have affirmed their commitment to thoroughly investigating allegations of child abuse, no matter how long ago the offences may have occurred. The priority for any investigation will always be safeguarding.

Within **CIS'ters** we do NOT require that a member should or should not report. It is a personal decision. But it is also important that victim/survivors know what will happen if they do report. This knowledge/awareness can sometimes make the difference between reporting, or not. The link below is to an animation that has been produced by the police to provide some background with the intention of helping victims and survivors of childhood abuse in making a personal decision.

Based on two fictional characters, both of whom are survivors of child abuse, the film takes the viewer on an educational journey from understanding what child abuse is, to providing information on the reporting process, the criminal justice process, and the support available.

The film is designed for adult survivors of childhood abuse, and the information within it is relevant to all types of child abuse including neglect and physical abuse. The film was supported by the prosecuting bodies for England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales, and is generic in its messaging, and relevant to an adult survivor of childhood abuse from anywhere within the UK. It runs for just less than 8 minutes.

A link to the animation, which is hosted on the NPCC You Tube channel, is available here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84G_1gUDM7M&feature=youtu.be

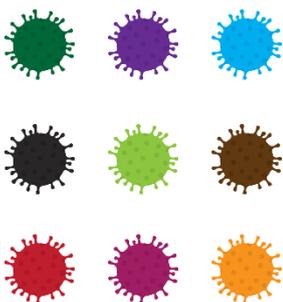
CIS'ters – the next step



Funding at the end of March 2020 was low as we went into lockdown and it was unclear whether we would be able to secure future funding beyond that which we already had. In our August 2020 newsletter we provided an update on the various grants we have managed to get since then and this ensured we are able to not only respond to emails/phone calls but have time to plan for the future as well. In addition, we were also contacted by our local Police and Crime Commissioner who told us that their grant which was to expire on 30th September 2020 was to be extended to 31st March 2021. So although our funding situation is no longer a headache we still can't relax as from April 2021 the financial situation is still very uncertain.

BUT we are still focusing on there being a future. The increase in demand by 700% has demonstrated, more than ever, that **CIS'ters** is needed. At the moment we are busy developing a Business/Funding Strategy (work funded by Lloyds Bank Foundation) and also a Digital Strategy. The digital work is being funded as part of the grant we received from NHEngland&Innovation and will include podcasts as well.

Our Members are crucial to the strategies and you will all shortly be receiving a **survey form** from us (either by email or through the post) seeking your views. Please do complete it as soon as it arrives as we are on a tight deadline to produce the final documents. Your feedback is important to us and will be needed to ensuring that **CIS'ters** prepares for the future – to reach out, and respond to, the needs of female survivors of familial sexual abuse as children.



Our Business Continuity Plan had started to move into a recovery stage.....

Prior to the (predictable) secondary lockdowns we had begun to move towards a 'recovery' plan, and the above strategies are STILL very much part of that process.

Kate, who works for us part-time in the office (some of you will have met her at our annual weekend workshop) undertakes the updates linked to covid.

IF YOU NEED NHS MEDICAL HELP – PLEASE ASK FOR IT

We know from members who have contacted us, and also from many news articles that people are reluctant to seek help from the NHS for physical conditions (new and existing) for fear of covid. We just wanted to give you some feedback that in June 2020 and again in October 2020 the partner of one of our members needed emergency healthcare interventions. First an ulcer followed by a mini stroke. Each time that expected anxiety heightened by: should I contact the NHS? will they respond? would my loved one catch covid from being in an NHS area? It might not be enough to reassure you but just want to say that it was impressive how responsive the NHS have been. A comfort during an otherwise stressful time. So, please reach out to the NHS if you have a physical or emotional well-being condition that needs attention.



I feel different to you because:.....?

Remember: It is ok to be different....to create your own pathway

Members/survivors come in all shapes and sizes. There is no one person who could be described as typical of a survivor. BUT the one thing we have in common, and is unique to us, is that we have a shared pain from the acts of others, upon us, as children.

Some survivors want to shout it from the tops of trees, of their hurt and pain, and need for others to hear them and be understand. Others want to stand up, not as survivors or victims, but as 'being more than that' of being 'who they are' the whole being – a part of who they were, and who they are now, and who they will become. Others want and need to be, and remain, anonymous – to be invisible and not judged for that requirement. On occasion they might need or want others to stand tall for them but not always.

Not all victims/survivors want or need counselling, or to meet other survivors. Not all are ready for that step. Not all want to be seen as or labelled as a victim/survivor and can feel judged by others. It is ok to assert a right not to be open or visible. Some find solace in faith/spiritual pathways, whilst others would find that route totally unacceptable. Some report being a victim to the police, and others do not. Some have children and others not. Some have ongoing contact with their family of origin and in some cases this includes the abuser. Others have no contact with any member of their family of origin.

Some are in long standing relationships, others are not. Some have nurturing partners, some do not. Some are warriors, some are not. Some love music, some do not. Some have forgiven their abusers, some have not. Some live in houses, some in flats, some in tents, and some on the streets. Some misuse drugs/alcohol/food and some do not. Some are able to drive and some do not. Some wear specs and some wear contact lenses and some don't need them. Some are tall, and some are short. Some like cats and some like dogs and some like both and some not either. Some had one abuser, others more than one, some had neglect/other abuse during childhood (as well), others not.

We are all individuals, we are all unique, – we have a shared type of childhood, and we might share our today or our tomorrow – but we are all different. You can only speak for yourself. No one person can speak for us all. 'This is me' has never felt so true than at this time, during 2020.

A final thank you to all the individual members/others who have continued to make donations to us this year. Your ongoing support means so much to us. If this is something you would like to do, then there is information on our website which explains a variety of ways you can do this. Use drop down menu for <http://cisters.org.uk/how-you-can-help/funding>

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.

CIS'ters, PO Box 119, Eastleigh, Hants, SO50 9ZF Tel: 023 80 338080 www.cisters.org.uk

CIS'ters: an experience in learning, sharing, growing – individually and together

Copyright©1995 (C.I.S.'ters & logo combined).ALL RIGHTS RESERVED