

Help Point – all-in-one SOS system

Refuge points where anyone who feels in danger can activate an alert button and receive immediate support from a local control room.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Crime prevention Violence against women and girls Violence (other) Vulnerability and safeguarding
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Region	East Midlands
Partners	Police Local authority
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	April 2023

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people General public Victims

Aim

To make people feel safer – particularly women and girls – and to deter offenders.

Intended outcome

To increase public safety and reduce street crime.

Description

The Help Point is an all-in-one SOS system that's specifically designed to reduce street crimes such as assaults, robbery, gang crimes, and crimes against women and girls. It was developed in conjunction with UK police forces as part of the government's ongoing Safer Streets campaign.

Locations

Eight Help Points have been installed in Northamptonshire in public spaces, in areas previously suffering high violence levels or along our safer routes to make users of the path feel safer. The Help Points were placed in areas where repeated violence was seen, including the racecourse and in the town centre.

The racecourse is a large expanse which was a hot spot for several sexual and violent offences. Four Help Points were installed on the path, supported by improved lighting implemented by the local council and a comprehensive CCTV rollout, also funded through Safer Streets. Line of sight has been improved with 15 monitored cameras, with the Help Points providing an enhanced level of safety and security.

How the system works

The system provides a refuge point where anyone who feels in danger can activate an alert button and receive immediate support from a local control room. The wireless CCTV equipment has a two-way talking feature, lights, and camera.

Anyone can press these Help Points if they feel that they may be immediately under threat. The cameras attached to the Help Points are monitored alongside existing local authority monitored cameras. The Help Points emit a blue light, which is incredibly bright during the evening. This is a deterrent to offenders and increases visibility of the Help Point for potential victims.

Upon activation, the:

- camera above the Help Point zooms in
- light at the top flashes to draw further attention
- wireless CCTV (WCCTV) operator at the monitoring station can listen and speak

There is a trigger plan with the police, who will deploy immediately if there is deemed to be an imminent threat to personal safety.

- [Read more about WCCTV in Northamptonshire](#)

Cost

The cost of eight Help Points was £22,000, with further funds required to connect them into the central monitoring station. The estimated cost of the Help Point as a whole plan is £25,000 to £30,000 in total.

Overall impact

Northamptonshire has seen a 10% drop in reported sexual offences since the installation of these units. While this cannot directly be attributed to the devices, it's part of a series of measures helping to make the town safer. It sends a message to offenders and potential offenders that initiatives are targeted in places in areas where violence is likely to occur.

The help points are generally very well received by the community. They provide useful reassurance but it's too early to understand the overall impact of the intervention.

Learning

- Ensure the community is aware of Help Points. For example, Northampton has a large student population. Northampton Police therefore ensured this featured in their 'guide to safety' publication, along with the safer route locations. Virtual reality sessions were delivered during freshers' week, which allowed students to immerse themselves in a night-time economy setting and view where the Help Points were located. Students were also handed hard copies of where to find the Help Points.
- Signs need to be bright and easy to follow, with a QR code for further information.
- Have a system with the CCTV monitoring station to weed out false activations and log them. Establish a trigger plan with the police control room to respond to incidents that appear genuine.
- Northampton Police is considering whether floor markings leading to the Help Points in Racecourse Park would be useful, or a map in the centre of the park.
- Early indications suggest that the number of false activations is very high, particularly in the town centre. All activations are logged and checked in the council monitoring station. Genuine activations are lower. Northamptonshire Police feels it's worth the false activations if only a handful of responses can result in preventing serious crime or vulnerability.
- Help Points are a talking point among revellers, particularly due to the blue light emitted from the call unit that draws attention. The camera unit installed 15ft above the call unit also lights up on activation, which is designed to draw attention and deter the offender.
- Less than 1% are active activations. False activations are significant but can be managed through an effective plan with the monitoring team.

Best available evidence

The [crime reduction toolkit](#) does not include best-available evidence on the use of help points. It does include the best-available evidence on [Closed-Circuit Television \(CCTV\)](#).

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Tags

Violence against women and girls