‘Weaving the Web is an innovative project, which really encompasses the 21st Century world of technology. We look forward to working with RCEW, seeing how the portal develops over the coming funded years and how it will help change the lives of those women and girls that have experienced sexual violence.’ Gemma Hall, Big Lottery Fund
Jane Gregory, Weaving the Web Steering Group Chair

The digital revolution has happened and a truly amazing range of women and girls are now using the internet. Through pooling the expertise held by women working in Rape Crisis Centres and survivors themselves we can create empowering online services that extend our reach to underserved women and girls, potentially shortening the time between seeking support and getting support for more survivors, and ensuring online sexual violence support services are fully integrated into the range of support services Rape Crisis Centres offer.

The Rape Crisis network has a great track record of working collaboratively to make sure that what needs to be done gets done in a way that keeps the needs of women and girl survivors at the heart of all we do. This project aims to honour this track record and seeks to give opportunity to use our creativity to weave the web.

Catherine Lennox, Weaving the Web Project Manager

Welcome to the first Weaving the Web newsletter. This edition introduces the Weaving the Web project, explains the consultation process which has taken place so far and outlines the next steps for Weaving the Web. I am very much looking forward to the discussion continuing as we enter into our next phase of the project. Future Weaving the Web newsletters will focus on sharing project news, updates and learning about how to ensure provision of safe, quality online services which reflect the knowledge, needs and experiences of our member centres and women and girl survivors.

Weaving the Web: The Journey so Far

Research and Consultation

In August 2015 RCEW began a period of extensive consultation which included; gathering feedback from 133 women and girl survivors, written feedback from 53 women working in Rape Crisis Centres, workshops attended by 15 women from Rape Crisis Centres and telephone interviews with partners including Women’s Resource Centre, Imkaan and Sisters of Frida and 5 Rape Crisis Centres who are providing email services.

We also commissioned independent research. This included a Technical Feasibility & Findings report from AMG Software Ltd; a rapid research assessment from Durham University Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse (CRiVA) into the use of online services by survivors of sexual violence, safety for women and girls using online services, and mapping of current online services relevant to women and girl survivors of violence. SurvivorsUK, who have recently developed web chat and sms chat for male survivors of sexual violence, were commissioned to provide a lessons learnt report.

Based on our findings the project working group developed our theory of change, wrote an extensive project plan and Big Lottery funding was awarded on 30th March 2016.

Weaving the Web: A rapid research assessment conducted by Durham University Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse: ‘Rape Crisis Centres have already demonstrated their ability to improve health, mental health and wellbeing outcomes for women and girl survivors of sexual violence – it is therefore appropriate that they play an inspirational leadership role in the development of this advancing field following the technological revolution.’
What did women and girl survivors say?

Internet use is already very high with 91% accessing the internet and 99% of respondents accessing the internet via more than one device.

45% have previously searched online for information about Rape Crisis services including looking for counselling, information on support, helpline numbers and self-help information.

They felt that online research was a critical stepping stone in coming forward and calling a helpline. As it takes a lot of courage to pick up the telephone and speak to someone, being able to speak to someone on ‘live chat’ may be a useful way of breaking down fear.

Interactive ways of accessing support would also be valuable in helping with symptoms management, particularly for those who are on the waiting list for counselling. Women and girls didn’t feel that on-line services would replace face to face work, but that these other support mechanisms would ‘help them to get there’. They would use IT, but mainly as a stepping stone.

‘What are your thoughts about providing specialist sexual violence services online?’

Women working in Rape Crisis Centres were asked this question. Reponses included:

- ‘Huge benefits for accessibility – very significant gateway to support or source of support for some women who can’t access centres for all sorts of reasons.’
- ‘This will help us to hear and reach more women! It will give us new avenues for collecting data and evidencing the huge need for culture change and funding for services. I am worried for availability of resources, but this doesn’t change the fact that women are living in silence. This is a necessity.’
- ‘As part of a wider offer, which includes face to face work, I think this has potential. So long as it doesn’t replace physical services.’
- ‘Good engagement tool however cannot replace face to face support. Good idea as part of a range of options. Also cannot afford not to have a greater online presence.’

Concerns mainly related to 3 areas:

1. On line safety; including safeguarding, confidentiality and data protection.
2. On-line services being regarded by commissioners as a cheap replacement for face to face services.
3. Rape Crisis Centres already working at capacity and beyond and being overwhelmed by the volume of new referrals.

Member centre feedback:
‘Content and design are absolutely critical - women and girls must be central to the co-production process.’

Weaving the Web: Next Steps

The feedback gathered during the consultation process was integral to the design of the Weaving the Web project. During the next 12 – 18 months we will continue to consult with member Centres through telephone contact,
regional meetings and an on line forum. This will help us to understand the participation needs of both member Centres and survivors, and develop time frames and capacity support to enable involvement.

In 2017 we will hold a series of co-production skills exchange workshops with member Centres, survivors and partners who have specialism in inclusion of marginalised and discriminated against women and girls. This will ensure that services are developed by the experts, and delivery is to be driven by needs and quality, with the voices and safety of survivors at the heart.

A platform prototype will be developed which will be followed by a period of testing, feedback and adjustment. On-line services will be introduced gradually to allow time for monitoring and further adjustment before any other new services are introduced. There will be a staged approach to member Centres being able to opt into on line referrals and being part of delivering on line services for which there will be capacity support including training in working online.

The on–line platform - what will it look like?

On line tools and services to be developed are dependent on the outcome of co-production activities. Suggestions so far have included:

- ‘Ticketing’ service: a woman or girl chooses a Rape Crisis Centre and provides contact details which are securely passed on to that Centre for them to make contact.  
- Videos that can be streamed or downloaded e.g. explaining Rape Crisis services, on mindfulness, relaxation etc.  
- Other self-help resources such as mood diary apps; pod-casts developed by survivors; affirmations; songs; poems; animation or pictures.  
- A platform similar to a model already being delivered in Australia, ‘1800RESPECT’, which offers telephone and online counselling options directly from their website.  
- On line site navigators: trained Rape Crisis workers provide information about how to use self- help support tools on the site via video or webchat.  
- Web chat with trained Rape Crisis workers.  
- Moderated forums via a registration and log in process.  
- ‘Have your say’- on line consultations.