



## **2017 Annual Report**



## V-SAC Annual Report 2017

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## **V-SAC Annual Report 2017**

### **General Manager's message**

2017 was a very challenging year for Victim Support at Court (V-SAC), as I settled into my new role since I joined in November 2016. I was made feel very welcome by all board members, staff and volunteers. The Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017 was signed into legislation on 27th November 2017, which was one of the major highlights of the year.

There was an increase of over 20% in the number of victims, witnesses and their family/friends that V-SAC provided support to, compared to 2016. This equates to over 1,200 victims in total. This is a staggering statistic when you consider that V-SAC is predominantly in the Criminal Courts of Justice and Tallaght District Courts only.

Without our volunteers it would not be possible to continue to provide such a professional, high quality and necessary service to victims of crime. We recruited 14 new volunteers during the year. They underwent our extensive training programme, completed the 6-8 weeks shadowing process and were Garda Vetted, before they were assigned to support a victim/witness on their own. Most of our volunteers attended at least one day a week in the Criminal Courts of Justice (CCJ) and some travelled to other courts around the country, as needed. They gave 945 days in total to volunteering, which is incredible. They gave freely of their time and V-SAC is extremely lucky to have all of them on board.

V-SAC also have a permanent presence in Tallaght District Court and 2017 proved to be as busy as previous years. 131 trials were covered involving over 200 victims and/or witnesses. This service is provided solely by our longest serving volunteer, who is there every day, except Wednesdays, only because the court does not sit on Wednesdays! I introduced a visit to Tallaght court as part of the training, so the new volunteers could gain a more rounded understanding of the Irish Legal System and get to talk to as many of our existing volunteers about the court accompaniment role.

V-SAC have been very fortunate to receive financial assistance from the Dormant Accounts Fund over the last number of years. This has given us the opportunity to move forward with our plans for expansion and create awareness of our service outside the Dublin region. As part of the expansion, we recruited a new Regional Coordinator in November to manage the pilot expansion project in the Eastern and South Eastern Circuit Courts. This is due to get underway in 2018. The Victims of Crime Office provides the core funding for the day-to-day operations of V-SAC. I would like to thank everyone in the office for their support and help throughout the year.

Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to our board of directors, who provided me with leadership and guidance in ensuring that our service maintained its quality in supporting victims of all types of crime across all courts.

Dympna Kenny  
General Manager



## V-SAC Annual Report 2017

### Our Vision

Our vision is for a society which treats victims and survivors of crime with compassion, empathy and respect.

### Our Mission

Our mission is to provide a safe and supportive environment for victims of crime, their families or witnesses while they attend court.

### Our values

- *Treating all victims and witnesses with respect empathy and compassion.*
- *Working in partnership with criminal justice agencies, public bodies and support organisations to meet the broad range of victims' needs.*
- *Acting with integrity: we hold ourselves to the highest governance, ethical and legal standards.*
- *Valuing our staff and volunteers, their professionalism and commitment and providing opportunities to support their learning and development.*

### About V-SAC

V-SAC currently operates in the Criminal Courts of Justice at Parkgate Street and Tallaght District Court, but the cases it handles originate from all parts of the country. We also support cases outside the Dublin area, if the need arises. V-SAC is the only service whose sole function is to provide court accompaniment for all victims of crime, regardless of the type of offence. Counselling services are not provided, but referrals are offered to other appropriate services as and when required.

V-SAC is funded on an annual basis by the Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime (CSV) and works closely with An Garda Síochána, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and other related crime victims' organisations in the justice system. V-SAC received funding from the Dormant Accounts Fund for the pilot project to expand our service. The organisation undergoes an annual audit to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Companies Acts and the Revenue Commissioners.



## V-SAC Annual Report 2017

### Our work in 2017

V-SAC continued to provide its excellent court accompaniment service to victims of crime, witnesses and their family and friends, while at the same time growing its staff and volunteer numbers, including the appointment of two new directors.

Once again, we were allocated funding from CSVIC, which meant we could focus on strategic planning, policy reviews and increasing our volunteer base in preparation for the rollout of the expansion plan.

#### Strategic planning

Our strategic plan was drafted in May 2017. We have identified 4 key strategic goals over the next 3 years which will better equip V-SAC to maintain the provision of our first-class service for victims of crime, witnesses and their families and to support our mission.

- **Sectoral leadership:** We will maintain our reputation as a trusted organisation in the provision of court-accompaniment and ensure victims and witnesses know we are there to assist them during the criminal justice process.
- **Investing in excellence:** We will deliver court-accompaniment to the highest possible standard, we will nurture our volunteers, and proactively seek ways to maximise the quality of our services to victims and witnesses and to our volunteers.
- **Growing as an organisation:** We will leverage our expertise, reputation, and relationships to build a national service supporting victims and witnesses across Ireland.
- **Sustainability:** We will secure V-SAC's future by forward planning, identifying additional sources of income, and ensuring we leverage the maximum benefit for victims and value for money from grant aid and donations.

#### Our service

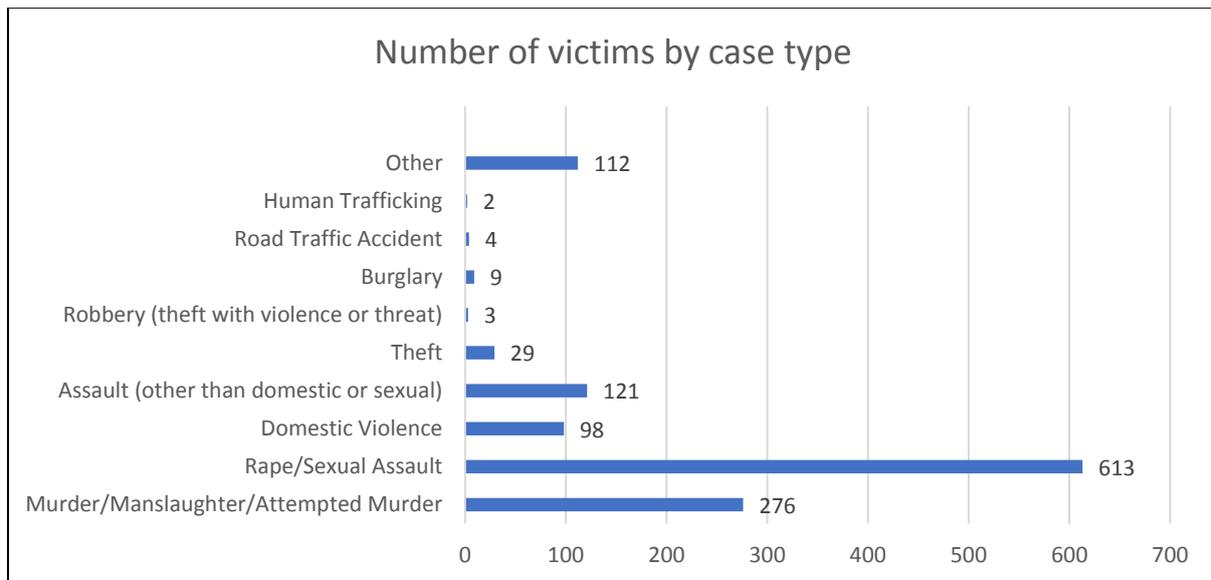
V-SAC's court accompaniment service went from strength to strength in 2017.





## V-SAC Annual Report 2017

We were able to provide support for 1,257 victims, witnesses and their family and friends across District, Circuit and Central Criminal Courts. We support all types of cases across all the different courts.



In addition, 57 pre-trial visits were facilitated in the CCJ, and our Volunteer Co-ordinator assigned volunteers to assist in 320 trials, 65 sentencing hearings, 10 retrials and 8 appeals across the CCJ, Tallaght and other courts such as Blanchardstown, Swords, Bray and Wexford, among others.

### Criminal Courts of Justice (CCJ)

V-SAC has a permanent presence in the Victim Support Area in the Criminal Courts of Justice (CCJ). Our CCJ Coordinator and volunteers are there daily and support all types cases.

CCJ 2017	Total
Number of Trials	181
Number of Victims	1047
Number of contact meetings with Victims	4997
Number of pre-trial visits	57
Number of sentencing hearings	65
Number of appeals	8
Number of retrials	10

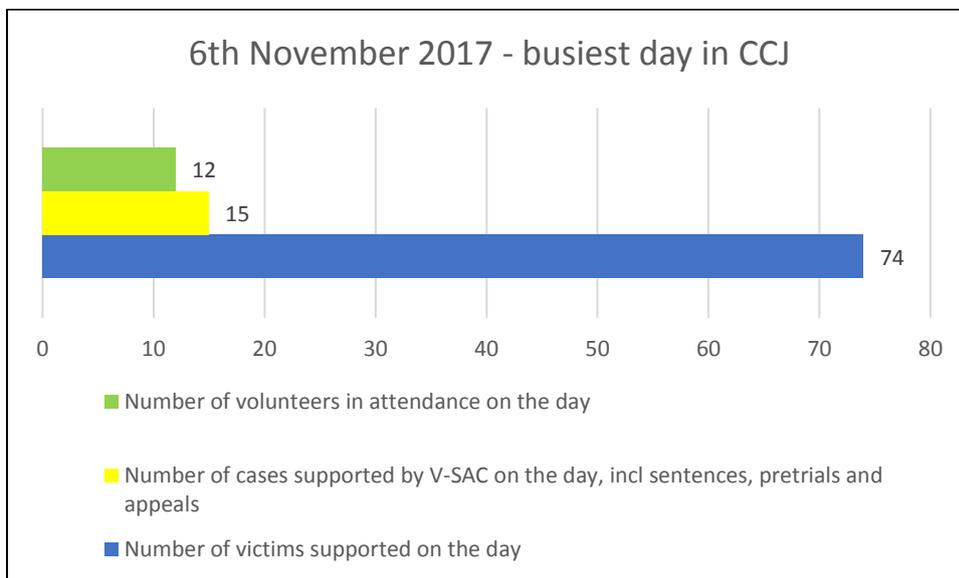
The CCJ Volunteer Co-ordinator, who is the main point of contact for the CCJ, managed the assignment of volunteers to the various trials, sentencing hearings, retrials and appeals and facilitated the 57 pre-trial visits in the CCJ, totalling 321, as outlined above.



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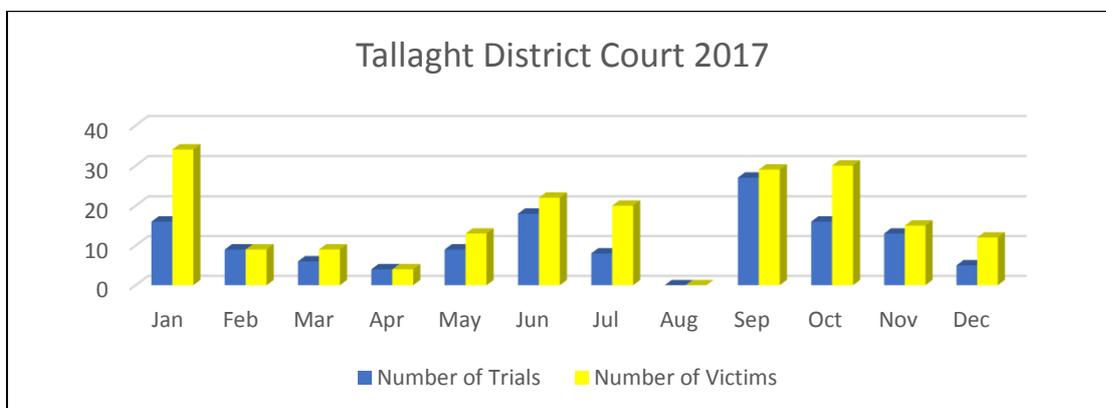
The number of contact meetings with victims is the number of times they attended court and were supported by V-SAC.

The month of November was one of the busiest months on record in the CCJ for V-SAC. On the 6<sup>th</sup> November alone, we supported 74 victims across 15 trials, sentencing hearings and pretrial visits with 12 volunteers in attendance. This gives a flavour of the organisation skills involved in effectively assigning volunteers to cases to make sure that all victims receive a professional service while attending court and receive the respect and support they deserve during their ordeal.



### Tallaght District Court

We also have a dedicated service in Tallaght District Court which is run by one of our most devoted volunteers and who is also one of the founder members of V-SAC.





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It was the tremendous work of this volunteer that meant that 204 victims received support across 131 cases, predominantly domestic violence cases.

While the total number of trials were slightly down on last year (469 in 2016 to 460 in 2017) the number of victims availing of our service was up over 20% on 2016 (991 in 2016 to 1257 in 2017). It was another successful year and V-SAC strives to build on the very effective and worthwhile service into the future.

### **Our volunteers**

Without our volunteers V-SAC would not be able to provide such a vital and valuable service in the support to victims of crime, witnesses and their families. They are the lifeblood of the organisation and our most v assets.

Following a full review of our active volunteer base at the start of the year and due to the number of volunteer applications received through our website, 11 volunteers were successfully recruited in May. They completed their extensive training programme, including shadowing experienced volunteers in court accompaniment and being Garda Vetted and are now flying solo. 3 more volunteers and a student started their training in October and continued the shadowing process until the end of the Michaelmas term. The feedback received from the trainees regarding the training programmes was outstanding.

We lost one volunteer who returned home to Scotland. One of the trainees from earlier in the year has deferred their volunteering commitment with V-SAC until they have completed their college course. At the end of 2017, there were 35 active volunteers.

In 2017, our volunteers and trainees gave 945.5 days of their time to V-SAC, which doesn't include the time they spent travelling or attending events where they represented V-SAC.

In recognition of the great work, contribution and commitment to V-SAC during the year, two volunteer appreciation evenings were hosted by V-SAC and by all accounts were enjoyed by everybody.



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V-SAC was also represented by some of our staff and volunteers at the International Volunteer Event held on December 5<sup>th</sup> in the Radisson Blu Hotel, Dublin City Centre where the General Manager gave a short speech to thank our volunteers for their dedication and hard work in supporting victims of crime.



V-SAC submitted a nomination for the Inaugural Charity Impact Awards and although we were unsuccessful, V-SAC was represented at the event, hosted by the Wheel, by the General Manager and the CCJ Volunteer Co-ordinator.

### Outstanding Contribution Award

It was with great pleasure that the Outstanding Contribution Award was presented to Noelle Fitzsimons, for her unwavering dedication, commitment and devotion to V-SAC. Noelle's volunteering career started in the 1990's supporting victims of crime at court in the Four Courts in Dublin city centre. Noelle joined V-SAC, previously known as Court Support Services, when it was established in 2005 so she could focus solely on the court accompaniment role. She is V-SAC's longest serving volunteer and provides victim support in Tallaght District Court on a daily basis. The only day she doesn't volunteer is Wednesday only because the court is closed!



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Noelle is an inspiration to both the V-SAC staff and volunteers. She has a very gentle manner and is patient with everyone she encounters. When asked what she gets out of volunteering, Noelle will respond 'It makes me realise how grateful I am for the life I have'. She has represented V-SAC on numerous occasions, giving interviews on the radio and attending events throughout her time with our organisation. Well done Noelle on your achievement and keep up the good work!



### **Our staff**

V-SAC is staffed by a full-time paid General Manager, a full-time Regional Co-ordinator, a part-time Court Listing/ Volunteer Co-ordinator, and a part-time accountant who ensures good financial governance of the organisation. The General Manager oversees the running of the service including the recruitment and training of volunteers to assist victims of crime, their families and witnesses in the court setting both before and during the trial. The General Manager reports to the five-member Board of Directors.



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### General Manager

The new General Manager, appointed on 1<sup>st</sup> July, manages the day to day operations, regularly provides updates to the board and will be responsible for monitoring the progress of the expansion project into 2018. Subsequently, the full-time Regional Co-ordinator was recruited and joined V-SAC on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2017 and will have responsibility for the rollout of the expansion plan pilot, commencing with the Eastern and South Eastern Circuit Courts.

### CCJ Volunteer Coordinator

The CCJ Volunteer Co-ordinator's role has evolved in terms of additional responsibility and longer working hours. The CCJ Volunteer Co-ordinator is the 'face' of V-SAC in the CCJ and is the main point of contact for the referrals from An Garda Síochána, the DDPs Office, etc., and is usually the first contact the victims have with our service. The daily statistics that the Co-ordinator produces enable the management and board of directors to monitor the service on an ongoing basis and take appropriate action to strive to improve the service.

Various training courses and conferences were attended by the staff throughout the year which was a great opportunity to spread the word about our service and our plans to expand. These included the Victim Support Europe Conference in May, The Wheel's Leadership Community events and the Charity Impact Awards. The General Manager and Regional Co-ordinator have visited the circuit courts V-SAC are planning to expand into and have received an excellent response from our stakeholders, e.g. Court Services, An Garda Síochána and also the Garda Victim Support Offices.

The General Manager also recorded a video about V-SAC which is included in the Bar Council of Ireland 2017 online training for barristers and judges following the Victims of Crime Act which came into law on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

### **Our Board of Directors**

There are five members of the Board of Directors of V-SAC, two of which were appointed in 2017. They include a Chair, Company Secretary and three additional members. The role of the Board is to set the strategic direction of V-SAC and ensure that the organisation operates to the highest levels of good governance and accountability. The Board are all volunteers who receive no remuneration for their time and who, like our court accompaniment volunteers, receive reimbursement of receipted out-of-pocket expenses only.

They have provided excellent leadership in developing robust policies and procedures to ensure V-SAC is transparent in all aspects of the organisation and the services it offers. There have been regular board meetings and our AGM was held in September. They have



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also set up a Volunteer Forum which takes place twice during the year and gives the volunteers an opportunity to engage directly with the board and vice versa.

#### **Where do we go from here?**

It's full steam ahead for the plans to expand our fantastic service across the country. This year we will concentrate on recruiting in the Eastern and South Eastern areas, so we can provide support to victims of crime whose cases will be heard in the Circuit Courts.

The progress of the project will be closely monitored by the General Manager who will provide regular updates to the board of directors, staff and volunteers on several key areas.

This was a very challenging but very successful year, which is evident in all the achievements V-SAC made which is detailed throughout the report. May the year ahead be as successful as V-SAC strives to improve on what is already a great service.



**Oifig Íospartaigh na Coireachta**  
**Victims of Crime Office**



**ciste na**  
**gcuntas dómhaoin**  
**the dormant**  
**accounts fund**

Victim Support at Court is a registered charity (number 20042)

and a company limited by guarantee (number 409085).

Our registered office is Áras Uí Dhálaigh, The Four Courts, Dublin 7