



Suffolk case study: Domestic Abuse support through live chat





CONTACT
Rob Jones

ROLE
Assistant Chief Constable

GOALS
Increase support for domestic abuse victim support

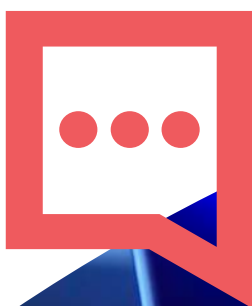
OUTCOME

- New channels for support through live chat for domestic abuse victims
- Improved access
- More data and detail captured
- Able to offer ongoing support after interaction



Assistant Chief Constable of Suffolk Constabulary, Rob Jones, worked with Futr to roll out a Domestic Abuse support for victims through Futr's live chat solution.

Rob previously worked at the Met Police where he played an active role in supporting domestic abuse victims. Suffolk had a successful live chat trial which then evolved into using live chat to support victims for more serious crimes.

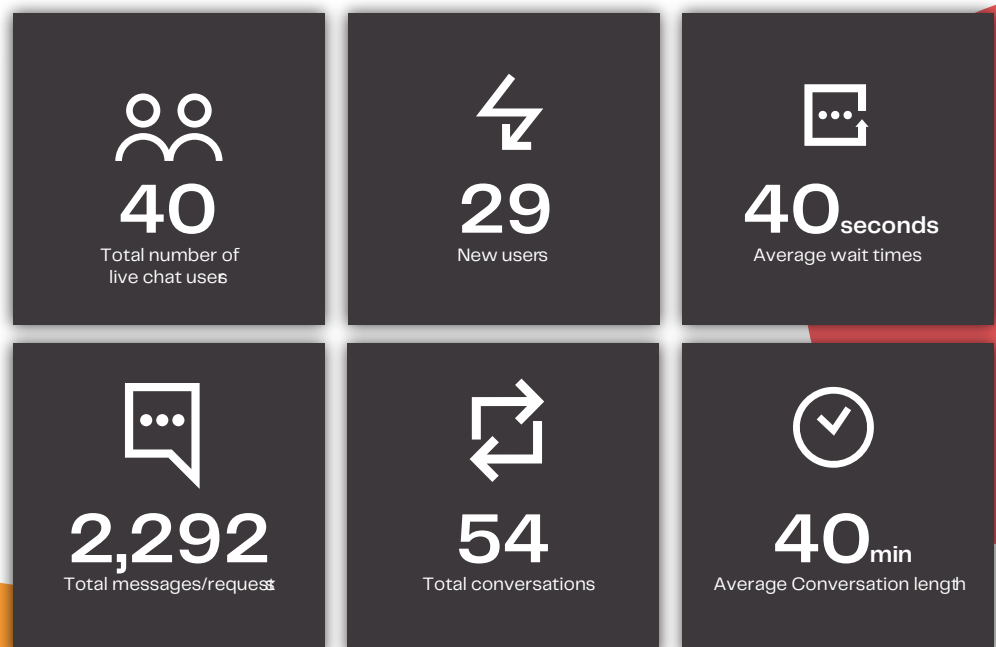


Challenge

Although Suffolk had a successful launch of live chat to help triage queries through to their agents, often it was unpredictable why someone would get in touch. On some occasions, members of the public would use live chat to report more serious crimes and had built up a strong rapport with the officers who were able to signpost them to getting the right help and support. This led to Rob Jones and his team to look at using Live Chat for more serious crimes like Domestic Abuse which could help increase support for victims and build trust with the police.

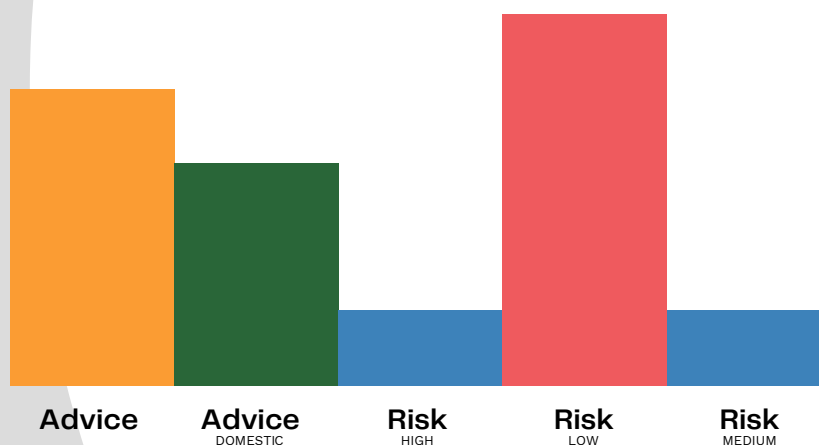
Solution

To help increase support for domestic abuse victims, live chat was introduced as an alternative channel. The team at Suffolk worked with Futr to build and test some new custom features around protecting privacy and safety of victims.



(Statistics over a one month period).

To allow for deeper insights and improve ongoing training the force asked us to allow them to group conversations.



Benefit

Privacy and safety

Victims gained a new channel for support. Previously officers would visit the victim, but many victims want to protect their privacy and don't feel comfortable having an officer knocking on their door. Through live chat, victims were able to get the support as well as being able to share more detail.

Even in quite complex circumstances you can signpost into other organisations quickly

Rob Jones

Rob says, "It really was such a great use of technology, ideas and people, to try to provide a new service. I think we've got to the place now where we have proved convincingly that victims really enjoy having an opportunity to talk to someone by text supported by the phone.

"Even in quite complex circumstances you can signpost into other organisations quickly, so you don't have to call at their door because sometimes there's all the

trauma that's caused by having officers turn up in your street."

"We did this trial for a month to see if we could use live chat into something really specific for domestic abuse victims. We wanted to have as many people who wanted to use the service in scope, which would mean people with more complex needs as well."

Access

Multilingual live chat is helping to improve access to the police. Offering such support and working with other sector providers such as support charities will help change some of the perspectives that certain communities have of the police. Often picking up the phone can feel like a big step for someone who doesn't speak the language, so by offering live chat, victims are able to get the advice they need.

According to Rob, "Access is really important, for example live chat had instant language translation. A lot of people, especially when they are feeling anxious and are suffering abuse, don't want to speak on the phone in a different language to their first language to someone they don't know.

You wouldn't unless you were really desperate for help in which case you may not be able to communicate as clearly as you wanted. Picking up the phone is a big step, but it's not as big a step getting advice through live chat. This way you can explain people's options better."



Prioritising and triaging queries

When an inquiry comes in, a higher risk one needs to be prioritised and triaged to the right agent. We asked Rob how this worked in the context of reporting domestic abuse, and specifically how the dash risk checklist is used.

Dash is a structured way of working out the vulnerability threat with someone to make sure the police don't miss out any risk and can take action. Typically, it is done face to face. Suffolk tried a slightly different approach by doing this through live chat. What they found was that people were willing to give more detail and were able to form their thoughts more than if a police officer was asking them questions.

Up until now, in a domestic abuse service, it didn't have live chat or a technology option

Rob Jones

Rob says, "Up until now, in a domestic abuse service, it didn't have live chat or a technology option. It would be triage and then prioritise that when the officers get there. This wasn't completely successful. Lots of people said, DASH has to be done face to face because it's quite personal. In fact, people doing the data assessment themselves through live chat, often gave a lot more detail and were able to form their thoughts more than a police officer asking them the questions.

"The officers would go through once they've done it and pick up

anything. It gave you a second way though, a more guided way.

"What then happened was that the transcript of the live chat could be attached to the crime report as a document. So rather than just having one dash notebook that had been done by an officer, you've got the whole richness of the transcript, which explains how victims are feeling and the impact. Rather than just being a booklet, it would form part of an investigation, for courts and things like that. The way this works is so much better than I thought it would."



Ongoing support

Conversations with victims are often in depth and can last up to two hours. Through live chat, there's much more data available because it's a controlled environment. Officers are able to classify what's happened in a much more accurate way compared to if an officer was to go out, such as picking up on things like harassment, malicious communications and any online threat. With this information, officers are able to signal victims into the right unit to get the support they need. For example, being able to signpost and advise more about charity support and helplines that Suffolk work with.

Rob says, "If we were doing a next state experiment, we would probably have some of those help charities as part of the live chat too, maybe even handing some of

the enquiries first so that straight away a victim can get that kind of support and you don't have to wait or make a phone call yourself later."

Confidence and flexibility

Suffolk was impressed with the core product and the team had confidence in it for general police inquiries. The quick win nature of Futr meant that they could very quickly offer a better service to victims. Previously, they would have had to do a capability analysis and get different services from different places, making the process clunky. Different technologies would provide different parts of a service and putting them together in the control room was expensive and difficult.

A huge benefit of Futr for Suffolk was that they already had confidence in the system, and the regular addition of new and useful features gave them more flexibility.

Rob explains, "What often happens with technology and procurement is we ask for something, we do a competition for it, and then they get a contract. And then we ask for iterations or certain customisations, they say, 'you haven't paid for that and we can't do it.' You end up in quite a difficult expensive mistake where the tech becomes obsolete

too soon and you're tied into contracts. This felt differently from that, which was really good.

"What was great was Futr's readiness to develop new features really quickly, and quite a lot of those were done in the weeks as we were doing the project so we could test them."

Custom features to protect safety and privacy

Suffolk Constabulary wanted to ensure that victims felt reassured when interacting with their live chat because often they are in an anxious state. It was important that victims know that it's a police officer they are talking to from Suffolk Police. The interaction needed to be clear so that the police officer could build a rapport with the victim.

Custom features were built to help give victims reassurance, including dissolving text, a clear welcome message and a quick exit button in case the victim is interrupted. Victims also have the ability to schedule a time to speak to someone later, if it's not convenient at that time.

In Rob's words, "We have a cover on the quick exit button which directs you to the BBC. And then things like being able to record the transcript, and then lift it into our

crime system, Athena. So you've got an evidential thing, which were some of the key features that were really good."

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Rob Jones

Implementation: Failing fast and failing forward

One of the things which made the implementation successful was being able to pull in expertise from different parts of the constabulary, the national as well as the Futr team. Implementation involved a month of setting it up, a month of delivery and a month of evaluating the solution, including following up on investigations, how the team felt working in the new way and their learning, and how the victims felt. This helped Suffolk do a fast experiment, where they learnt a lot and made a lot of ground quickly.

Rob says, "We were able to do a really fast experiment, where you get the learning, and you make you make a lot of ground quickly. It's

failing fast or failing forward, so early on you can look at what works and what doesn't work."

Experience with Futr

Rob shares his overall experience with Futr:

“What was fantastic about it, in terms of working with Futr was how flexible Alice was and how she got what we wanted to do. She was able to pick up ideas and suggestions really quickly. So for example, with things like an exit button and covering up to keep the safety of the victim, and people trusting the system, Futr’s live chat did what we wanted pretty quickly.

“The other thing which was really great was the training. We ended up using staff and frontline officers who were domestic abuse champions. They came in from all over Suffolk to form the team. They all got trained and picked up live chat incredibly quickly having never used that before. And were able to just apply their skills in helping victims into a live chat setting.”

