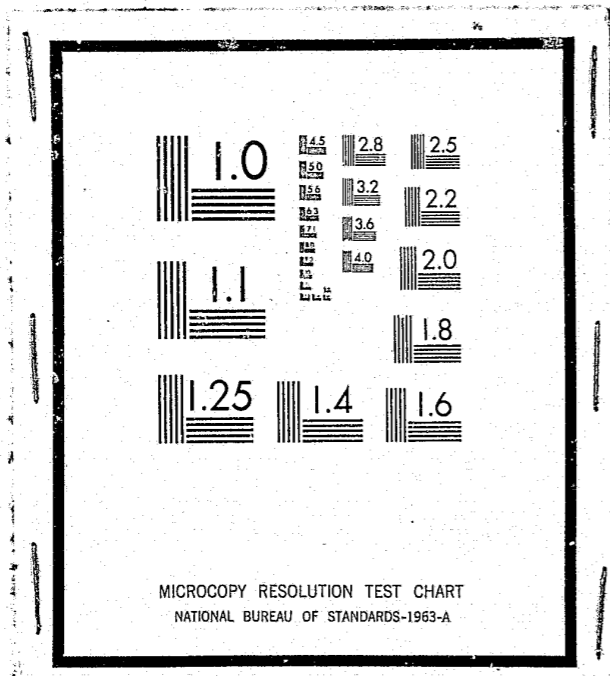


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LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION  
NATIONAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFERENCE SERVICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20531

3/31/77  
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R-76-192

## LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION POLICE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REPORT

SUBJECT: Houston-Harris County, Texas; Development of a Rape Referral and Prevention Capability within the City of Houston Police Department

REPORT NUMBER: 76-153

FOR: City of Houston; Department of Public Health; Rape Treatment, Detection, and Prevention Program

Westinghouse Justice Institute

Joanne G. Richter  
Larry R. Walton

BER: J-LEAA-003-76  
October 1976

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FOREWORD

This request for Technical Assistance was made by the City of Houston, Texas; Department of Public Health; Rape Treatment, Detection, and Prevention Program. The requested assistance was concerned with establishing a component of the proposed Houston-Harris County/Victim/Witness Assistance Project within the City of Houston Police Department.

Requesting Agency: City of Houston; Department of Public Health; Rape Treatment, Detection, and Prevention Program; Ms. Linda Cryer, Administrator

State Planning Agency: Police Services, Texas Criminal Justice Division, Darwin D. Avant

Approving Agency: LEAA Region VI (Dallas), Mr. Fred W. Gaffweg, Director, Program Development and Technical Assistance Division; Mr. N. T. Fischer, Police Specialist

1. INTRODUCTION

The Technical Assistance requested was to deal specifically with developing the Police Department component of a Victim Witness Assistance Project proposed to serve crime victims and witnesses in Houston-Harris County, Texas. Although this assistance was to deal only with the Police Department component of the project, it was necessary to review those areas of service that will be provided by the other two components of the project: The City of Houston Health Department and the Harris County District Attorney's Office. At present, the three agencies to be involved in this project, while having contact with each other regarding individual cases, function independently of each other regarding victim needs. If this project is to be successful, it will be necessary for all three components to have constant communication and exchange of information with each other.

The project is to be located in the City of Houston, which has approximately 1.6 million residents and covers a land area of 506 square miles.

The City of Houston Police Department is comprised of 2,586 sworn and 763 civilian personnel. The Department maintains its central offices in downtown Houston and five substations located throughout the City.

Deputy chiefs are in charge of the various divisions within the Department. The Consultants were advised, however, that a major Departmental reorganization was being undertaken and was in the process of being implemented.

While all members of the Police Department will have to be made aware of any Victim Witness Assistance Project set up within the Department, it was suggested that members of the Criminal Investigations Bureau, Narcotics and Vice Division, Juvenile Division, and the newly created Safety/Community Relations Unit (approximately 692 personnel) would have direct contact with the project staff member. Uniform patrol officers would be more apt to make direct referrals to the City Health Department component of the overall project as opposed to the Police Department or District Attorney's Office.

The following persons were interviewed during the onsite visit:

- Deputy Chief B. K. Johnson, Criminal Investigations Bureau.
- Captain L. D. Morrison, Homicide Division.
- Lieutenant J. A. Thomas, Planning and Research Division.

- Sergeant J. N. Flagg, Planning and Research Division, Crime Analysis Unit.
- Mr. Gary Nathanson, Criminal Statistical Analyst.
- Sergeant J. B. Mitchell, Court Liaison Officer.
- Ms. Linda Cryer, Administrator; Rape Treatment, Detection, and Prevention Program.
- Mr. James Larkin, Chief of Operations, Harris County District Attorney's Office.

During the course of study the following data were reviewed:

- Houston-Harris County Victim/Witness Assistance Project Grant Proposal.
- Houston Police Department Organization Report.
- Houston Police Department 1975 Uniform Crime Report.
- Houston Police Department 1974 Annual Report.
- Harris County Case Screening, Management, Continued Education, Victim Assistance Grant Application proposed by the Harris County Commissioner's Court.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEM

The City of Houston Health Department expressed concern that there presently are no coordinated services available within the community to meet the needs of crime victims. While social service resources are available to these victims, they are fragmented. In addition, individuals in positions from which referrals are most likely to emanate (e.g., police personnel) are unaware of the resources available within the City. There are no statistics available to demonstrate how many crime victims are using the social service agencies within the Harris County area, nor is there information on how they contacted those agencies that they did use.

Police personnel are primarily concerned, and justly so, with the apprehension of the offender; however, they are often forced to deal with a variety of social needs of the crime victims with whom they are in constant contact. Furthermore, police departments have long been the only agency within the community that serves the public on a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week basis and, therefore, receive many requests for assistance that go beyond the scope of recognized law enforcement functions. The Houston Health Department wished to take advantage of the Police Department's 24-hour availability in addition to its first-hand knowledge of and immediate accessibility to the crime victim. Through the implementation of its Rape Treatment, Detection, and Prevention Program, the Health Department has demonstrated the ability of the two agencies to work on a cooperative basis. In becoming involved with the emotional, psychological, and legal needs of rape victims, it has become evident to the Health Department that there is a need for a project in the community to deal with the needs of all crime victims. It is the belief of those formulating this program that without the Police Department component of the overall project, the program will not become a viable project within the City of Houston.

The problem addressed is the development of a component of the overall Victim Witness Assistance Project within the City of Houston Police Department capable of dealing with the needs of all crime victims as they relate to knowledge of case status, offender disposition, property returns, and Police Department procedures. This component will be required to coordinate its services with those agencies providing direct social services and also the District Attorney's Office, which will provide services to those victims and witnesses who will be actively involved in court procedures. This coordination will require, in addition to trained project personnel, training for all Police Department employees, particularly those in Communications and Patrol.

Citizens have access to the Police Department through direct calls to a specific division office, Communications, or through calls to the City Operator. The variety of ways in which a citizen is able to contact staff personnel accentuates the need for personnel training regarding any new project being undertaken by the Police Department.

As stated previously, the Houston Police Department is undergoing Departmental reorganization and is relocating throughout a number of buildings. Staff and space availability for positions created by this project were posed as problems to be addressed. An objection was expressed by the Department to allow civilian personnel access to confidential files and was viewed as a potential problem area.

### 3. ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

The Victim Witness Assistance Project proposed by the City of Houston Health Department will be comprised of three components: 1) The City of Houston Police Department, which has immediate access to the crime victim with the ability to make direct referrals and also provide followup case status information as requested by the crime victim; 2) The City of Houston Health Department, with staff and volunteers to provide direct social services and the knowledge necessary to provide referrals to the appropriate service agency as required by the crime victim; 3) The Harris County District Attorney's Office, which provides information on individual court cases, general criminal justice information, and specific information on court procedures.

At present, there is no central information and referral source for the City that has knowledge of all services provided within the community. Police personnel do not have direct knowledge of services provided throughout the community nor is training provided in this area. Many officers gain knowledge of where assistance is available through day-to-day experiences; however, they are not provided this information as part of their formal police training. As concern for the rights of the offender begin to shift to the rights and needs of the victim, it becomes more and more essential to provide the patrol officer with the working knowledge of the availability of community resources.

The Administration of the Police Department expressed agreement that concern for the victim is an area in which the Police Department has a rightful interest but some concern was expressed about amount of personnel that would be required to do an effective job dealing with the social service needs of crime victims. When the land area covered by the Department is considered in relation to the number of sworn personnel and the crime rate, it would be unrealistic to expect the Police Department to provide staffing that enabled it to deliver direct social services to the crime victim. The problem then was to coordinate whatever assistance would be available from the Police Department with the efforts being planned by the District Attorney's Office and those being developed by the Health Department.

In accordance with figures assembled by the City of Houston Police Department for the FBI's 1975 Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), the City had 347 actual or attempted homicides; 588 forcible rapes; 6,422 robberies involving a dangerous weapon or physical force; 1,567 aggravated assaults, 5,252 simple assaults; 30,968 burglaries; and 9,494 automobile thefts. These figures represent 54,368 individuals and their families who were in some way affected by the commission of a crime within the City of Houston. While not all of these victims may have required the direct services of a Victim Witness Assistance Project, it is safe to assume the majority would view the criminal justice process more positively if they had been provided information about the procedures that would be followed and what to expect in each of their cases.



Information is the key to many of the services that victims need. Victims want to know whether an assailant has been caught, whether or not he is out on bond, and when their possessions held as evidence will be returned. Victims may never hear that their cases are considered closed; victims may be called to identify a suspect and never be called to court if plea-bargaining is used. These situations frequently cause additional stress, loss of public confidence in the criminal justice system, and failure to follow through with prosecution resulting in dismissed or adjourned cases. This greatly inhibits the ability of the community to offer assistance to victims, as well as being able to protect itself through treatment of the offender. Thus, the response of the legal machinery itself creates circumstances mitigating against victim cooperation in reporting the crime, following through until courtroom resolution and in obtaining more convictions. A program that would provide the type of information and services needed by victims and their families that would enable them to feel more comfortable and be more willing to utilize criminal justice services would help to ensure their cooperation. Both law enforcement agencies and District Attorney's Offices recognize that victim-witness cooperation is a very positive side effect of any Victim Witness Assistance Project.

The UCR figures, while illustrating the impact of crime upon the community, also bring into perspective the number of victims that the Victim Liaison Officer might be forced to assist if the appropriate media coverage is provided this new program. It is obvious that one officer, even with the assistance of a secretary or a police aide, could not handle a workload consisting of this number of clients.

It is proposed that the Health Department provide a 24-hour emergency line (Victim Assistance Line [VAL]) for crime victims. Through this line, victims can obtain assistance in arranging transportation to emergency medical facilities, be provided with a volunteer companion/advocate during the period immediately following the crime, receive information about the existing community services, and be assured of adequate service delivery through followup procedures. In addition, the victim may be referred to the District Attorney's Office for court proceedings information, or to the Police Department for case status information, property returns, offender disposition, and so on.

The Houston Police Department is to provide referrals to the Health Department's Information and Assistance Line; provide staffing to answer requests for information on police procedures, property returns, case status, and offender dispositions; and take any additional information the crime victim or witness may have regarding his/her case. Referrals to the District Attorney's Office are also to be made as indicated. It was planned initially to have two civilian employees located with the Police Department to provide these services; however, as stated in Section 2, the accessibility to files within the Department would be restricted for civilian employees. Referrals to the Police Department component,

which will be referred to as the Victim Liaison Officer (VLO), would be received from the Health Department's Victim Assistance Line, the District Attorney's Office, the City Operator, other departments within the Police Department itself, and from the Road Patrol Divisions. In turn, the VLO, after providing requested information, can make additional referrals to the Victim Assistance Line and the District Attorney's Office.

The District Attorney's Office already requested funding to establish its component of the overall Victim Witness Assistance Project. As stated in its grant request, personnel will provide information, assistance, and encouragement to victims and witnesses when requested or necessary. Personnel will personally contact all victim-witnesses on initial cases or when requested by the prosecutors; will provide information on general court procedures; and will ensure that victim-witnesses have transportation, job excuses, expense money, and the like. Where indicated, the personnel will refer victims to the Victim Assistance Line and to the VLO as necessary (see Figure 3-1).

Although it is uniformly agreed that the Houston Police Department is an integral part of this overall project, the exact structuring of its component has posed a number of questions. A major factor is that while the concept of Victim Advocacy is becoming a moving force throughout the United States, no police agency within the State of Texas has implemented a Victim Assistance Program similar to the one being proposed for the City of Houston.

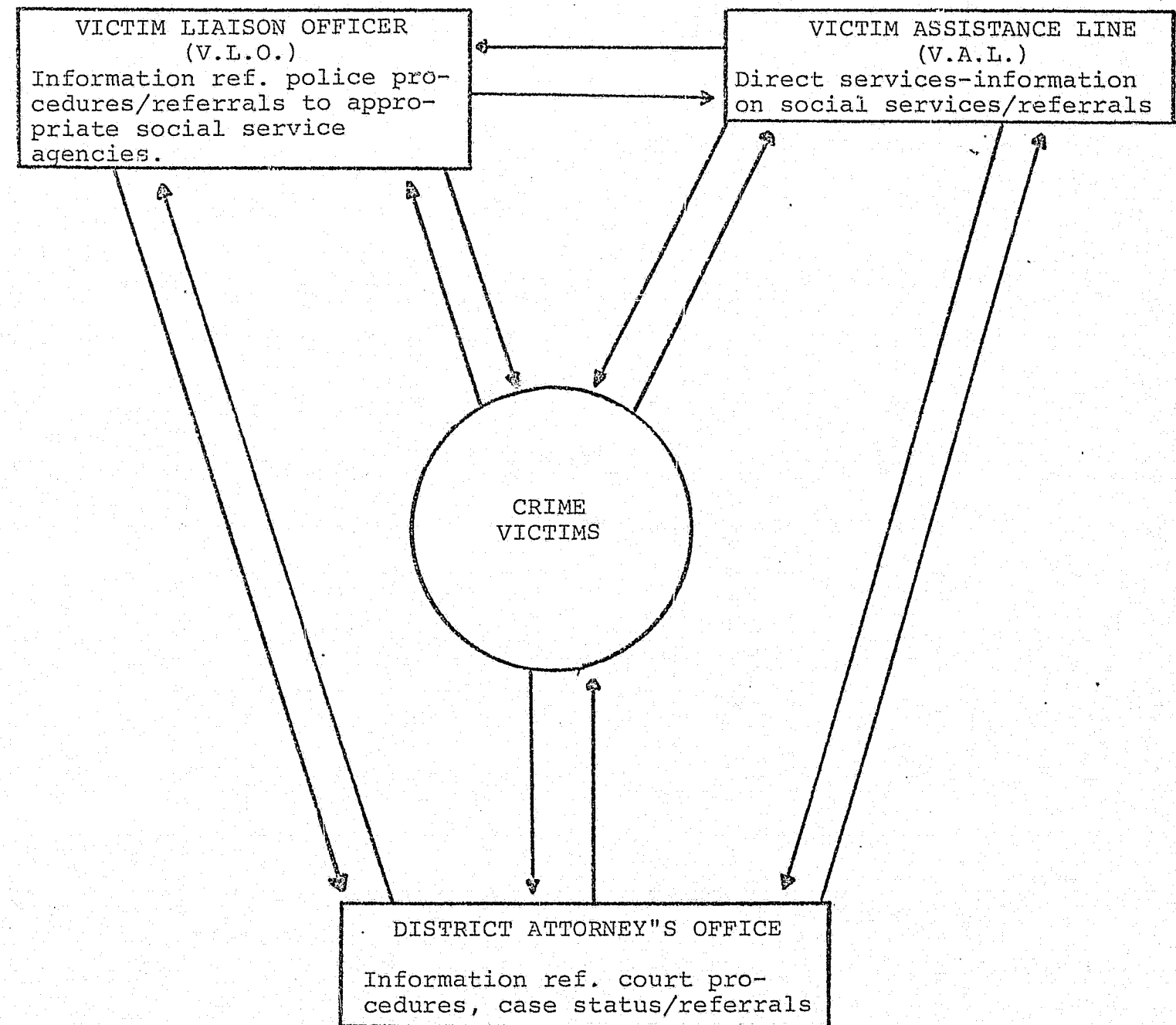


Figure 3-1. Crime Victim Referral Procedure

#### 4. FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on a review of the overall Victim Witness Assistance Project and the structure and staffing capabilities of the Police Department, the Consultant arrived at the following recommendations and implementation procedure for each facet of the Victim Witness Assistance Project as it pertains to the Police Department, as well as suggestions regarding the City Health Department's role as it relates to the workings of the Victim Liaison Officer's component of the project. A recommended implementation timetable is attached as Appendix A.

- A sworn police officer, preferably one with experience in the Criminal Investigations Bureau, should be assigned as the Victim Liaison Officer (VLO).
  - Discussions with Department personnel raised objections to civilian personnel having access to confidential files. They believed that a sworn police officer serving as the VLO would maintain a more responsible position. Furthermore, an individual with experience in the Criminal Investigations Bureau (CIB) will know its workings and procedures and will not (as might be the case with civilian personnel) have to prove himself worthy of the confidence required from the detectives with whom he is working.
- The VLO should be located within the CIB, specifically, the Homicide or Robbery Division.
  - In speaking with personnel of the Planning and Research Division, it was learned that the Department's record-keeping is approximately one month behind. If the VLO was located in the CIB, he would have direct access to the detectives and their files, and be able to obtain information on case status and offender disposition. Moreover, it is assumed that the majority of crime victims will be connected with these two Divisions.

- Direct supervision of the VLO will be required to ensure that only requests for assistance by crime victims are being handled by this staff position.

- The VLO should follow the normal chain of command with overall supervision by the Deputy Chief of the CIB. Since a personnel shortage in the Department indicated, it possible that duties other than those relating directly to crime victims could be assigned to the VLO. This probability should be carefully supervised since it would be detrimental to the overall project.

- The duties of the VLO should consist of the following:

- Answer requests for information on Police Department procedures.
  - Provide information on case status and offender disposition for individual crime victims.
  - Initiate property returns where applicable.
  - Inform crime victims when their cases have been closed by the Police Department and an explanation why.
  - Take additional information on open cases from victims or witnesses to be provided to the appropriate detective if the victim has had trouble locating the detective.
  - Make referrals to appropriate social service agency or to the Victim Assistance Line for direct victim services.
  - Make referrals to the District Attorney's Office for court case status and court procedures information.

- Followup with crime victims to determine that requests for assistance were provided by agencies to which victims were referred.
  - Provide patrol officer with information on outcome of crime victim situation that the officer referred to VLO staff.
  - Provide inservice training to all Police personnel regarding workings of the VLO.
  - To effectively carry out all of these assignments, it will be necessary to provide the VLO assistance from a secretary or police aide.
- A General Order should be issued by the Chief of Police stating his support of the overall Victim Witness Assistance Project and advising all personnel of the formation of the VLO position.
    - When any new project is undertaken by a Police department, it is essential that all personnel are aware that the project is one which has the backing and support of the Chief of Police and that he will work to ensure its success and acceptance by the community and Department personnel
  - The VLO should hold training sessions at each of the Patrol Division briefings to ensure that each uniformed officer has a working knowledge of the program.
    - The patrolman is an integral part of the Victim Witness Assistance Project. He has the initial contact with the crime victim and has the opportunity to elicit a positive or negative response towards the entire Criminal Justice System. Therefore, patrolmen must be aware of the objectives and procedures of the VLO and also the Victim Assistance Line.

The patrolman should be advised that when a situation requires immediate crime victim assistance, the officer may contact the Victim Assistance Line through Communications.

- Training sessions should also be held for the sworn and civilian personnel working in Communications to ensure direct referrals to the VLO.
  - While all Department personnel must be aware of the function of the VLO, the Communications personnel are in a position to ensure the success or failure of this program since the majority of incoming calls go through Communications. The personnel answering these calls must be aware of the program, the scope of the program's operations, and what calls are appropriate for referral. For this reason, it is essential that the VLO be available for briefing sessions with all Communications personnel. Road Patrol officers may also contact Communications for crime victims assistance via radio.
- A memo must be sent to all city operators who handle Police calls, advising them of the VLO position.
  - Although many calls are dialed directly to the Police Department, a number of citizens contact the Department through the city operator for nonemergency matters. Because of this, it will be necessary to advise all city operators of the Victim Witness Assistance Project and its Police component. A memo from the Office of the Chief of Police via the Mayor would be appropriate.
- Victim Liaison Officer and Victim Assistance Line telephone numbers must be made available to all Police Department personnel.
  - Decals with both the Victim Liaison Officer and Victim Assistance Line numbers should be printed and made available to every member of the Police Department, and should be placed in each Patrol vehicle. The decals could also be made available throughout the community to the various social service agencies.

- o An important side effect of this program is the potential for perpetuating a positive police image within the community. To assure positive response, it is necessary for the VLO to provide acknowledgment of all requests for assistance.

- Through use of a secretary or police aide, form letters can be forwarded to each victim notifying them when their case has been closed and the reason why. Followup calls can be made to determine if necessary assistance was received.

- o The VLO should record the source and type of all referrals received and made.

- By keeping a record of referral sources, the following determinations can be made: 1) What areas of the Department may need further program explanation, 2) Whether or not further program publicity is required in the community, 3) What agency or individual should be the followup contact to determine if all necessary assistance was received.

Although the following recommendations deal specifically with the City Health Department, they least indirectly concern the operations of the VLO.

- o Agency services provided within the City of Houston need to be reviewed as to availability and services provided.

- Before an effective Victim Assistance Line can be established, available community services must be identified. After a survey of these agencies has been completed, a booklet should be compiled that lists the agencies alphabetically, as well as by service category (i.e., housing, food, transportation). These booklets would be made available to Victim Witness Assistance personnel in all three project components: Health Department, Police Department, and District Attorney's Office.

- o If onscene assistance is to be provided by Health Department volunteers, training must be provided in Crisis Intervention techniques.



- With the Victim Assistance Line being made available on a 24-hour basis staffed by volunteers providing onscene assistance in addition to information and referrals, then knowledge of crisis intervention techniques becomes imperative. It should also be noted here that volunteers should not respond to calls for onscene emergency assistance alone or without notifying other workers of their destination. It is recommended that the Police Department be advised of the situation requiring assistance if so warranted.
- The same volunteers should consistently respond to requests for assistance in a particular area of the city.
  - By having volunteers respond to requests for assistance in a particular area, they will become known to the police personnel in that area. This will help to foster a positive working relationship and a team concept.
- An informational pamphlet describing all three components of the Victim Witness Assistance Project should be developed and distributed throughout the community by the City Health Department.
  - These pamphlets can be made available to the three components of the project for distribution in addition to all the social service agencies dealing with the general public and crime victims in particular.
- The project should initially concern itself only with victims of violent crime.
  - After the Consultant reviewed the Part I Crimes reported within the City of Houston during 1975, it became apparent that with the staffing available it would be impossible to provide any meaningful service to such a large number of crime victims. For this reason, the Victim Assistance Project should initially concern itself only with the victims of violent crime. Dade County, Florida,

structured its Victim Advocate Program in this manner; and after tow years of operation, it has proven to be highly successful.



APPENDIX A  
Program Implementation Recommendations  
and Timetable

A. Phase I - One (1) month

1. Select staff and volunteers by each of the project components.
2. Develop a Community Services Resource booklet -- In developing this booklet, it is suggested that support and assistance be elicited from such organizations as the Junior League or the League of Women Voters who will be familiar with private sources of assistance within the community in addition to the traditional agencies.

B. Phase II - Two (2) months

1. Program Development

- a. Promulgate program operating procedures and objectives -- Issue General Order.
- b. Develop filing system and referral forms to ensure adequate followup.

2. Training

- a. Develop training sessions for all Police and volunteer personnel.
- b. Disseminate program information to all appropriate individuals (e.g., city operators).

3. Printed Materials

- a. Print decals.
- b. Develop and print project brochures.

C. Phase III - One (1) month

1. Establish liaison with community resources.
2. Distribute decals and project brochures.
3. Project field tests.
4. Project preevaluation and revise procedures.

D. Phase IV - Eight (8) months

1. Full Program Operation -- At the outset of full program implementation, a press conference should be called by the Chief of Police

and representatives of the Health Department and District Attorney's Office. During this press conference, the program should be outlined and the primary project personnel should be introduced. Media coverage will be a vital asset to this project and full cooperation should be afforded the press throughout the entire grant period.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMETABLE

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
PHASE I -- one month												
Staffing	■											
Community Services Booklet	■											
PHASE II -- two months												
Program Development		■	■									
Training		■	■									
Printing		■	■									
PHASE III -- one month												
Establishment of liaison with resources				■								
Distribution of decals and brochures				■								
Project field tests				■								
Preevaluation and procedural revisions				■								
PHASE IV -- eight months												
Full Program operation					■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

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