



U.S. Department of Justice  
Office of Justice Programs  
Bureau of Family Assistance



# PROGRAM BRIEF

118763

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**PROGRAM BRIEF**

**Information Guide for Elected Officials, Criminal Justice Personnel,  
Victim Assistance Organizations, and Concerned Citizens**

**VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**


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118763

U.S. Department of Justice  
National Institute of Justice

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**NCJRS****NOV. 10 1989****ACQUISITIONS**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Victim Assistance Program is a synthesis of several years of experience with prosecutor or police-based victim/witness programs, rape crisis centers, domestic violence programs, and other independent victim assistance projects. The Victim Assistance Program incorporates recommendations, developed by the 1982 President's Task Force on Victims of Crime, that have an immediate impact on victims.

Central to the Victim Assistance Program is concern for the victim. There is strong research evidence to indicate that when program goals focus on recovery of the victim, criminal justice performance is improved. The experience of the more effective programs, which have benefited from consistent administrative and funding support since the early 1970's, has shown that establishing a primary goal of humanitarian concerns for victims benefits, rather than hinders, criminal justice goals. These proven programs have been found to be helpful to police officers, investigators, prosecutors, judges, and probation officers.

## **II. GOAL AND OBJECTIVES**

### **A. Goal**

The goal of the Victim Assistance Program is to improve the treatment of victims of crime by providing victims with the assistance and services necessary to speed their recovery from a criminal act, and to support and aid them as they move through the criminal justice process.

### **B. Objectives**

The objectives of the program are:

1. Increase the commitment of state and local government to do all that is possible to assist victims of crime;
2. Increase the range and availability of services for victims of crime;
3. Expand the victim's opportunity to participate at all critical stages of the criminal justice process, and to ensure consideration of the impact of the crime upon the victim in all major criminal justice decisions; and,
4. Increase coordination and networking of all appropriate agencies, organizations, and groups providing services to victims of crime in order to develop an integrated community system of victim assistance.

## **III. PROBLEM AND ANSWER**

### **A. Problem**

After hearing the testimony of over 1,000 victims and the professionals who serve them, the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime concluded that the neglect and mistreatment of crime victims is a national disgrace; yet, the criminal justice system is absolutely dependent upon these victims to

cooperate. Without citizen cooperation in reporting and testifying about crime, it is impossible to hold criminals accountable. When victims come forward to seek resolution and justice, they find a criminal justice system that often fails to protect them, treats them with indifference at best, and frequently inflicts a "second injury" on them.

**B. Answer**

Separate victim service units or programs, solely dedicated to providing services to victims of crime, help victims to cope with the traumatic effects of the criminal act and the demands of criminal justice system involvement. The programs should be well organized with clearly defined goals; staffed by trained, competent personnel; adequately funded; and visibly supported by their administration. Programs should have the capability of providing a comprehensive system of services to victims, or services should complement the existing victim services system to ensure continuity of support for victims. It is important that program actions be coordinated with those of other victim service programs, agencies within the criminal justice system, community social service agencies, and business organizations.

**IV. CRITICAL ELEMENTS**

**A. Assess the existing victim services in the community.**

**B. Define the program model.**

1. Type and eligibility of victims to receive services.
2. Location of program (e.g., prosecutor's office, independent agency, police department).

**C. Identify the sources of victim access.**

1. Called by police to respond to crime scene.
2. Daily review of police reports.
3. Referrals from criminal justice, hospital, and social service agency personnel.
4. Self-referrals.

**D. Identify the services to be provided.**

**1. Crisis Intervention and Counseling Elements**

- a. Twenty-four hour crisis intervention, counseling, and criminal justice advocacy for victims of sexual assault, child victims and their families, surviving families of homicide victims, and victims of severe physical trauma.
- b. Bereavement counseling and criminal justice advocacy support services for surviving families of homicide victims.
- c. Safety, crisis intervention, supportive counseling, social service support referrals, and criminal justice advocacy for victims of domestic violence and child sexual abuse.

- d. Counseling, social service referral, crime prevention referral, and crime compensation assistance for victims of violent crime and residential burglary.

## **2. Criminal Justice Elements**

- a. Support during investigation.
- b. Coordination of victim/witness appearances.
- c. Assistance with line-ups.
- d. Information on case progress and disposition.
- e. Support during trial process.
- f. Assistance in property release.
- g. Consultation.
- h. Transportation.
- i. Employee, landlord, etc., intercession.
- j. General information on criminal justice system.

## **3. Training, Public Awareness, and Prevention**

- a. Provide training on victimization issues to law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and medical, mental health, and social service personnel.
- b. General public awareness presentations combining victim assistance information with practical crime prevention techniques.
- c. Continued interaction with the media, including the development of public service announcements, press releases, etc.

## **E. Develop standard evaluation process.**

1. Victim/client satisfaction.
2. Community awareness of services.
3. Criminal justice agency satisfaction with and/or awareness of services.
4. Level of benefit to criminal justice system with regard to reporting, investigation, cooperation of victim/witness, trial preparation, and conviction.
5. Cost-benefit in terms of criminal justice.
6. Need for written procedures, standards, and accountability strategies; and, documentation of an effective case management plan.
7. Referral and feedback system.
  - a. Monitoring social service referrals to guarantee that the victim received services.
  - b. Ensuring feedback to police departments and prosecutors' offices that initially refer victims to programs.

## **V. IMPLEMENTATION STEPS/ISSUES**

Critical to the success of a victim assistance program is a thorough understanding of the program's goals, and its relationship to the community and to the criminal justice system. Early programs identified either criminal justice or treatment goals. These goals were frequently viewed as mutually exclusive. The state-of-the-art experience, however, is that the two goals are one in the same. Community-based crisis programs have come to realize that a critical victim need

is justice, i.e., effective resolution of the case. This can only be accomplished through a positive, active involvement with and access to the criminal justice system.

Services designed to focus on the victim facilitate the criminal justice process. Witness notification, victim impact statements, and restitution programs give the victim a sense of involvement and justice, which are critical to the victim's recovery. The efforts of a specialized victims unit also extend to secondary victims, i.e., family, eye witnesses, police, etc., all of whom are essential to successful prosecution.

The goal of every community should be the development of a comprehensive system of services for victims of crime. The services should be activated when the crime occurs and continue to be provided throughout the entire criminal justice process, i.e., emergency response through post-sentence.

Whether the victim assistance program is placed within the criminal justice system or functions as an independent agency is best left to local determination. Program development and successful implementation must consider several elements.

- A. Policy level support, involvement, and personal commitment of the implementing agency administrator to the goals and success of the program.
- B. Funding commitments to ensure adequate staffing and the provision of comprehensive services.
- C. Commitment of policy-makers representing law enforcement, prosecution, judiciary, social services, hospitals, and other victim service agencies who will serve as an advisory council to assure agency commitment, resources, and cooperation; facilitate communication and problem-solving; maximize utilization of the program; and, facilitate in-service training.
- D. Needs of the community and existing services.
- E. Clearly defined program goals.
- F. Specific criteria for selection of project director.
- G. Logistics, including the physical location or placement of the unit, proximity to other agency staff, and access to victims, and placement of the program in the administrative structure of an agency.
- H. Implementation strategies, including adequate training of professional and volunteer staff, a continuing education plan, and technical assistance during the implementation phase.
- I. Program design reflecting the perspective of the victims and the problems they encounter from the moment of victimization.
- J. Staffing patterns reflecting the anticipated case load of the program. (Note, while a core of paid professional staff may be helpful in ensuring regularity and continuity of services, many successful victim service programs are staffed by thoroughly trained volunteers.)

The effectiveness of local programs is closely related to the ability of the programs to take advantage of the growing body of technology, research, and expertise in the field of victim assistance. This need is best addressed by a state coordinating and resource office capable of providing technical assistance, data collection, training, monitoring, and serving as liaison with Federal programs and other appropriate state agencies. This office should be established with victim assistance as its primary goal, and should be charged with facilitating communication with and among local programs, state prosecuting attorney associations, police and sheriff associations, probation, crime victim compensation programs, and other specialized victims efforts which may be in place.

Only with coordinated efforts at the state and local level will victim assistance programs avoid fragmentation, increased cost of services resulting from duplication, public confusion regarding similar services and agencies, and, most importantly, the revictimization of the victims by the very agencies entrusted to aid them. The successful victim assistance program will assess, plan, train, evaluate, and work with other agencies in a spirit of cooperation, communication, and coordination.

## **VI. PROGRAM EXPERIENCE**

The concept of the Victim Assistance Program evolved from a body of research dating back to the 1930's, and continuing through the 1970's, designed to explain the reluctance of many crime victims to become witnesses. One survey conducted in a selected prosecutor's office indicated witness cooperation, or the lack thereof, to be a significant factor in case attrition. The study indicated that victims suffering physical injuries (73 percent) received no compensation, and were not even aware of the availability of state victim compensation funds. Thirty percent of all victims never got their recovered property back. Seventy-eight percent reported lost pay from their employment due to court appearances. Ninety-five percent received no compensation for their court appearances. Finally, about 42 percent were never notified of the outcome of the cases in which they were involved. The results of these studies became the foundation for the implementation of a Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) program in January 1974 to improve the criminal justice system's approach to victims and witnesses.

That program, entitled "Citizens' Initiative Project," awarded three, one million dollar grants which resulted in the development of eight prosecutor-based victim/witness programs, including: (1) Victim Ombudsman Programs, the forerunner of several law enforcement-based Victim Advocate Programs, some of which are still operational; and, (2) community-based victim services projects. Rape crisis centers and domestic violence programs were similarly funded by LEAA during this period. Programs were developed using the technical assistance provided by state and national program offices.

In 1979, seven states received LEAA funding to develop statewide victim/witness networks. Of the seven statewide programs, all remain active. Those states are California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, and New Jersey.

The majority of victim/witness assistance programs were initiated not so much to assist victims, in a humanitarian spirit, but rather to assist witnesses in an effort to gain their cooperation with the criminal justice system. Services provided included return of stolen property, courtroom orientation, case information, and other court-related services. Law enforcement programs typically provided 24-hour crisis intervention responses to the hospital, the victim's home, or the crime scene, and focused on providing victim services and enhancing the efforts of patrol and investigation.

Research evidence as to the specific success of these victim/witness programs in developing more cooperative witnesses is mixed. What the research did note was that fewer than 15 percent of crime victims become involved in the court process. By limiting services largely to victims/witnesses, many victim needs went unfulfilled. If the victim/witness projects did not totally succeed in improving the victims' "spirit of cooperation," they did succeed in making the work of the prosecutors more efficient and in accomplishing a valuable, but less easily documented, goal of helping to reduce the effects of the crime and the court experience. The separation of a victim/witness program into two distinct undertakings constitutes a more persuasive effort which has proven effective in achieving criminal justice goals and, at the same time, more humanitarian treatment of victims.

## **VII. SOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE**

### **A. Selected Bibliography**

Two "Final Reports" would be very helpful to any government agency or private organization wanting to initiate a victim assistance program.

- "Final Report"; President's Task Force on Victims of Crime; Executive Office of the President; December, 1982.

This report is available through the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) at a cost of \$7.00 (MasterCard or VISA accepted). Ask for "Crime Victims Report," SN 040-000-00461-1. The address is:

Superintendent of Documents  
U.S. Government Printing Office  
Washington, D.C. 20402  
Telephone: (202)783-3238

- "Final Report"; Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence; U.S. Department of Justice; September, 1984; NCJ #94777.

A limited supply of this report is available, for practitioners, through the:

National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS)  
Box 6000  
Rockville, Maryland 20850  
Telephone: (301)251-5500 or Toll Free (800)851-3420



Additional copies of this report are available, for the general public, through the GPO at a cost of \$4.50 (MasterCard or VISA accepted). Ask for "Family Violence Report," SN 027-000-01197-7.

The following documents and articles, some of which are referenced in the text of this Program Brief, can be consulted for more information on the organization, operation, and evaluation of victim assistance programs.

1. "Assisting Crime Victims and Witnesses"; Prescriptive Package; U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; 1977.
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8. Cronin, R.C., and B.B. Bourque, et al.; "National Evaluation Program - Phase 1 Assessment, Victim/Witness Assistance Projects"; American Institute for Research, Washington, D.C. ("Final Report," 1980, NCJ #70122; "Executive Summary," 1981, NCJ #77490; and, "Site Reports," 1979, NCJ #70123).
9. Davis, R.C., M. Tichane, and E. Connick; First Year Evaluation of the Victim Involvement Project; Victim Services Agency, New York; 1980.
10. Dubrow, F.L., and T.M. Becker; "Patterns of Victim Advocacy"; W.F. McDonald (ed.); Criminal Justice and the Victim; Sage, Beverly Hills, Calif.; 1976; NCJ #37274.
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13. Halpern, S. (ed.); Rape: Helping the Victim - A Treatment Manual; Medical Economics Books, Oradell, N.J.; 1978; NCJ #94123.

14. Holmstrom, L., and A.W. Burgess; The Victim of Rape Institutional Reactions; Wiley, New York; 1978; NCJ #46603.
15. McCombie, S.L. (ed.); The Rape Crisis Intervention Handbook: A Guide for Victim Care; Plenum Publishing Corp., New York; 1980; NCJ #69620.
16. New York State Crime Victims Board; The Crime Victim and the Criminal Justice System; Albany, N.Y.; 1982.
17. "Projects to Combat Violent Crime"; Exemplary Projects: Focus for 1982; NIJ, U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.; 1982; NCJ #80793.
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19. Schafer, S.; The Victim and His Criminal; Random House, New York; 1968; NCJ #10816.
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21. Straus, M.A., R.J. Gelles, and S. K. Steinmetz; Behind Closed Doors: Violence in American Families; Anchor Books, New York; 1980.
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Most of the preceding information is available from the cited source or, through microfiche, from:

National Criminal Justice  
 Reference Service (NCJRS)  
 P.O. Box 6000  
 Rockville, Maryland 20850  
 Telephone: (301)251-5500 or  
 Toll Free (800)851-3420

**B. Sources of Technical Assistance**

**1. Community-Based Victim Assistance Programs**

Victim/Witness Aid Program  
307 N. Dixie Highway, Room 300  
West Palm Beach, Florida 33401

Contact: Robert C. Wells, Director  
Tel: 301/837-2418

Crime Victims Center  
3801 Nicolet Avenue, S.  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55409

Contact: Dick Erickson, Director  
Tel: 612/872-0836 or 612/340-5400

**2. Prosecutor-Based Victim Assistance Programs**

Alameda County Victim/Witness Program  
1225 Fallon Street  
Oakland, California 94612

Contact: Harold Boscovich, Director  
Tel: 415/874-6565

Victim/Witness Service Bureau  
Middlesex County District Attorney's Office  
40 Thorndike Street  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02141

Contact: Amy Singer, Director  
Tel: 617/494-4604

Victim/Witness Services  
Milwaukee County District Attorney's Office  
821 W. State Street, Room 412  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53233

Contact: Jo Kolanda Beaudry, Director  
Tel: 414/278-4667 or 414/278-4659

**3. Police-Based Victim Assistance Programs**

Victim/Witness/Youth Outreach Bureau  
Evanston Police Department  
1454 Elmwood Avenue  
Evanston, Illinois 60204

Contact: Debra Sunblad, Director  
Tel: 312/866-5015

Victim Advocate Program  
Pinellas County Sheriff's Department  
250 W. Ulmerton Road  
Largo, Florida 33540

Contact: Sara S. Sopkin, Senior Victim Advocate  
Tel: 813/585-9911

**C. Federal Program Contact**

Victim Assistance Program  
Bureau of Justice Assistance  
Office of Justice Programs  
U.S. Department of Justice  
633 Indiana Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20531  
202/724-5974 or 724-5961

**VIII. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

During implementation of the program described in this Program Brief, sponsoring agencies or organizations should find it useful to track and maintain certain program information in order to provide some indication of program performance. While basic in nature, this information will not only provide an indication of program progress and performance, but will also serve as a benchmark for continued program implementation and allow for comparison with similar program efforts in other jurisdictions. Attached is a suggested reporting form listing several performance indicators which should be helpful in tracking program performance.

**PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**  
(Please type)

Program Category:           Victim Assistance

Project I.D. No.:           \_\_\_\_\_ (Limited to 10 characters)

Implementing Agency: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Report Date:               \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

Period Covered:           \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_ through \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

Performance Indicators: In order to gather basic information regarding project implementation, please provide responses to the following performance indicators.

(1) Number of staff assigned to project:

(2) Total amount of Federal/non-Federal expenditures:

(3) Types of services provided, and number of victims/witnesses served by each:

(A) Outreach/advocacy:

(B) Crisis intervention/counseling:

(C) Shelter:

(D) Counseling:

(E) Referral to human service agencies:

(F) Assistance with compensation claims, creditors, and return of property:

(G) Orientation/consultation regarding criminal justice system agencies and procedures:

(H) Escort/transportation:

(I) Restitution/mediation assistance:

(J) Reviewing case outcomes:

(K) Other:

(4) Number of criminal justice personnel and others trained:

(5) Additional comments/information: