



Victim Support at Court

(Company Limited by Guarantee)

Annual Report

2023

Áras Uí Dhálaigh, Four Courts, Dublin 7.

RCN: 20079246, CHY20042, Company No. 409085



V-SAC Annual Report January 1st to December 31st 2023

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Legal and Administrative Details

Directors as at end of 2023	John (Ian) Fleming, Chairperson (Mar 2021) James Doorley (Sep 2019) Gary Rutledge (Jun 2023) Ian Marder (Jun 2023) Lisa O’Sullivan (Nov 2023) Emer Lumsden (Nov 2023) Niamh O’Toole (Nov 2023) Dwayne Keogh, Secretary (May 2022)
Company registered number	409085
Charity tax exemption number	CHY 20042
Charity Regulatory Authority number	20079246
Registered office	Áras Uí Dhálaigh, The Four Courts Inns Quay, Dublin D07 N972
Company secretary	Dwayne Keogh
General Manager	Dympna Kenny
Board Committees	Remuneration and Human Resources Sub-committee Governance Sub-committee
Independent Auditor	Whelan, Dowling & Associates
Principal Bankers	Allied Irish Banks, Capel St, Dublin 1
Solicitors	Not applicable



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Chairperson's Report



I am pleased to report on the activities of Victim Support at Court (VSAC) for the year ending 31 December 2023.

2023 was a very busy, productive, and successful year for VSAC as detailed in this Annual Report. We supported a total of 2,717 people, which was a 37% increase on the 2022 outturn. The number of individual contacts also increased from 5,776 in 2022 to 8,166 in 2023 or by 41%. Last year also saw growth in the number of volunteers in our service with an increase of 10 from 57 to 67 who in total provided 2,151 volunteer days. While numbers and statistics are important, ultimately the service is in place to meet the needs of victims when they are at court and the benefit and importance of our service for victims is epitomized by the snapshot of "thank you" card messages detailed in this report.

We continue to deliver on our objectives in line with our Strategic Plan 2021-2023 which was in its final year of implementation in 2023. Significant preparatory work was undertaken during the year to prepare for our Munster expansion which commenced in 2024. There was significant change in our Board in 2023, our outgoing Chairperson Kieran Kenny stepped down at our AGM in July 2023 after serving for more than six years. We thank Kieran for his commitment, wise counsel and steering the organisation through the challenging covid period. Two other colleagues Julie Carroll and Scott Ahearn, who had served for over four years each also stepped down, both made a significant contribution to our work, and we thank them for the efforts and insights. In order to refresh and replenish the Board we recruited a significant number of new Directors throughout 2023. We were delighted to welcome Gary Rutledge, Ian Marder, Ross Moore, Emer Lumsden, Lisa O'Sullivan and Niamh O'Toole. All our new Board members brought significant experience and expertise and were a great asset to the board and organisation. The Board met a total of ten times in 2023 with significant agendas and decisions to be made. I would like to acknowledge the professionalism and commitment of my fellow directors and thank them for their support during the year.

I would also like to acknowledge our funders, the Department of Justice and in particular Minister McEntee, T.D. and the departmental officials whom we engaged with on a range of issues throughout the year. To our stakeholders in the DPP's Office, An Garda Síochána and fellow support organisations, who refer victims to V-SAC's service, thank you for your continued support and helping us reach our goals and assuring victims have access to the support they need at court.

I also want to acknowledge the leadership, commitment, and professionalism of our General Manager, Dympna Kenny, who has managed the service during our busiest and most successful year on record and created the conditions for our further expansion. She has been ably assisted by Sara, Niamh and Emily who are contributing and operating at the coal face with victims and our volunteers, and for that, we thank you. As noted earlier, the V-SAC volunteer base continues to grow as V-SAC reaches more victims across the country, and I would like to congratulate and thank our volunteers for their



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enthusiasm and commitment to V-SAC, you are the lifeblood of the service. You are indeed “ordinary people making an extraordinary contribution”.

I was pleased to take on the role of Chairperson at our AGM in July 2023 on an interim basis. I was subsequently delighted that my colleague Ian Fleming agreed to take on the Chairperson role from January 2024 as he has the experience, wisdom, and commitment to bring to the position. I agreed to take on the Vice Chairperson role from January 2024 and support Ian and my board colleagues in our important work of setting the strategic direction, ensuring good governance, and working with our wonderful staff and volunteers to deliver the best possible service for victims at court.

James Doorley

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'James Doorley'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a thin blue horizontal line.

Chairperson, July-December 2023



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Financial Director's overview



2023 Look Back

2023 saw a significant increase in levels of activity in our core services as the year progressed due to our successful expansion into the Midlands, West and North which started in 2022 along with the courts becoming more efficient and more Central Criminal Court trials being heard outside of Dublin. This resulted in the total number of people supported by V-SAC increasing by 37% to 2,717 and the total number of contacts increasing by 30% to 7,528. The total number of employees in V-SAC in 2023 remained at 4 which meant that we were operating at full capacity.

V-SAC is funded by the Department of Justice for its core services and applied for Dormant Accounts funding to pilot expansion into areas without an existing court accompaniment service. V-SAC was awarded Dormant Accounts funding for a pilot expansion into the Midlands, West and North over 2020 and 2021 which was placed on hold due to Covid and launched instead in 2022. This Dormant Accounts funding continued into 2023. The return to normality post Covid and expansion of services required close financial management to ensure that costs were managed carefully. Thanks to the attentive stewardship of expenditure by V-SAC staff, accountant, and directors we were able to ensure we could meet our purpose of providing support and accompaniment to victims of crime, their families or witnesses when attending court during this year and also retain a small surplus for reserves.

2023 Financial Overview

With regard to the 2023 financial performance, V-SAC received core funding of €235k for court accompaniment in the Dublin, Leinster, and North Munster courts from the Department of Justice as well as donations of just over €5k. The expansion pilot to bring the service to the Midlands, West and North continued this year with funding received from the Dormant Accounts Fund of €54k. V-SAC also received just under €3k from the European COVIS project the purpose of which was to improve access to court-based support for victims/witnesses across Europe bringing total funding for 2023 to €298k.

Total 2023 expenditure was €294k, leaving a net surplus of just over €3k which was carried into reserves. The expansion accounted for €87k of this expenditure. The largest area of expenditure was staff salaries and PSRI at €166k. Other costs were €128k in 2023, compared to €62k in 2022. The increase in other costs was expected for several reasons. Firstly, we saw a significant increase in the levels of activity in the courts as the year progressed, incurring additional accompaniment expenses as a result. Secondly, we incurred expected additional costs in the establishment of new services in our expansion areas. Thirdly, we noted the trend of Central Criminal Court trials occurring outside of Dublin. As a trend, trials outside of Dublin are more expensive to support than in Dublin due to higher travel and subsistence costs. Finally, we supported a small number of cases on an exceptional basis in the Munster region that were not in our original plan.



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At the end of 2023, the organisation had reserves of €61k. This level of reserves is lower than our desired level as per our Reserves Policy, and it is the intention of the Board to grow this over time, to ensure that we are in a position to protect the V-SAC service regardless of funding shortfalls or cashflow issues.

Future Outlook

V-SAC received funding from the Department of Justice for 2024 in line with our 5-year plan. This reflects the continuation of our existing core services in Dublin, Leinster, Midlands, West and North courts along with expansion into Munster.

Conclusion

The Board would like to thank our funders, donors and suppliers who are providing services at a reduced cost for all their support throughout 2023. We are able to provide a highly effective and specialised service due to the daily professionalism and excellence of our staff. For that we are very grateful, and we were delighted to expand the team to 6 in 2024. Finally, we could not provide such a comprehensive and excellent service to victims of crime without the on-going support of our team of volunteers and we would like to thank them wholeheartedly for the many hours of their time that they donated to the organisation throughout 2023.

Ian Fleming Financial Director



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General Manager's message



As I reflect on 2023, it amazes me just how much V-SAC achieved. V-SAC was able to adapt to meet the demand for support through the work and commitment of the staff, volunteers and board members – thank you.

Deliver high quality support for persons affected by crime who needs it.

V-SAC heightened the awareness of its support service among its stakeholders and the communities we serve across the country by engaging with them at every opportunity and being more active on social media. The European COVIS (Court-based Victim Support) project highlighted how V-SAC is progressing in terms of best practice, compared to its European counterparts. We are grateful to the Department of Justice in working with us and accepting our proposal to become a national service which will ensure that victims, regardless of location, have access to V-SAC's support.

Build partnerships and alliances with other organisations to work together on putting victims and witnesses needs first.

V-SAC strengthened its cooperation with its stakeholders – An Garda Síochána, DPP's Office, Courts Service, other support organisations, among others – by working together to ensure that all victims', their families' and witnesses' needs were met when they attended court. The increase in referrals to V-SAC proves that the hard work paid off. The partners in the COVIS project from Sweden, Portugal, Finland, Denmark and Victim Support Europe meant V-SAC could share information on how it provides court-based victim support and explore new ways of supporting victims through the courts.

Champion the rights of victims, witnesses and those affected by crime.

V-SAC welcomed new volunteers as it grew its volunteer base. This wasn't without its challenges as it was difficult to attract suitable applicants in some counties. V-SAC worked with Courts Service to ensure that there was a separate waiting area available for the victims each day they came to court.

Develop V-SAC to enable the delivery of an excellent needs-led service.

Supporting our staff and volunteers in their work with victims was hugely important and it is great to see some many volunteers staying with V-SAC for many years. At V-SAC's annual Volunteer Development and Appreciation event in January, we were delighted to welcome Prof Marie Cassidy as the Patron of Victim Support at Court.

2024 will be an exciting year as we complete our national expansion and open our office in Cork City. And finally, to all the people who put their trust in us for the support and guidance – you are the reason we do what we do, and it was our privilege to be there for you at such a difficult time in your lives – thank you!

Dymphna Kenny
General Manager



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Message from V-SAC Patron



I am privileged to have been appointed Patron to V-SAC. My hope is to help raise awareness of the existence of this valuable service and to highlight the amazing contribution it makes to the justice system.

V-SAC's growth over the last few years is an indication of the need for this support system, but none of it would be possible without the fabulous volunteers who selflessly give of their time.

Setting up an office in Cork is the next step towards a visible nationwide network, and with ongoing support from the Minister for Justice it is eminently achievable.

Prof Marie Cassidy

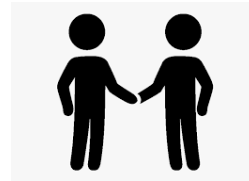


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2023 at a glance



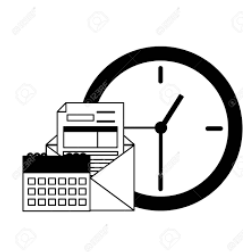
2,717 people supported ->



8,166 Individual contacts



67 volunteers ->



2,151 days to volunteering



535 trials/hearings plus



162 pretrial visits
152 sentencing hearings
5 appeals
13 retrials

37% ↑ people supported in the courts compared to 2022.



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1. Summary of the organisation's purpose and activities

Purpose

The main purpose of V-SAC is to provide support and accompaniment to victims of crime, their families, or witnesses when attending court.

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

Our value	Our commitment
Respect	Treating all victims and witnesses with respect, empathy, and compassion.
Partnership	Working in partnership with criminal justice agencies, public bodies, and support organisations to meet the broad range of victims' needs.
Integrity	Acting with integrity: we hold ourselves to the highest governance, ethical and legal standards.
Valuing our staff and volunteers	Valuing our staff and volunteers, their professionalism and commitment and providing opportunities to support their learning and development.
Equal opportunities	V-SAC is an equal opportunity employer with policies on recruitment, induction, supervision, appraisals, grievance and disciplinary procedures and health and safety for both staff and volunteers.
Compliance	V-SAC is compliant with the requirements of data protection legislation and is committed to and compliant with the Charities Governance Code.

2. Strategic objectives (2021-2023)

DELIVER high quality support for persons affected by crime who needs it

BUILD partnerships and alliances with other organisations to work together on putting victims and witnesses needs first.

CHAMPION the rights of victims, witnesses and those affected by crime.

DEVELOP V-SAC to enable the delivery of an excellent needs-led service.



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3. About V-SAC

Victim Support at Court (V-SAC) was set up in 2005 by a victim of crime who went through a trial with no support in court. She gathered a group of volunteers together to provide free court accompaniment for victims of all types of crime. V-SAC wants people to feel welcomed, comfortable, and safe during a difficult time in their lives. V-SAC's court accompaniment service is available to victims of all types of crime, their family and friends, and prosecution witnesses who are due to attend court, no matter what their background. V-SAC does not discriminate on gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, race, membership of the Traveller community and people in receipt of housing assistance.

Since 2005, V-SAC has gone from strength to strength by increasing its volunteer base and expanding its service in areas where little or no service was available. Our trained volunteers provide support in court, practical advice, and access to a separate area within the courthouse away from the general public. Where V-SAC really wants to get to - is to be a national service so every victim or witness of crime coming to court has access to V-SAC's court accompaniment service.

V-SAC is funded on an annual basis by the Department of Justice and works closely with An Garda Síochána, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Courts Service, and other related crime victims' organisations in the justice system. The organisation undergoes an annual audit to ensure compliance with the requirements of the Companies Acts and the Revenue Commissioners.

Operating context

by Faith Plunkett, Maynooth University student and participant in the 2024 student placement programme with V-SAC:

Throughout the history of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) in Ireland, it can be noted that the adversarial system is fixed on the accused and uses the victims as an observer rather than an important part of the system and case (Harding, 2018). This, among other aspects within the CJS, is a reason that victims of these crimes have a poor perception of their interaction with the system.

The sidelining of victims during trial processes can be seen historically through the traditional ways of the Common Law Courts (Iliadis, 2020). This can come as a shock to the individual due to the importance of the victim regarding the functioning of the system (Harding, 2018). The victim provides important aspects of the event such as initial reports, statements, and evidence (Harding, 2018). It is in respect of this, one wonders how the victim is not at the focus of the trial.

There is a fear of giving the victim focus during the trial process. In Common Law Practice in Ireland, the trial process focuses on the two parties disagreeing over facts of the case until an appropriate truth has been reached (Frankel, 2017). Through minimising the



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activity of the victim within the courtroom and trial process, the CJS is staying within guidelines directed by the European Council of Human Rights, where there is a focus for the accused to receive a fair trial and due process (Doak, 2005). The courts focus on what the accused should do and their needs and requirements (Harding, 2018). While the wants and needs of the accused are being met, the victim does not tend to receive the same care.

When a victim has entered the courtroom, often they can be met with an abundance of stress. They have entered an environment to which they may know limited information about (Harding, 2018). Due to the fast-paced nature of the CJS, victims sitting and listening to the trial may feel unheard from the different opinions of the facts, shocked from the information being discussed in the court by both parties and overall abandoned from the legal system.

This abandonment can lead to negative experiences for the victims within the CJS. Despite efforts such as the Directive 2012/29/EU giving countries minimum targets for the rights of the victim (Heffernan, 2017), there is data to suggest that they are faced with dissatisfaction and alienation during the trial process (Iliadis, 2020). During this already daunting experience, there are limited places for the victim to go that does not involve the accused. This means they may have the added anxiety of encountering them. With all these stressors placed on the victim, it is important for them to have a dedicated area in which they can go to relax, while still being able to remain informed about the ongoing trial if wanted.

The Criminal Justice Act (Victims of Crime) Act 2017 section 20, regarding the power to exclude the public - while the public may be excused at any stage, the victim is allowed the right to have a family or friend, or a support worker of their choice with them. This is where VSAC plays a role. While others will be excluded, the victim can have someone to support them while in the courtroom if they choose. The volunteers play an important role here as they can offer the victim knowledge of the courtroom, as well as a place to seek refuge, if needed.



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4. Our board of directors as at the end of 2023



Ian Fleming, Chairperson (Mar 2021)



Lisa O'Sullivan, Financial Director (Nov 2023)



Gary Rutledge, Director (Jun 2023)



Emer Lumsden, (Nov 2023)



James Doorley, Director (Sep 2019)



Ian Marder, Director (Jun 2023)



Dwayne Keogh, Company Secretary (May 2022)



Niamh O'Toole, Director (Nov 2023)



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5. Our staff

V-SAC has four paid staff – General Manager and three Regional Coordinators.

Dympna Kenny, General Manager



Dympna joined V-SAC in November 2016 and reports directly into V-SAC's board of directors. Dympna is responsible for leading, managing and motivating the staff in the delivery of V-SAC's court accompaniment service and its expansion across the country.

Regional Coordinators

Sara Murphy – Criminal Courts of Justice



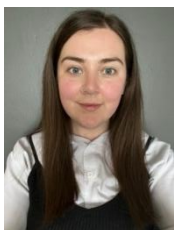
Sara joined V-SAC in 2013 as a court accompaniment volunteer. In 2014, Sara became a paid employee and reports into the General Manager. Since 2014, Sara has successfully managed V-SAC's core service in the Criminal Courts of Justice, Parkgate St, Dublin. In 2018, Sara was the proud winner of the Volunteer Ireland Manager of the Year Award.

Niamh Lambert – East and Southeast



Niamh joined V-SAC in 2017 as the Regional Coordinator for the East and Southeast of the country and reports into the General Manager. She successfully project managed the expansion of the service in these areas which previously had little to no court support.

Emily Healy – West, Midlands, and North



Emily joined V-SAC in 2022 as the Regional Coordinator to oversee the expansion of the service into the Western, Midlands and Northern courts. She reports into the General Manager, and she successfully established V-SAC's service into these areas.



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6. Our volunteers

Volunteers are at the core of everything we do to support victims and witnesses in the Court System. Their contribution and commitments is invaluable to V-SAC .

Comprehensive training is provided to equip our volunteers to support victims from the first time they have contact with the organisation. The training consists of one day classroom training and 6-8 weeks shadowing an experienced volunteer in court accompaniment. They report directly into the V-SAC Coordinators. Going to court can be a daunting and frightening experience. Our volunteers are trained to deal sensitively with victims, their families and prosecution witnesses to ensure V-SAC provides a friendly face, support, a listening ear and information during a trial or hearing. Our volunteers are also trained to give specific support to children and vulnerable persons, if required.

7. Beneficiaries

- Victims of all types of crime
- Victim's family/friends
- Prosecution witnesses

V-SAC does not discriminate on gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, race, membership of the Traveller community and people in receipt of housing assistance.

The benefit of availing of V-SAC's court accompaniment means:

- Support tailored according to the victims' needs – before, during and after court proceedings
- Increased feeling of safety within the court building
- Referrals ensure timely access to support
- Seeing the court setting before their trial is due to start
- Having someone there – a 'go-to' person - just for them every day they are in court
- Not going through the whole court experience on their own
- Have an independent person to talk to in confidence every day they are in court
- Access to the Victim Support Area which is a separate area within the courthouse, away from the public and the accused and/or the accused's family
- Information about other support services available to them post-trial if they need any additional support

8. Primary Stakeholders

- V-SAC Court Accompaniment Volunteers, staff, and V-SAC board members
- Gardaí
- Director of Public Prosecution's Office



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- Legal Aid Board
- Courts Service
- Department of Justice
- Other victim support organisations

9. Main activities

V-SAC achieves its mission by:

- (a) Tailoring the support according to the victims' needs
- (b) Treating all the people with respect, empathy, and compassion
- (c) Allowing victims of crime, their families, or witnesses experience a court setting in advance of the trial through accompanied visits to a criminal court when the court is not sitting
- (d) Facilitating them in their attendance at court by making available to them a private area away from the general public where they can feel safe and avail of privacy
- (e) Referring such victims of crime, their families or witnesses to other support agencies or organisations as appropriate
- (f) Recruiting, training, and supporting volunteers to undertake the work of court accompaniment and related activities in a comprehensive and professional manner
- (g) Promoting support for victims of crime generally

10. Organisation and governance

10.1 Governance Structure

V-SAC is a company limited by guarantee and was incorporated on 7th October 2005. It was formerly known as 'Court Support Services.' Following a Special Resolution by the company, and with the approval of the Registrar of Companies, the company name was changed to Victim Support at Court on 19th September 2011.

10.2 Appointment of Board

Directors are appointed by the Members at the Annual General meeting (AGM).

Recruitment of new Directors is conducted by the Chair and one other Director following a discussion at the Board of the skills and competencies required of any new appointees. However, the Directors have the power at any time to appoint any person to be a director, either to fill a casual vacancy or as an addition to the existing Directors. However, the total number of Directors shall not at any time exceed nine nor be less than three in accordance with the Articles of Association. Such Directors are appointed only until the next Annual General Meeting when the Members may re-appoint them.



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The Board endeavours to secure a broad range of skills necessary for effective governance, including but not limited to, expertise in the following areas: the law, finance, corporate governance, psychology, marketing, organisation development/management, public policy, and public relations.

The Board is committed to equal opportunity for all during the recruitment process for Directors.

There were ten board meetings held 2023, 7 online and 2 hybrid and 1 in-person and were well attended by all board members, with the average attendance rate at 96%. V-SAC's Annual General Meeting was attended by six out of the seven board members and was held on 27th July 2023. All meetings were conducted in line with V-SAC's Constitution and the Companies Act 2014.

10.3 Director Induction

Each new Director must complete an induction process. Director induction is undertaken by the Chairperson and the General Manager, including a visit to a courthouse to see V-SAC's court accompaniment service in action.

Each new Director receives a Director's Handbook which contains a page for signature by the new Director and which must be returned to the Company. By signing this page, the Director acknowledges his/her responsibilities as a Director of V-SAC and his/her acceptance of the governance documents, and the policies and procedures set out in the Handbook.

This handbook has been developed:

- To give Board members an insight into the ethos, work, and structure of Victim Support at Court Limited (V-SAC)
- To outline the roles and responsibilities of Board members
- As a receptacle for the key policy and governance documents (both internal and external) which the Board has adopted and which regulate how the Board operates and exercises its functions.

The following documents are also given to each new board member as part of their induction:

- Code of Conduct
- Staff role descriptions
- Six most recent board meeting minutes
- Two most recent annual reports and audited accounts
- Strategic Plan



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- Latest annual budget
- Risk register
- Constitution
- Expenses claim form
- Relevant training material

10.4 Rotation

Directors are elected at the AGM for a term of three years.

One third of the Board must retire at each AGM, as per the Company's Articles of Association.

10.5 Tenure of the Board

Directors must retire from the Board after a period of three years but may offer themselves for re-appointment at the AGM for another term. Best practice is a maximum of 9 years as per the Charity Regulator guidelines. V-SAC's board members volunteer for a maximum of 6 years.

10.6 The Role of the Board

The primary role of the Board is:

- to see to the fulfilment of V-SAC's mission; and
- to engage in periodic reassessment or redefinition of the mission; and
- to conduct the functions of the office of Board Member and / or Officer as stated in law and as set out in the Director's Handbook. The Board focuses on the development of broad policies that govern the implementation of institutional plans and purposes. This role is separate and distinct from the role of the General Manager who determines the means of implementation.

10.7 Role of the Chairperson

- Lead the Board in the determination of its strategy and in the achievement of its objectives.
- Oversee the orderly operation of the Board of Directors.
- In conjunction with the Manager or individually as necessary, act as spokesperson for V-SAC with the Commission for the Support of Victims of Crime and all other stakeholders and with Government (including politicians and senior officials in the Department of Justice and Equality and in other Government Departments) to further the objectives of V-SAC.



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10.8 Role of the Secretary

As per the legal requirements of a registered company, V-SAC has a Company Secretary, who is elected in accordance with Article 33.1.1 of the V-SAC Constitution. In V-SAC the Company Secretary is one of the directors of the company supported by the General Manager. Another director or the General Manager may take responsibility for undertaking the duties outlined below, however it is the Company Secretary's responsibility to ensure such duties are completed. The Company Secretary:

- provides comprehensive legal and administrative support and guidance to the board of directors
- ensures that the board's decisions and instructions are properly carried out and communicated
- has responsibility to ensure that the company complies with all relevant statutory and regulatory requirements
- has responsibility for communication with the shareholders when required
- acts as principal administration officer, liaising with staff, members, volunteers, and the board of directors
- executes important documentation on behalf of the company, together with a director

10.9 Role of the General Manager

- Develop and deliver on the Company's strategic plan in the most effective and efficient manner.
- Be accountable for the overall performance of the Company and for the day-to-day running and management of the Company's operations, under delegated authority from the Board.
- In conjunction with the Chairperson or individually as necessary, act as spokesperson for V-SAC with the Department of Justice and all other stakeholders to further the objectives of V-SAC.

10.10 Role of the Financial Director

While Governance is a collective activity of all the Directors, the Finance Director supports the Board to ensure that:

- the organisation has the resources to meet its goals,
- the organisation meets its obligations for financial reporting,
- the organisation's finances are effectively managed.

10.11 Governance Sub-committee

Purpose



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The principal purpose of the Governance Sub-Committee is to support good governance in V-SAC and, in particular, to support the implementation of and compliance with the Charities Governance Code.

Role

The committee is responsible for advising the Board on effective governance of the organisation through:

- Developing and reviewing the governance policies and procedures of V-SAC.
- Overseeing the implementation of the Charities Governance Code.
- Advising the Board on the recruitment of new members.
- Supporting Board performance evaluation and orientation for new Board members.
- Advising the Board on the adoption of any new governance principles, policies and standards as may be required from time to time.

10.12 Remuneration and HR Sub-committee

Purpose

The Sub-Committee will review and assess the remuneration and benefits packages of all the staff and compare them to those being paid to staff in similar sized charities operating in this sector. It will make recommendations to the Board to ensure that the total remuneration packages on offer are fair and comply with best practice in this sector.

Role

The Sub-Committee's responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Meeting with the staff to listen to their concerns and representations regarding remuneration and benefits and carrying out a benchmarking exercise against the remuneration and benefits available in similar roles elsewhere
- Considering 'future proofing' any proposals to align with multi-annual funding
- Compiling a report with recommendations for consideration by the Board
- Continuing to liaise with the General Manager and individual members of staff, as required, on an ongoing basis.

10.13 Governance Standards

In 2023, V-SAC was fully compliant with the Charities Governance Code as published by the Charities Regulator in November 2018.

V-SAC met its legal requirements, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Children First. Lobbying returns were submitted in a timely way online via www.lobbying.ie. It complied with the Companies Act 2014 and submitted all returns to the



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Revenue Commissioners in a timely fashion. Relevant training was sourced and provided to staff and volunteers, ensuring all requirements were incorporated in organisational policies.



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11. Key objectives

2023 was a busy year but V-SAC was focussed on its objectives as it continued to expand its service, create awareness within the communities it serves and build relationships that would benefit V-SAC in achieving the objective set out in the 2021-2023 Strategic Plan.

11.1 DELIVER high quality support at court for persons affected by crime.

a) *Maximising Communications: Develop a communications plan to enhance our organisational profile among our stakeholders and use social media and technology to reach all sections of the community.*

In 2023, it was important for V-SAC to raise its profile on a local and national level by engaging with its stakeholders and the press and being active on social media to create awareness with the public and victims of crime about the support available across the State.

V-SAC achieved this by being **represented at various events** during the year. V-SAC attended the Launch of the 360 virtual tours, hosted by Court Services in The Supreme Court. The launch was also attended by members of the Judiciary, the Department of Justice, Courts Service, and other support organisations.

V-SAC achieved **national media coverage** which helped create awareness across all sectors of the community. The Irish Sun featured an exclusive article about V-SAC, highlighting the benefits to victims of having V-SAC support them through their time at court. An interview with Evelyn O'Rourke, reporter for RTE Radio 1, was aired in June on the Claire Byrne show. Again, it highlighted the magnificent work being carried out by V-SAC staff and volunteers, and that it is expanding across the country. The feature included an interview with V-SAC's General Manager, 2 Coordinators and a court accompaniment volunteer. It was very well received based on texts, emails, and likes on social media.

The V-SAC CCJ Coordinator gave a presentation and tour of the Victim Support Area to groups of delegates from the EU and African Judiciary, members from An Garda Síochána, and students from Irish schools and colleges, among others.

V-SAC was delighted to be at the **National Ploughing Championships** within the Department of Justice tent. This was a wonderful opportunity to meet the public and partner with our stakeholders and to raise awareness of the supports available to victims at every stage of their journey of recovery as they navigate their way through the Irish Criminal Justice system.



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V-SAC was represented at the event hosted by the Chief Justice, Donal O'Donnell, to mark the opening of the Legal New Year.

By being visible at events and engaging with members of the press while at the same time being active on social media helped V-SAC to raise its profile in the communities it operates in.

- b) *Pursuing quality standards: Pursue an accreditation of excellence for voluntary programmes, using the external review process as an opportunity to benchmark our activity and volunteer development against the highest standards across the sector. Maintain and develop links with other national and international volunteer and victim support organisations to identify and implement evolving best practice.*

Good progress is being made with best practice as part of the EU project – COVIS (see section 2c for full details). The project team held a workshop at the 2023 Victim Support Europe Conference in Berlin which gave the team the opportunity to gather information on how court-based support is implemented and maintained in different countries across Europe. It will inform V-SAC about how our service compares to organisations providing similar services.

One of the deliverables of the project is to produce a best practice document on court-based victim support. This will be especially useful for countries that wish to introduce or enhance their support for victims through their own justice systems.

V-SAC was shortlisted for a National Volunteer Ireland award, in the large organisation category, which demonstrates the esteem to which our organisation is held within the charity sector.

Patrick Caldwell, V-SAC court accompaniment volunteer who joined in 2023, was nominated for a local award with the Monaghan Volunteer Centre. This highlights the impact of the service and acknowledges the support new volunteers provide, within the community they work in. This shows that even new volunteers are being recognised within the community they work in.

- c) *Governing with integrity: Uphold best practice corporate governance in line with the Charities Regulator Governance Code, and compliance requirements as a registered company and charity.*



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V-SAC met all deadlines in compliance with Company Law, the Charities Regulator Governance Code and the various legislation and regulations that govern charities in Ireland.

The external audit of the 2022 financial statements was completed and the signed audited accounts were submitted to the Companies Registration Office and to the Department of Justice within the required deadline.

The risk register was reviewed and is a working document. Governance and Risk is a standing item on the V-SAC board meeting agenda.

In 2023, three new directors were co-opted onto the V-SAC board of directors, in March and May. All three were elected by the members at the July AGM, following the completion of their induction. The Chairperson, Kieran Kenny, retired on 6th June having served two terms of three years as a director. James Doorley accepted the position in July 2023. In November, three new board members were coopted onto the board as directors and will be up for election at the 2024 AGM.

HR policies were updated accordingly to reflect changes to employees' rights during 2023, e.g. Statutory sick leave, Leave for victims of Domestic Violence, etc.

d) *Planning for the future: Develop a 5-year budget and cash flow projection, which anticipates future funding needs based on expansion and ongoing operating costs.*

V-SAC received a total allocation of €235,000 in core funding from the Department of Justice.

To support decision making and analyse trends, changes were introduced into monthly financial reporting, which presents Forecast Budgets alongside previous years spends in same periods. Credit card transactions were also captured in the monthly financial report to the board.

Due to the tight monitoring of budget requirements by the V-SAC board throughout 2023, V-SAC identified the need for additional funding in Q4. V-SAC's submission to the Department was accepted, and V-SAC received an additional €32,360 in November 2023.



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A new sub-committee was formed to draft a proposal for V-SAC's expansion into Munster, including a breakdown of the required funding. Following discussions with the Department of Justice, V-SAC's submission of the Expression of Interest to become a national organisation was approved by the Department in December 2023.

All submissions and returns to the Department of Justice were made within the required deadlines, as detailed in the 2023 Grant Agreement.

11.2 BUILD partnerships and alliances with other organisations to work together on putting victims and witnesses' needs first.

- a) *Strengthening co-operation: Continue to liaise with our partner organisations and stakeholders, including The Courts Service, An Garda Síochána, Office of the DPP, and other victims' groups to build upon our existing partnerships and increase our referrals from these services.*

V-SAC continued to collaborate with the other victim support organisations and its stakeholders to create awareness of the expansion, the services available for victims and the areas of operation.

V-SAC shared information about its expansion experience with **ASCC**, a relatively new charity specializing in supporting child victims, who were starting its national expansion. This helped with their plans in terms of timescale, challenges, positive aspects of the development and demand for services/people.

V-SAC was represented by the General Manager and several V-SAC volunteers at the in-person event hosted by **the Crime Victims Helpline** to mark European Day for Victims of Crime.

In January 2023, V-SAC commenced its accompaniment service in Cloverhill Court at the request of staff from the **DPP's Office**. The referral process was agreed with them and **Gardaí** who may have victims attending for bail applications. The service is now well established, and fifty people were supported as a direct result of this initiative. V-SAC also presented to the class from the Prosecution Service Certificate Programme to inform them of the support services V-SAC provides to victims when attending court.

The General Manager attended the launch of 'Finding your way after sexual violence guide' by **Dublin Rape Crisis Centre**. It is a guide on support available for each step of a victims' recovery journey. The guide includes a section for victims as well as support workers and includes input from people who have been through the DRCC service.



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Invitations were issued to several stakeholders to participate in a panel discussion as part of the COVIS project. All accepted, demonstrating how we work together in sharing experiences and information on victims' rights and supports available.

Staff responsible for the **Garda Victim Support Offices** invited V-SAC to give a presentation as part of the overall training plan. The presentation by V-SAC staff in August received very positive feedback.

V-SAC engaged with DPP's office and other support organisations to ensure support was available to victims in the Central Criminal Court trials being heard outside Dublin. V-SAC supported 149 people in 27 of these trials, two of which were referred to by other support organisations.

V-SAC was represented at the CCJ User Group meeting, hosted by **the Courts Service**. There were discussions on how the Victim Support Area within the CCJ could be used more effectively for victims, particularly in the provision of private space.

*b) **Build external partnerships, networks, and alliances: Develop external partnerships, networks and alliances to deliver the right services to the communities, families and individuals we serve.***

At the **Victim Support Europe annual conference**, the V-SAC General Manager met with victim support organisations interested in V-SAC's court accompaniment service and exchanged contact details with various organisations, including US Prosecutor, Victim Support France, Victim Support Asia, among others.

V-SAC are participating in the Volunteer Ireland 2-year **project on Flexible Volunteering**. This project will address flexible and non-traditional types of volunteering such as:

- time/needs match programme
- event volunteering
- task-based volunteering
- short-term volunteering
- virtual
- micro
- one-off
- episodic

Benefit of V-SAC participating in the project:

- Develop and test out flexible roles within our organisation
- Recruit and involve a more diverse volunteer base
- Have direct support from Volunteer Ireland staff
- Have the chance to influence and inform the development of the future of volunteering in Ireland



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- Gain the opportunity for professional development
- Have travel costs covered for the meetings

The General Manager met with Judge Gráinne Malone to discuss the referral process for the new court presenter who started in December 2023 and the support for victims who are due to give a victim impact statement. V-SAC supported 116 people involved in domestic violence cases in the CCJ.

- c) *Maximise the benefits from our partnerships: Promote victims' rights and share best practice in victim issues by being creative in determining which services can be delivered by V-SAC alone and consider opportunities to work in partnership with similar organisations to provide better support for victims.*

The new service in Cloverhill benefited any victims attending the court for bail application hearings and is now established and working very well.

V-SAC's participation in the **COVIS project, which is co-funded by the European Union** is a wonderful way of exploring and developing best practice in court-based victim support. The project team met monthly to discuss the progress against plan and monitor actions and deliverables to ensure all was on track. Victim Support Europe developed a communications and dissemination strategy which was implemented at the agreed times. 'COVIS Mondays' were messages posted on social media over 2 6-week periods during the year.

V-SAC hosted the project team in Dublin in May 2023.

- **Day 1** – project meeting – agreeing further study visits – France (Feb 2024) and Croatia (Mar 2024) and webinars with other countries – Netherlands confirmed.
- **Day 2**
 - visit to CCJ – met with V-SAC staff and volunteers; Courts Service gave a tour of the building; met with Judge Malone.
 - panel discussion – including such topics as referrals, timeframe – when is support offered, location – where is support offered, visibility within the courthouse, geographical coverage, accessibility of service, governance, and funding.
 - project meeting – agreeing Berlin workshop format and outcomes to be achieved, information material – consider how the information will look like – service users, service providers, public.

Another key deliverable, which was completed in December 2023 was to conduct a mapping survey to identify gaps in court-based victim support across Europe. This information will be shared at the end of project conference in June 2023.

As part of the COVIS project, there were three international webinars with countries that provide court-based victim support – Netherlands, Australia, and USA. These



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webinars were a means of hearing about other countries support services and sharing information on any innovative elements that may work for V-SAC.

The General Manager and the Regional Coordinator visited Braga, Portugal. The group visited one of their busiest courts and met with support workers and one of the judges. This helped to gather information on their support provided to victims of crime, particularly victims of domestic violence and children. This will help with drafting the best practice booklet as one of the deliverables of the project.

The victim's right to court support and a separate space within the court building was included in the feature on the Claire Byrne show.

11.3 CHAMPION the rights of victims, witnesses and those affected by crime.

- a) *Engaging with external partners: Develop a Public Affairs strategy to influence public policy, build and maintain V-SAC's strong reputation and find common ground with stakeholders.*

V-SAC, along with other victim support organisations, was represented at the Department of Justice's Victims Forum during 2023.

V-SAC had discussions with the Department of Justice on the possible provision of V-SAC's court accompaniment service in Munster. Following a formal submission by V-SAC detailing the Expression of Interest to become a national organisation, the Department of Justice subsequently approved the submission.

- b) *Raising awareness: Actively develop and promote V-SAC as a centre of expertise on victim issues by raising awareness of V-SAC to the public in, for example, health, education, social policy, and other sectors.*

V-SAC and Crime Victims Helpline presented an information session with the Parole Board on engaging with victims of crime. Sixteen staff from the Parole Board were in attendance and the feedback was positive. This was the first session and one that can be tweaked for future sessions, as required.

V-SAC gave a presentation to AdvIC staff, volunteers, and psychologists/counsellors to share information about the support available to families of murder victims when they come to court. AdvIC refers the victims' families to V-SAC for court accompaniment, if required.



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V-SAC's Regional Coordinators engaged with the Courts Service, the DPP's Office and other victim support organisations in relation to Central Criminal Court trials being heard in regional courts to ensure that adequate resources are available to meet the increase in demand outside Dublin.

Attendance by V-SAC staff and volunteers at the Ploughing Championships helped to raise awareness of V-SAC's service to members of the community that may not have been previously aware of the support offered to victims of crime.

V-SAC was recognised on a national level by being shortlisted for a National Volunteer Ireland Award. At a local level, V-SAC received a Community Recognition Award from the Dublin City PPN and one of our Monaghan court accompaniment volunteers was nominated for a local Community Volunteer Award. Social media pages were updated accordingly.

- c) *Expanding our volunteer base: Promote our services to local communities, responding to their needs and taking an active part in Diversity, Gender, Age, Location, race, etc., so our services are available to anyone who needs them.*

Throughout 2023, V-Sac continued to recruit volunteers in the East and Southeast of the country, as well as in the Western, Midlands and Northern Courts where it sought to expand its presence. V-SAC advertised for these roles on social media, Activelink and the V-SAC website. There were challenges attracting volunteers in the Southeast, so V-SAC's Coordinator organised a pop-up stand in the local area to inform the local people about the benefits of volunteering with V-SAC.

Each V-SAC Coordinator interviewed potential volunteers and, if suitable to the role of the court accompaniment volunteer, the candidates were invited to participate in one of V-SAC's Volunteer Training. The table below shows the active volunteer base from January to December 2023.

Active at start of 2023	Recruited during 2023	Departed V-SAC during 2023	Active at end of 2023
57	21	11	67

Refer to the Expansion Plan update for details of the expansion into the Western, Midlands and Northern courts.

- d) *Advocacy: Advocate for national and local solutions that advance the interests of victims.*



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V-SAC worked with the DPP's Office and the Gardaí to establish a service in Cloverhill for bail application hearings.

Courts Service held a CCJ User Group meeting for the support organisations to listen to suggestions for the use of the space in the Victim Support Room more effectively as the area is much busier. Some of the suggestions have already been implemented and are working well.

The Regional Coordinators engaged with local support services to ensure victims' needs are prioritised. In some circumstances, V-SAC shared the support in trials with other support organisations, providing support on days where the local support person was not available or providing support to some of the victims who were not linked in with the local victim support organisation.

In Trim District Court, V-SAC are piloting a process with the local Domestic Violence service by having V-SAC volunteers available on certain days where victims may be due to give evidence in criminal proceedings.

e) *Research: Undertake or commission work of direct relevance to service user needs and expectations and to the development of best practice.*

The indicators for impact measurement tool will be developed as part of the COVIS project in terms of the impact of support for services users, impact on the criminal justice system and impact on partner agencies.

V-SAC agreed to support the proposal by the National Open Research Forum (NORF) on 'Embedding a culture of interdisciplinary open research in criminal justice in Ireland through a Researcher-Policymaker-Practitioner Partnership'. The project was successful in obtaining funding and will commence in October 2023, lasting twelve months. The Partnership includes 'affiliate partner' representatives, including V-SAC, from seven categories of organisation:

The mapping exercise as part of the COVIS project is complete. Ireland is in a strong position in relation to court-based victim support but there is always room for improvement.

11.4 DEVELOP V-SAC to enable the delivery of an excellent needs-led service.

a) *Securing development opportunities: We will provide on-going training and CPD to our staff and volunteers, to enhance their capacity to provide compassionate, empathic*



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support to victims, recognising that volunteering is a two-way process which works to the betterment of both service-user and volunteer. We will enable our directors to receive training relevant to their role in V-SAC.

V-SAC staff explored ways to keep volunteers engaged during quiet periods in their region. This included developing a training day customised for the volunteers with different speakers giving talks on topics relevant to their court accompaniment role. This event took place in January 2024 and was very well received.

The new directors who joined the V-SAC board of directors completed the V-SAC director induction programme, which included a visit to the CCJ to meet with the General Manager, the Coordinators and some of the volunteers.

The Volunteer Ireland 2-year project on occasional/flexible volunteering will explore the possibility of introducing new volunteer roles for existing V-SAC volunteers and/or recruiting new volunteers for these specific roles.

- Volunteer Ireland project training on the development of roles for flexible volunteering.
- All staff interim performance reviews completed.
- Volunteer Development Day is due to take place in early January 2024. Relevant speakers to be sourced.
- CCJ Coordinator attended Managing Volunteer Wellbeing training.
- Regional Coordinator (East/Southeast) attended Domestica Abuse Awareness training.

b) Supporting expansion: Put in place a staffing and supervision framework that meets the needs of an expanding national service, ensuring that victims and witnesses will be speedily and appropriately matched with volunteers, that volunteers are adequately supported and supervised and that the overall service is coordinated effectively.

In 2023, V-SAC used the existing staffing and supervision framework, which proved effective to date. This ensured that all staff and volunteers had the support needed to ensure victims and witnesses received the same level of service, regardless of the court they attended.

Each Regional Coordinator, i.e. CCJ Coordinator, East/Southeast Coordinator and Western/Midlands and Northern Coordinator, is responsible for their own areas and reports to the General Manager. The coordinators assessed the need for volunteers in each region and recruited and trained them accordingly. The Volunteer Training



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Programme was completed by all new volunteers and each volunteer linked in with the designated Coordinator at the end of each day in court.

Group supervision was held monthly, one in-person session and one online session, and is compulsory for volunteers and staff to attend at least once during each court term. One-to-one sessions were offered to staff and/or volunteers, where necessary.

The General Manager is responsible for the overall operation of V-SAC's service and kept in regular contact with staff and volunteers and reported to the board at each board meeting, so they are also kept updated on the day-to-day running of the court accompaniment service.

- c) *Reviewing our processes: We will keep under review our policies and procedures, and ensure we maximise efficiency, enable succession planning and support induction of staff, volunteers, and directors.*

2 V-SAC directors developed the existing data into a format that presented the data in unique styles, highlighting any trends or risks that were emerging or may emerge in the future.

The Internal Financial Controls policy was reviewed and will include the management of credit card payments and transactions. A new credit card policy is now in place.

All staff have signed the updated Employee Handbook, which included recent changes in employment legislation.

Following the retirement of the V-SAC psychologist, A new psychologist was recruited and started on 3rd July 2023 on a 12-month contract.

- d) *Robust data collection: Establish data collection that allows for the sharing of information and analysis across agencies to improve the quality of service provided by all.*

V-SAC introduced the recording of 'Proactive' referrals in 2022, where our staff and/or volunteers receive referrals as a direct result of being on site in the courthouses and linking in with our stakeholders. 29% of people supported in 2023 were directly related to having V-SAC staff and/or volunteers on site in the CCJ, Dublin District Courts on hearing days and for the first day of Circuit Court sitting in the Regional Courts.



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Further analysis is to be undertaken of the data already collected and any future data to be collected, relevant to service delivery and volunteer development.

e) *Evaluation: Capturing and sharing the victim and witness experience through robust, evidence-based research.*

Due to the sensitive nature of the service V-SAC provides victims of crime, it is difficult to gather evidence-based feedback. So, we monitor the compliments, thank you cards, gifts received and complaints, if any.

Sample of some of the compliments received in 2023:

- Thank you for making us feel as comfortable as possible. Ye are all greatly appreciated! Keep up the amazing work. It makes such a difference.
- Thank you for a place to reflect and think and an ear to listen and coffee.
- Can't thank you enough for being by my side every day through my nightmare
- To all the wonderful staff, Thanks so much for everything during the past two months. It was greatly appreciated and made a huge difference to our family.

Complaints: 0

Survey responses: 10 responses. All but one had positive responses. The one with negative feedback was in relation to an email not receiving a response, and not about V-SAC's court accompaniment service. Positive action has been taken to ensure all emails are responded to in a prompt manner. Below are some quotes from the surveys received:

as a Garda i have seen first-hand the difference this service makes. giving an invaluable help to victims of crime

We were provided with victim support at Carlow court. Volunteer X supported my sisters through a very stressful court case She was so supportive and professional and did everything she could to help them to negotiate the process. We were so grateful for her assistance.

Volunteer A and B were like guardian angels throughout the trial which was very daunting. There to explain and support during the process.

Volunteer C was very friendly and offered great support to my family during our time at the Circuit Court. He guided us through the whole process and made us feel very comfortable. He was very attentive and kept us updated on our case from start to finish.



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The family room offered to us as part of the VSAC service provided us with privacy and comfort throughout the process. VSAC is an excellent support service and very beneficial to people who may be feeling uncertain or unsure about the court process.

Just over €2,000 in non-monetary gifts were received which demonstrates the appreciation from service users of the support given by V-SAC to them during their time in court.

Expansion plan update

V-SAC's expansion into the Western, Midlands and Northern courts, which began in early 2022 has been highly successful. The two-year project has seen growing numbers of people being supported in these areas.,

Communications

The Regional Coordinator engaged with local volunteer centres and media outlets to boost its recruitment ad campaign for volunteers.

V-SAC met stakeholders in the Garda Victim Support Offices, State solicitors, Courts Service and sent a reminder notification to Gardai to arrange for any victims of crime, who are due to attend court, to book a meeting with V-SAC.

Potential volunteers were initially engaged through email upon receipt of an online application. Zoom was then used to conduct interviews and facilitate training. A second day of training was conducted through a court visit. This gave the volunteers and Regional Coordinator a chance to meet face to face.

The Regional Coordinator interacted with and supported several victims, witnesses, and family members across each region as part of the shadowing process for new volunteers. The Regional Coordinator continued to consult with Courts Service in all courts to ensure there is a private room for victims and to make them aware when our volunteers would be on site.

V-SAC were invited to the Service Users meeting in Monaghan Courthouse. The Regional Coordinator and one volunteer attended. Also in attendance were representatives from The Prison Services, Probation services, Child Family Agency, and the local domestic violence service. All were very receptive to V-SAC, and all took leaflets with them to share with their organisation.



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Galway Volunteers were nominated for a Mayor's Award in the category of Community Service and Social Inclusion and one of the Monaghan volunteers was nominated for the Monaghan Community Volunteer award. While V-SAC was not chosen for an award, it shows the immediate impact the service is having among the community.

Volunteer Recruitment

A phased approach for the recruitment of volunteers continues for the expansion.

Recruitment advertisements were posted on Avelink, social media platforms Instagram and Facebook, and with the local volunteer centres. All applications were responded to promptly. Shortlisting was necessary for some regions where there was a good response.

Successful applicants were invited to train. 'Classroom' training days were facilitated through Zoom by the General Manager and/or Regional Coordinator. A court visit was then arranged for all participants. The court visit entailed a tour of the courtroom, and building, explaining the court process and layout, and filling in documents such as confidentiality agreement, handbook, volunteer details, etc. The volunteers were then invited to shadow. This is still ongoing for some volunteers as opportunities for shadowing are facilitated.

As at the end of 2023, there were four volunteers for the Western courts, eight for the Midlands courts, and one for the Northern courts.

High level statistics

Overall summary - expansion	2023
Number of people supported	439
Number of individual contact meetings	1101
Number of cases/trials	97
Number of pre-trial visits	6
Number of for mention	15
Number of book of evidence	1
No of active volunteers	22
No of days given by volunteers	450

64% of the cases referred to V-SAC was because our volunteers were on site in the courthouse. This is what we refer to as our proactive approach to ensure all victims coming to court have access to support, if they want it.



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PEOPLE SUPPORTED - TRENDING			
REGION	COUNTY	2022	2023
Midlands	Laois	0	15
Midlands	Longford	0	26
Midlands	Offaly	8	42
Midlands	Roscommon	3	25
Midlands	Sligo	0	16
Midlands	Westmeath	14	45
Northern	Cavan	0	29
Northern	Donegal	0	12
Northern	Leitrim	0	0
Northern	Monaghan	3	106
Western	Galway	30	70
Western	Mayo	8	53

CONTACT MEETINGS - TRENDING			
REGION	COUNTY	2022	2023
Midlands	Laois	0	59
Midlands	Longford	0	88
Midlands	Offaly	26	87
Midlands	Roscommon	0	104
Midlands	Sligo	0	49
Midlands	Westmeath	80	164
Northern	Cavan	0	30
Northern	Donegal	0	27
Northern	Leitrim	0	0
Northern	Monaghan	12	189
Western	Galway	93	158
Western	Mayo	19	146

Highlights

- Getting first referrals for the courts as V-SAC introduced its service.
- Visiting courts for the first time, and meeting stakeholders.
- The success of the proactive approach.
- Getting shadowing opportunities for volunteers.
- Seeing the growth in victims supported in most regions.
- Volunteer award nominations.



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Challenges

- Lack of fully trained volunteers during busy court terms.
- Finding volunteers for the Mayo and some northern courts.

Next steps

Due to the success of the expansion into the Western, Midlands and Northern courts, V-SAC included these regions in its 2024 Funding Application for its existing service. The submission was approved by the Department of Justice in February 2024. There are still challenges to be faced in terms of volunteer recruitment and retention which will be the focus for 2024.



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12. 2023 in figures

2023 was V-SAC's busiest year on record. The number of people supported by its volunteers increased by over a third on 2022. This is a significant increase and shows the demand for its services around the country.

Persons assisted by the Victims of Crime funding:

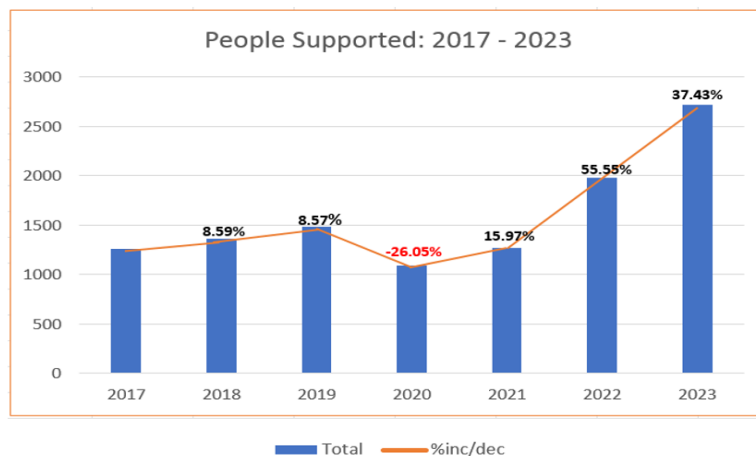
Number of individuals: **2,717**

Number of individual contact meetings: **8,166**

67 volunteers gave 2,151 days in supporting victims, their family/friends and prosecution witnesses when they attended court.

12.1 Overview of 2023

Some of the increase of 37% in the number of people supported can be attributed to the continued expansion of our service into the Western, Midlands and Northern courts. In addition, several Central Criminal Court trials were moved to be heard in Regional Courts. V-SAC supported 149 victims in 27 of such trials. On average each person supported met with V-SAC 3-4 times during the year.





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The table below gives a more detailed breakdown of the service since 2017. The individual contacts remain on average 2-3 individual meetings per person supported. The number of trials/hearings is up significantly which may be attributed to some courts running to full capacity and the appointment of several new judges within the year. The trend of more sentencing hearings continued in 2023. Our active volunteer base increased with the expansion of our service as well as filling gaps in our existing service. We will continue the recruitment drive in 2024 until we have sufficient resources to manage the increase in demand for our services. On average volunteers gave 32 days of their time each year to help victims navigate the criminal justice system.

Overall summary	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of people supported	1257	1365	1482	1096	1271	1977	2717
Number of individual contact meetings	5352	5427	5435	3248	3270	5776	8166
Number of cases/trials	327	356	462	246	284	391	535
Number of pre-trial visits	57	85	81	77	105	149	162
Number of pre-trial hearings	0	0	0	1	0	7	11
Number of sentencing hearings	65	85	59	45	83	114	152
Number of appeals	8	11	8	2	5	18	5
Number of retrials	10	15	19	2	3	15	13
No of active volunteers	34	46	69	46	36	57	67
No of days given by volunteers	946	1202	1417	662	665	1043	2151

The table below shows the breakdown of the number of people supported and the types of trials/hearings in which they were involved. Most types of crime saw the number of people supported increase compared to previous years. There was an 52% increase in support for people involved in proceedings involving rape or sexual assault and a significant increase in the number of people supported involved in assault proceedings. This may be due to priority being given to trials of rape/sexual assault and assault or that the courts are operating more efficiently.

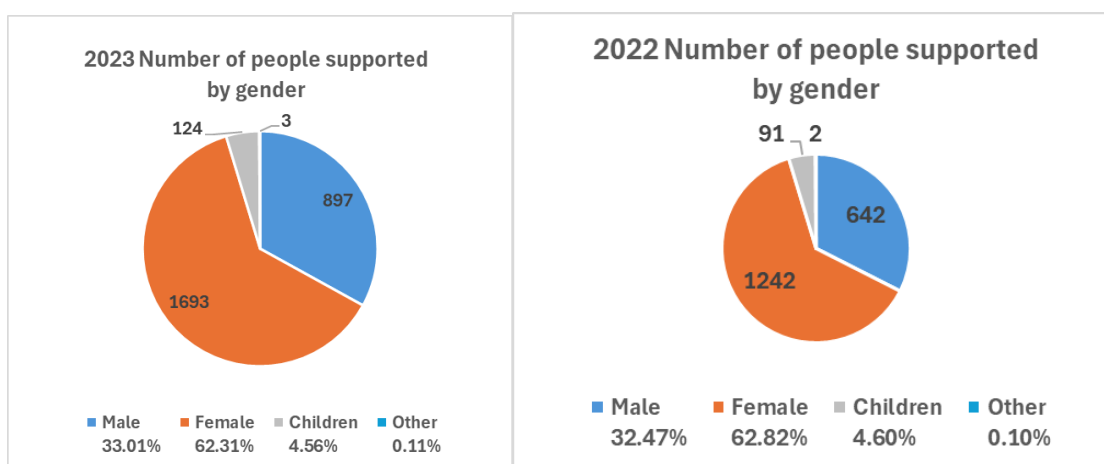


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Summary of people supported by crime type:

By offence	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Murder/Manslaughter/Attempted Murder/DBDD	269	318	258	263	337	425	571
Rape/Sexual Assault	607	576	543	388	466	870	1323
Domestic Violence	103	147	299	162	207	175	263
Assault (other than domestic or sexual)	124	149	205	138	90	238	316
Theft	29	8	10	2	0	1	9
Robbery (theft with violence or threat)	3	9	5	9	11	12	7
Burglary	9	2	9	29	10	14	14
Road Traffic Accident	4	9	9	2	5	3	5
Human Trafficking	2	2	0	3	3	5	2
Other	107	145	144	100	142	234	207
Total	1257	1365	1482	1096	1271	1977	2717

In 2020, V-SAC started recording the gender of people supported. The analysis shows that on average almost one third of the people supported were male, 62% female and 5% children and a small percentage were in the Other category. The number of children supported in 2022 almost doubled and in 2023 there was a 27% increase compared to 2022, which may be due to the courts giving priority to cases involving minors.

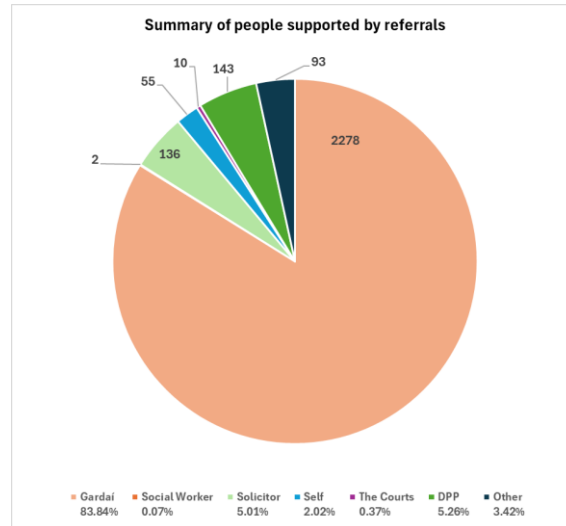


Below is a pie chart depicting the summary of the 2,717 people supported by how they were referred into V-SAC in 2023. Most people (84%) were referred to V-SAC for court accompaniment and/or support by the Gardaí, followed by the DPP's Office (5%) and



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solicitors (5%). Victims and survivors also referred in directly with V-SAC (2%). The 'Other' category is made up of referrals from other victim support organisations and GSOC.





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12.2 Criminal Courts of Justice

64% of all people supported by V-SAC in 2022 attended the Criminal Courts of Justice for the criminal proceedings. There was a 10% increase in the number of people supported compared to 2021. This is remarkable considering the previous year was our busiest year to date and some trials were moved from Dublin to the regional courts. V-SAC still managed to provide support to over 1,700 people. On average the number of people supported per year is just over 1,000 people, but this trend is now increasing as the CCJ is running to full capacity. The only significant drop since 2017 was during 2020, the year COVID-19 arrived. V-SAC's CCJ Coordinator and volunteers managed the increase in demand. More volunteers will be recruited in 2023 to manage the increase in volumes.

The table below shows the breakdown of the people supported by the type of crime. As most of Central Criminal Court trials are heard in the Criminal Courts of Justice, it is not surprising to see that most of the people supported by V-SAC were involved in such trials as murder, manslaughter, death by dangerous driving, rape, etc.

CCJ – Summary of people supported by crime type:

CCJ	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Murder/Manslaughter/Attempted Murder/DBDD/Conspiracy to murder	268	318	214	224	320	414	497
Rape/Sexual Assault/Attempted rape	594	508	489	300	385	678	818
Domestic Violence	6	17	99	79	111	106	116
Assault (other than domestic or sexual)	69	84	83	60	64	155	139
Theft	5	0	5	0	0	1	8
Robbery (theft with violence or threat)	0	2	3	7	11	8	6
Burglary	7	2	7	25	10	14	10
Road Traffic Accident	0	0	0	1	0	0	4
Human Trafficking	2	2	0	3	3	5	2
Other	91	74	111	73	118	197	138
Total	1042	1007	1011	772	1022	1578	1738



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12.3 Other Dublin Courts

V-SAC provides a service in the District Courts, which Blanchardstown, Cloverhill, Dun Laoghaire, Swords, and Tallaght.

The table below gives a high-level breakdown of the service since 2017. The numbers of people supported and subsequently the number of individual contacts has significantly decreased since 2019. Numbers still have not returned to pre-COVID volumes, even though our volunteers were on site for hearing days in Blanchardstown and Tallaght District Courts and we now have a service in Cloverhill. The challenge for V-SAC into 2024 is to work with the Gardaí and court staff to ensure all victims are being offered support when attending the Dublin District Courts.

Dublin courts	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
People supported	218	251	294	94	97	73	169
Individual contact meetings	355	308	358	112	133	80	182
No. of active volunteers	2	4	7	4	5	6	14
No. of days given by volunteers	N/A	N/A	N/A	19	49	103	295

The largest group of people supported were victims of domestic violence (63%), and the second largest group were victims of assault (20%), which is similar to 2022. It is our belief this trend will continue again into next year and hopefully more victims will be referred into V-SAC to get it back to pre-COVID volumes.

12.4 Eastern courts

The expansion into the Eastern Courts started in 2018. It was slow to start with but then as more people availed of the service and our stakeholders became familiar with V-SAC, the service went from strength to strength.

The table below shows a high-level breakdown of the service since 2017. The increase in numbers of people supported in 2020 were mostly from January to March, i.e., pre the pandemic. The reduction in 2021 can be attributed to the impact of COVID-19, when courts were closed for a few months. The service is finally back to normal and exceeding pre-pandemic levels.

Eastern Courts	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
People supported	0	24	84	137	62	117	212
Individual contact meetings	0	30	466	234	123	242	474
No. of active volunteers	0	5	18	14	9	8	16
No. of days given by volunteers	Not recorded			102	53	112	323

The largest cohort of people supported were involved in sexual assault trials (59%). As most of the cases were heard in Circuit Courts, this trend is probably going to continue into 2024 and beyond.



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12.5 South-eastern courts

The South-eastern courts include courts in Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Wexford, and Waterford. The expansion into this region proved highly successful and remained steady year-on-year since 2018. While other courts show a decrease in 2020 and 2021, the South-eastern courts were the exception. This was due to Central Criminal Court trials being listed in counties they may not normally have been heard in. 2023 was the busiest on record for the South-eastern courts with just over 17% increase of people supported compared to 2022. 69% of people supported were involved in trials of rape and/or sexual assault. It is anticipated that the demand for V-SAC's court accompaniment service in the South-eastern courts will remain on par or have a slight increase on 2023 levels.

South Eastern Courts	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
People supported	0	68	68	74	72	123	144
Individual contact meetings	0	224	172	360	218	401	427
No of active volunteers	0	10	15	34	12	11	17
No of days given by volunteers	<i>Not recorded by court</i>			90	65	133	224

12.6 Midlands, Northern and Western Courts

The expansion into the Midlands, Northern and Western courts started in 2022 with the recruitment of a Regional Coordinator to oversee the expansion into these regions.

PEOPLE SUPPORTED - TRENDING			
REGION	COUNTY	2022	2023
Midlands	Laois	0	15
Midlands	Longford	0	26
Midlands	Offaly	8	42
Midlands	Roscommon	3	25
Midlands	Sligo	0	16
Midlands	Westmeath	14	45
Northern	Cavan	0	29
Northern	Donegal	0	12
Northern	Leitrim	0	0
Northern	Monaghan	3	106
Western	Galway	30	70
Western	Mayo	8	53

The demand for the service increased in each region in 2023 and is becoming well established. In 2022 and 2023 just over 500 people were supported as a direct result of V-SAC introducing its service for victims of crime in these regions.



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CONTACT MEETINGS - TRENDING			
REGION	COUNTY	2022	2023
Midlands	Laois	0	59
Midlands	Longford	0	88
Midlands	Offaly	26	87
Midlands	Roscommon	0	104
Midlands	Sligo	0	49
Midlands	Westmeath	80	164
Northern	Cavan	0	30
Northern	Donegal	0	27
Northern	Leitrim	0	0
Northern	Monaghan	12	189
Western	Galway	93	158
Western	Mayo	19	146

There were over 1,300 individual contacts with the 505 people supported, which means on average V-SAC staff and volunteers had 2-3 contacts with each person supported. This demonstrates how busy the service was in the different counties. The service was provided by 21 volunteers who gave over 500 days of their time to support the 505 victims, their families and prosecution witnesses. As the Central Criminal Court will continue to sit outside Dublin, 2024 should see an increase in demand in these regional counties with V-SAC reaching more victims as more of the stakeholders become aware of V-SAC's court accompaniment service.

12.7 All other courts

This group includes Cork, Kerry, Clare, and Limerick. In total, fifteen people were supported in these courts and there were twenty-eight individual contact meetings.

While V-SAC does not have a service covering these counties in 2023, a proposal was submitted accepted by the Department of Justice to expand its services into the Munster region. This will mean that V-SAC will be a fully national service provider of court-based victim support, once the Munster expansion is complete.



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Below are quotes from some of the Thank You cards!

Thank you so much for all the chats, explaining and support

I can't thank you enough for being there for me, 'X' and my sister during this difficult time. This has been a long journey as you know but I'm so grateful you became part of it too.

To S and all in VSAC (wonderful volunteers) - Thank you so much for all that you do to stand behind & beside victims during some of the toughest times of their lives. Your compassion, patience + kindness means everything these days. Please always remember the importance of self care, minding you. I've filled a bag with some nice things I hope you can enjoy on self care days.

For all the Kindness, Patience & Support to myself, 'X' & all my family. Couldn't have got through this time without you all.

Thank you so much for the hospitality and interest you took in us. All your kindness is much appreciated. You and your colleagues do marvellous work. Do not know how we would have managed.

Thank you for everything the last few days, for listening to my rants, to calming me down, for the emotional support. I'll be forever grateful for meeting you and for your support to me during the most difficult time of my life.

Thank you all for your support and kindness during our time at court. We really appreciate the work you do and know it can't always be easy. You make the day that bit brighter through your work. Thank you for helping us.

Thank you for putting your trust in us!



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13. Future plans

V-SAC will expand into Munster over the coming 2 years, which includes the opening of an office in Cork City. It, hopefully, will be more straightforward now that the courts are running to full capacity.

V-SAC will maintain the great relationships built up throughout 2023 and will look to form new alliances with relevant organisations on a local, national, and European level.

It will be exciting to see the completion of the COVIS project in 2024 and learn from the recommendations on best practice in providing court-based victim support.

V-SAC will always put the victims needs first and ensure that, regardless of where their case is due to be heard, they have access to the support they need at court. V-SAC will continue to work with the Department of Justice and its stakeholders to ensure access to support for all victims when they need it.

V-SAC's court accompaniment project is supported by:



The COVIS project is co-funded by the European Union