

Letter from the Moira Fund to the Convener

I write as Chair of The Moira Fund to express my ongoing concerns about the welfare of families in Scotland who have lost a loved one through murder and need help from Victim Support Scotland [VSS].

The Moira Fund is a national, very small charity, a handful of unpaid volunteers with no official funding, set up in 2009 in memory of my daughter Moira Jones who was brutally murdered in 2008 in Glasgow. We were established to help with needs which could not be met, or easily met, by official help agencies; to alleviate the stress of those who were struggling to cope financially as well as emotionally with the loss of a loved one through murder. We work closely with the Homicide Support Service in England and Wales. This provides one-to-one support for victims' families with the dedicated Homicide Case Worker [HCW] liaising on behalf of the family with Police, funeral directors, courts, employers, schools, social services, counsellors etc. The HCW will remain in contact with the family for 12-18 months and should any needs arise during that time which cannot be met by official funds then we will be asked to help. Our response has always been a positive one.

Sadly, there is no such service in Scotland and there are gaps within the services available as well as between them. And since many will be severely traumatised, deeply shocked and distressed, it is unlikely that they will have the strength or even the will to self-refer to a help agency. This has been the case for a long time. I have discussed the issue with Crown Office Officials, MSPs and charity Leaders and it is widely agreed that change is needed. I have also written to the Secretaries of Justice, Kenny MacAskill and Michael Matheson. There have been no improvements and families in Scotland are still not getting the help and support that English families do. This cannot be right. They deserve better than this. Generally, the referrals we receive from Scotland come from Police Family Liaison Officers [FLO] who are about to pass the family over to COPFS/VIA and these requests are for financial help with funerals.

My many concerns came to a head yesterday when I spoke to a FLO who had sent an Application for Support for a recently traumatically- bereaved family. I indicated our willingness to help in some way and asked about other support. The FLO had already contacted VSS. She was told that the victims' "pot was empty". When I contacted VSS to voice my concerns as well as the FLO's, I was told that they were looking into how they could help in this case but the Victims Fund [VF] was "depleted". I was told that they would look at money remaining from a grant that we had given them at the beginning of the year and that they perhaps would get back to us again for help. The Moira Fund donated £5000 at the beginning of 2016 and the same in 2015, ring-fenced to help murder victims, because there were VSS difficulties then with the VF. It was never our intention to prop up Government Funds, and I am sure our supporters wouldn't want us to do that either, but we did, and do, want to help those in the depths of despair. We were told over two years ago that monies from prisoners' fines would be given to help homicide victims and others but that hasn't happened as far as I know.

I am alarmed. If the VF is “depleted” now, before the end of December 2016, what is going to happen to those traumatically bereaved through murder in the three months remaining of the current financial year?

I was told VSS were talking to the Government now. I don’t know what to think. The VF, I know, is to help victims of serious crime but what could be more serious than murder? Should there not always be money in such a “pot”, just in case. Is all of this a result of under-funding by the government?

Is the VF not being properly managed? This needs sorting. Without help and support families become isolated, go into debt, increasing debt and a downward spiral of depression, they become fractured and, if they were already dysfunctional, it will only become worse. They need help.

Our charity is administered in England and Scotland. I am Scottish. Our family was very well looked after by the Scottish Police and court service. The warm support and generosity given to The Moira Fund, especially in Glasgow, is wonderful. I want things to be better for Scottish victims. They are the poor relations in the justice system and this is not right. Victim Support Scotland may do a good job with victims of other crimes but there is not nearly enough being done for victims of homicide. Although we have responded positively to all requests for help from Scotland, in proportion to England there should be many more and if there was some sort of continuity of service to victims then different needs could be identified and addressed and we could do more.

I could say much more. As a victim I know only too well the ongoing pain, grief, shock and bewilderment which will be experienced by other victims and how important it is that they are given both the practical and emotional support they need. I become agitated just thinking about those who are not getting this help, who are let down because help agencies are not joined up, or not run efficiently.

I have been urged to take my concerns to the press but I don’t really want to do that. I don’t know what to do. Is your committee aware of the current state of affairs? Can you help? I would be pleased to discuss this further, to talk at any time if that would help and I would welcome a response from you and your committee to the matters addressed.

Beatrice Jones
Chair
The Moira Fund
6 January 2017