

Hollie Guard app

A safeguarding app to protect victims of domestic abuse (DA) and stalking.

First published

5 August 2024

Updated

28 August 2025

Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Domestic abuse Stalking and harassment Digital, data and analytics
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Region	North East
Partners	Police Education Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.

Key details

Start date	September 2022
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Victims

Aim

The aims of the Hollie Guard app are to:

- provide reassurance to victims of DA
- enable a safe method for victims of DA to alert police and their emergency contacts
- activate the phone's GPS tracker, to provide opportunity to locate victims and deploy police resources
- capture both video and audio when activated (with a simple technique), which is accessible through the company, in an evidential format for prosecution at court
- safeguard users of the app through enhancing security and prevent them from being a victim of crime
- retain all records of activations. At this time, the information is not readily available in terms of activation and subsequent prosecution

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the Hollie Guard app are to:

- provide victims of DA with a safe and secure means to request assistance from the police
- increase safety within the community
- increase the perception of community safety

Description

Hollie Guard is a personal safety app designed to protect victims from violence and incidents, record evidence and alert emergency services. The app has been developed by the charity the Hollie Gazzard Trust.

The implementation of Hollie Guard was initiated by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Humberside (Humberside PCC). Humberside PCC established a DA profile which identified the need for additional technological resources for DA interventions around children and families. The Hollie Guard app was identified as a suitable resource. £70,000 of funding per year was awarded from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence fund for the period of 2022–2025. Humberside PCC informed Humberside police that Hollie Guard licenses had been purchased (£70 per license) and directed them to the company's website for how to implement the apps with their victims of crime.

Training

Initial training was provided by the Hollie Gazzard Trust, delivered both online and in person to teams such as the Domestic Abuse Safeguarding Investigation Team (DASIT), health providers and the youth justice team. The training session focused on demonstrating the functionality of the app and how to describe it to service users (members of the public).

The rollout of the Hollie Guard app

The safeguarding team would be deployed and visit the victim face to face with an Independent Domestic Violence Practitioner (IDVA) or similar representative from local authorities and charities such as Women's Aid.

During the visit victims are told about Hollie Guard and are encouraged to download the app. When registering their details on the app, they will be issued with a unique registration code, which provides them access to the Hollie Guard Extra facility. The victim has the option of adding up to five friends and family emergency contacts. Within the app, details of location or a duration of a meeting can be added if a person was going on a date. This would activate the functionality if they failed to sign back into the app to demonstrate they are safe.

If an individual is in danger the facility is activated by either shaking the smartphone for 5 seconds or holding the warning sign on the app for 5 seconds. Humberside Police advise the sole use of the shaking technique. Upon activation an emergency alert is sent to up to five emergency contacts in

the form of a text and to Hollie Guard's alarm receiving centre (ARC). The ARC makes an assessment and triages if necessary to a police force control room (FCR) who will then decide whether and how to deploy police resources for assistance. Using the Hollie Guard app does require an internet connection of either Wi-Fi, 4G or 5G to save a meeting which is then saved in the Cloud. This enables an alert to be sent if the phone is then switched off or does not receive signal.

The app has the ability to record audio and visual footage as long as these features are enabled. Incidents of DA reported to the police do not require cooperation or engagement by the victim for prosecution. When victims are not ready to engage with the police, the evidence can be used to build a victimless prosecution which can be passed onto the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to decide whether the case can go to trial.

Licenses

The 10,000 licenses are managed by the safeguarding team, who can only reallocate licences to partner agencies if there is a need. Reallocation occurs when an agency or partner such as the independent sexual violence advisors service (ISVA), independent domestic violence advocates (IDVA), the Forge (a homelessness and vulnerability charity in North Lincolnshire), education partnerships or youth justice submit a request for a code to be transferred to their portal.

There are currently 10,000 codes available and there is capability by police to redistribute the licenses among all the agencies where demand requires. Licenses are revoked if they are not used, with three-month checks made with the issuing agency to check if the victim requires the app.

Overall impact

The use of the Hollie Guard Extra app is an ongoing process and there is no current mechanism to evaluate effectiveness or conversion from activation to prosecution.

In total, Humberside police has issued 800 codes since the inception of the DA/SV fund. The app has also been used in high-risk DA cases and resulted in a rapid response to prevent a drowning incident, ultimately helping to save life. Overall, the app has enabled victims to feel that little bit safer and has given them confidence in some cases to prevent them being isolated for those victims who have felt too unsafe to go out in public.

For 2022/23 140 codes were issued to victims who had interacted with stalking services. The service gives the opportunity to tap their phone screen twice if they feel at risk and automatically means someone from the Hollie Guard service is monitoring both audio and visuals of what is happening in real time and can identify the victim's location to enable police to respond to their location in a timely manner.

The app allows all the evidence to be recorded so cases can be progressed if victims do not want to make a statement.

Key findings

- the safeguarding team are aware of several activations and that there has been a positive police response as a result, a recent case resulted in a suspect being arrested and the case being heard at a Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)
- the impact is that the victims feel safe when they are out in public – Humberside can see their location at any point if required
- feedback provided by the local authorities, charities and victims has been overwhelmingly positive
- having the app installed on victims' own phones ensures its use is discreet
- Hollie Guard has resulted in convictions for other types of crime as the app has provided key evidence in court cases which has brought offenders to justice

Learning

The Hollie Guard app is easy to download and register the relevant information. The Hollie Guard website provides exactly what you require in terms of an explanation into what it is used for and how. The force encourages user(s) to know this is a trustworthy means of providing them with immediate support and safeguarding should it be required.

When implementing the Hollie Guard app the following challenges are present:

- the victim must possess a smartphone
- the phone must be active and charged in order to work
- the victim is required to log onto the app to ensure it is functioning (the advice is once a day)
- emergency contacts need to be regularly reviewed and updated
- if the victim changes their phone they need to reinstall the app

Initially, there was resistance from some areas of the force, who believed existing technology was sufficient. To overcome this challenge more strategic conversations around the app focused on prevention.

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Tags

Domestic abuse