

LAW FIRMS JOIN FORCES TO SUPPORT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

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Firm news

Amid ongoing reports of domestic abuse during lockdown and as restrictions on movement have increased* three law firms have joined forces to raise awareness of domestic abuse and provide an online safe space for victims.

The three firms – Herbert Smith Freehills, Dentons and Addleshaw Goddard – have agreed to install a dedicated portal on their internal or external websites which provide a combination of support, advice and emergency contact information for anyone at risk of domestic abuse. Developed to leave no browsing history, the browser-based service has also been designed with a quick exit button to help ensure the safety of those using it.

The portal, built by Royal Mail in collaboration with charity Hestia and its UK Says No More campaign, uses a pop-up window to provide details of local support, based on users' postcodes and internet location. Victims accessing the site will find information including when to dial 999, national helplines, local support groups and a questionnaire to determine the level of risk and potential actions to take.

“Covid-19 has opened a window into the way law firms can use technology to reach people beyond the confines of the office. Those same capabilities can be harnessed to offer support to tackle the physical and mental strain that victims of domestic abuse suffer and we are proud to work with Royal Mail providing a lifeline where it is needed,” says [Alison Brown](#), executive partner at Herbert Smith Freehills.

Together, Herbert Smith Freehills, Dentons and Addleshaw Goddard have become the first law firms to support Royal Mail's campaign. Their participation in the initiative follows eBay, Post Office and the Ministry of Defence announcing plans to incorporate the free-to-install portal on their websites.

"We have been working closely with the National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV) since 2016, helping victims of domestic abuse obtain emergency protection from the courts," says Lisa Sewell, managing director of Dentons' UK & Middle East region. "The pandemic has thrown this issue into even sharper relief and we are pleased to support the Royal Mail's campaign by creating an online safe space for those who need support."

The initiative was developed by Royal Mail Group senior legal advisor, Charlie Ryan, as part of the company's entry in the Financial Times Innovative Lawyers - Global Legal Hackathon Challenge which asked participants to produce pioneering solutions to societal problems posed by the Covid-19 crisis.

"One of the deeply troubling effects of the pandemic has been a sharp rise in domestic abuse across the UK. All too often those living with abuse report feeling isolated and that there is no one to help. It is therefore more important than ever to spread the word to those in need, whoever they might be, about the help that is available. For that reason we were delighted to be part the FT Innovative Lawyer Hackathon team developing the technical solution with Royal Mail, and now promoting the Online Safe Space initiative across our business," says Mary Peterson, Head of Talent and Learning, Addleshaw Goddard.

Charlie Ryan, senior legal advisor, Royal Mail Group says: "We have developed the 'Online Safe Spaces' portal to help victims of domestic abuse access vital support if they need it online. By placing the link on high traffic websites, we hope that victims will be able to use the service discreetly if required without placing themselves at further risk. We hope that the portal will inspire affected individuals to feel confident enough to seek help."

Lyndsey Dearlove, Head of Hestia's UK SAYS NO MORE campaign says: "With Covid-19 restrictions still in place, many victims of domestic abuse may feel that no support is available. We want all victims of domestic abuse to know that they are not alone, and that support services are open. By installing the Online Safe Spaces portal on their internal and external website, Herbert Smith Freehills, Dentons and Addleshaw Goddard have opened up a new opportunity for staff and users of their services to seek vital specialist support. We're pleased to see more businesses taking a proactive approach to supporting victims of domestic abuse."

* Reports have included victims personal accounts such as [this](#) and the release of [data](#) from Refuge, the national charity supporting victims of domestic abuse.

About the Royal Mail Group's 'online safe spaces' campaign

Royal Mail Group has worked with the national 'UK SAYS NO MORE' campaign and abuse experts from the University of Bristol to ensure that the 'Online Safe Spaces' provides a host of helpful links and information.

The term 'Safe Spaces' aligns with the current 'UK SAYS NO MORE' campaign, which provides physical Safe Spaces in retail premises for victims of domestic abuse. Participants so far include Boots, Superdrug and Morrisons.

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