The
VICTIM'S INFORMER
TEXAS CRIME VICTIM CLEARINGHOUSE
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A Time to Reflect: Organizational Trauma and Healing

Angie McCown, Director of Victim Services Division

Recently the University of Texas, School of Social Work invited Pat Vivian to present on the book she co-authored with Shana Hormann, Organizational Trauma and Healing. The book is designed to strengthen organizations that work with traumatized populations such as crime victim survivors. Several TDCJ Victim Services staff attended and found the information both useful and interesting. I ordered the book and began reading it because it struck a chord with me that I have visited and re-visited throughout my career in victim services.

Upon graduating from the University of Texas in Austin, I took a marketing position in the commercial furniture and interior design industry. Although it was a competitive industry, there was a great deal of mutual respect and camaraderie within the company I worked for and between our vendors, our clients, and our competitors. Ten years later, I returned to college to complete my Masters degree in Marriage and Family Therapy. I worked as a Family Therapist for a few years and then moved to Austin to accept a position in victim services. Almost immediately I noticed that some of my co-workers seemed extremely stressed, even beyond what I would expect from a position that assists victims and survivors of crimes. I began to notice what I referred to as a parallel process that was occurring between victim services professionals and the victim survivors they served. Victim services professionals were exhibiting reactions that are common for victim survivors who have been traumatized. There also seemed to be a significant degree of discord between victim services professionals and between entire agencies. There seemed to be very little time for collaboration and dialogue because victim services professionals and agencies were in a perceived constant state of crisis. It was hard for me to comprehend how the marketing profession I had come from had been able to embrace mutual respect and camaraderie, while those in the helping profession providing services to victims of crime seemed to be struggling with this.

In the past ten years, I think many of us have gained an increased awareness of how working with victim survivors of crime and trauma can impact the individual victim services professional. Yet I feel that we as a field have only begun to understand the full impact of this

work on individuals and agencies. I have often said that providing services to crime victim survivors is the most rewarding and the most painful work I have ever done. Although there has been improvement in collaboration and dialogue among victim services professionals and agencies, there is still work to be done and relationships to be mended. Victim survivors deserve to have competent compassionate victim services professionals working together to meet their needs. We owe it to the victim survivors, to ourselves, and to our agencies to create a space where we can begin to have conversations about how to heal traumatized systems and how to support one another in our work.

The
VICTIM'S INFORMER

Providing Effective Services to Crime Victims with Disabilities

By Iracema Scannapieco Mastroleo, Disability Services Education Manager with SafePlace

Individuals with disabilities are not immune to crime. In fact, the victimization rate for people with disabilities is at least twice the rate for the general population. According to some researchers, many people with disabilities experience victimization by multiple perpetrators throughout their lifetime. Some factors that increase the risk of abuse are unequal balance of power in their relationships, isolation, socialization of institutionalized individuals to be compliant with staff, and perceived lack of credibility by crime responders.

Despite these high rates of victimization, crimes against people with disabilities are under reported and people with disabilities are typically underserved by victim services agencies. These abuse survivors deserve accessible services in their quest for justice, safety, and healing.

In Texas, many people with disabilities live in congregated settings, such as group homes, nursing homes, or institutions, where there is a high risk for abuse. Yet these crimes are usually not investigated by law enforcement and people with disabilities who experience victimization are often not referred to victim services programs. In addition, when crime victims with disabilities do reach out to programs for help, they are likely to encounter barriers to services.

Victim services agencies must ask:

- Is your agency serving crime victims with disabilities?
- If yes, how do you know, especially given that disabilities may be hidden?
- Is it possible your agency sees so few people with disabilities because they either do not know about your services, fear they are not welcome, or believe the facilities are inaccessible?
- How does your agency know if buildings and services are accessible?

The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was designed to ensure that people with disabilities are not discriminated against in employment, government services, public accommodations, transportation, and telecommunications. The ADA Title II applies to state and local governments, requiring agencies to provide equal opportunity to individuals with disabilities in all programs, services, and activities through reasonable modifications. We also use the word accessible, meaning "easy to approach, enter, operate, participate in, and use safely and with dignity by a person with a disability" (Ward & Associates, 1994).

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Remember that TDCJ VSD offers email notifications in addition to letter notifications! Email allows for immediate notification via computer, mobile device, or wherever internet access is available. Those already registered with the confidential Victim Notification System (VNS) should have received a letter with instructions on how to take advantage of this new option.

Agencies are encouraged to conduct an internal assessment of their buildings, policies, and services to evaluate whether people with disabilities can access those.

Some assessment questions are:

• Is it possible for an individual using mobility devices to park their vehicle, enter through the door, move easily in hallways, and use the bathroom?

• Are the building signs and elevator buttons in Braille?

• Do you have contracts with agencies that can provide qualified American Sign Language interpreters?

• What barriers and strengths does your agency have in providing services to individuals with a variety of disabilities?

• How many crime victims with disabilities is your agency currently serving? Do they ask for modifications? If so, how open is your agency to providing reasonable modifications to ensure service accessibility?

Begin outreach to people with disabilities by first learning more about how many people with disabilities live in your service area, including the most common types of disabilities, age groups, presence of group homes and institutions, and available disability services. To begin to capture this data, you can research census information or conduct a needs assessment survey with individuals with disabilities, parents, and disability service professionals. A survey may include questions relating to their perceptions about your agency accessibility, knowledge about core services that your agency provides, and space for suggestions about improving outreach, accessibility, and response. Your agency can then use information from the needs assessment survey to improve services.

You can also invite people with disabilities to be part of your coordinated community task force or an agency advisory committee that addresses issues related to crime prevention and response. When accessible services are promoted by your agency through community outreach and education, more individuals with disabilities will begin to seek assistance.

In providing accessible services to crime victims with disabilities, what follows are some examples of basic suggestions for disability etiquette and accessibility.

Make it a standard practice to inform all new service recipients that your agency is committed to providing accessible services to people with disabilities and that reasonable modifications can be requested. If an individual self-discloses a disability, ask the person directly what assistance, if any, will be the most helpful. Wait to provide assistance until the person has told you how you can help. If your offer is declined, accept it. The person with the disability is the expert about what she/he can or cannot do.

Be respectful by not touching the person's wheelchair, cane, or other assistive equipment without permission. These devices are part of an individual's personal space. Know where to get replacement devices if these items need to be collected as part of the crime evidence. Individuals who are unable to communicate verbally will sometimes use assistive technology such as a communication board, with picture icons to represent words or an electronic speech generating device. Be open to various types of communication methods. Service animals are used to guide people who are blind, retrieve items for individuals with mobility impairments, predict seizures, and many other tasks. Check with its owner if the animal has any needs and have a designated relief area for them. Victim services professionals who provide support during court proceedings can advocate with court personnel to provide accessibility-related information on their website and signs in key locations, such as who to contact for accessibility requests. Prosecutors' offices can also coordinate accommodations with court personnel prior to the victim's appearance date.

Courtroom accommodations may include the following:

• If the witness stand is not wheelchair accessible, you may wish to ask that jurors leave the courtroom while a crime victim using a wheelchair finds an alternate position. This way jurors focus on testimony, not inaccessibility.

• Deaf crime victims may have preferences about lighting and the positioning of sign language interpreters out of the line of sight of a defendant who knows sign language.

• Take time to prepare a crime victim with a cognitive disability to testify by visiting the courtroom, sitting in the witness stand, and using a microphone.

• Ask for breaks for a crime victim with mental illness symptoms or extra time for a person with atypical speech who uses an assistive device.

When working with crime victims with physical disabilities:

• Inform the person of the agency's accessibility features. For example, the location of accessible parking, bathrooms, and entrances.

• Be aware that it may take longer for the person to answer the phone or the door at their home.

• The person may need assistance finding personal care services, if the alleged abuser provided that function.

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CONGRATULATIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE TEXAS ASSOCATION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

TAASA
Texas Association Against Sexual Assault

US JUSTICE DEPARTMENT HONORS TEXAS ASSOCIATION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

President Reagan proclaimed the first Victims' Rights Week in 1981, calling for renewed emphasis on, and sensitivity to, the rights of victims.

This year the Department of Justice recognized the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA) for outstanding advocacy and innovative programming on behalf of sexual assault victims. Attorney General Eric Holder presented the program with an award during the National Crime Victims' Rights Week awards ceremony on Wednesday, April 24, 2013 in Washington, D.C.

"These committed individuals are being honored for their dedication to assisting and supporting victims of crime all across the country," said Attorney General Eric Holder. "Their actions inspire all Americans, to do what we can, each in our own way, to help lessen the physical, emotional and, financial impacts of crime on people in our communities."

TAASA received the Ronald Wilson Reagan Public Policy Award for supporting legislation favorable to victims and advocates, which increased funding for sexual assault programs at both the federal and state levels.

In 2007, TAASA advocated to fund sexual assault services through a $5 customer fee at strip clubs that permit the sale or consumption of alcohol. The first $25 million raised over a two-year period was directed toward sexual assault services.

In 2011, the Texas Supreme Court upheld the $5 fee and the U.S. Supreme Court declined to challenge the decision. TAASA's bold action in pushing this public policy laid the groundwork for other states and advanced Texas closer to the goal of a sustainable source of funding for rape crisis centers and support for sexual assault survivors in their recovery.

In addition to TAASA, Attorney General Holder recognized 12 other individuals and organizations for their outstanding efforts on behalf of crime victims. Descriptive narratives and videos of the contributions of all recipients are available at the Office for Victims of Crime's gallery: ovcncvrw.ncjrs.gov/Awards/AwardGallery/gallerysearch.html.

VICTIM SERVICES DIVISION WISHES ALL THE BEST TO GENE STEWART AND KRISTI HEIMAN

Gene Stewart recently retired from public service as Assistant Deputy Director of the Programs Section. Kristi Heiman, who provided training to victim assistance coordinators in the Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse, has accepted a job with TDCJ's Community Justice Assistance Division, where she will develop curriculum and training programs.

THE VICTIM IMPACT PANEL

A CRY FROM THE PRESENCE

by Rachel H. Valadez

As clichés go, "You never expect it to happen to you," and, "the young are suppose to bury the old."

One day I felt a deep burden in my soul all morning that made me want to cry. After dropping off my boys at school, I went to work feeling drained and tired. I cried several times throughout the day, not knowing why. I checked on the boys and my husband, who is a paramedic. Everyone was accounted for, but the sense of loss and crying just would not go away. All I could do was pray and ask the Lord to hold me and give me strength for whatever I would need to endure.

To this day I don't like hearing a knock on the door. I make sure our doorbell is always working. The doorbell was not working the night the police came to my house. I heard the knocks. I assumed it was my son, Mikey, who had gone to pick up his first paycheck from work and was running late getting home. Unfortunately, it was not Mikey.

I opened the door and asked the police officers if I could help them. They proceeded to ask me if I was Mikey's mother, his age, and his full name. After answering their questions, I heard the following words, "We regret to inform you that your son has been murdered."

You wish that it was a nightmare or your imagination. In my state of denial, I asked what hospital I needed to go to so I could be with him, and was he seriously injured? They repeated to me what I did not want to accept. They gave me a piece of paper with the number to the morgue. I felt angry. Was I supposed to go there with my other children in tow? That day —February 17, 1995—was a day that forever changed me, my family, and so many others. That afternoon Mikey boarded a city transit bus and had sat down by the back exit door. Another young man he recognized also boarded the bus and went to the back. The young man was being chased by a known gang member and that gang member's girlfriend, who had previously dated the young man.

The gang member's girlfriend managed to stop the bus before it drove off, except the girl didn't get on. As she stood in the doorway, the gang member raced toward the bus.

The young man sitting in the back with Mikey saw what was happening and decided to ring the bell to open the back door. As the gang member and his girlfriend boarded, the young man dashed out the back door. According to the witnesses on the bus, Mikey got up to yell and warn the young man that the gang member coming towards the back had a gun. Mikey got scared and also jumped out the back door. The gang member shot at both of them. Mikey was shot in the back and fell to the street. The other young man kept running and was able to escape.

The shooter jumped into a getaway car that had come up to the back of the bus. Before the getaway car sped off, the gang members stopped just long enough to shoot Mikey again as he lay in the street. The bus driver managed to detain the girlfriend, drive to the next block, and call dispatch.

I learned that Mikey had often ministered to his peers and other young men, some of whom were in gangs, when he would play basketball at recreation centers. The morning after his death, many pastors called to tell me what Mikey had been doing. I had no idea. He didn't like to lose, and in winning, all he asked was that these guys join him at church. The amazing part is they would show up! He loved basketball, and I guess this was his way of preaching. At his memorial, a large group of young people, mainly young men, formed a choir and sang for him. I later asked how they knew him, and their stories were all the same. He would make bets before a basketball game. If they lost, they were to meet him at church. I also discovered that he would help other boys by bringing them donated pairs of shoes, pants, and shirts. You teach your kids to be kind, and to give to others, but you never expect them to be taken from you.

After much praying, a year later, witnesses finally began coming forward to assist in the investigation, and the suspect and his accomplice were arrested. The shooter was sentenced to 99 years.

The Bexar County District Attorney's Office Victim Assistance Division did a great job guiding our family through the court system. I became a member of Parents of Murdered Children and I was also introduced to officers of the Bexar County Juvenile Probation Department. They asked me to be part of a Victim Impact Panel and speak to a group of juvenile offenders. I had volunteered and worked with children, but this type of request was totally new to me. I was not sure what I could say to help these kids, but I remembered what some of the pastors had told me about Mikey: "he had no fear, and only set his site on his goal, which was to reach out to the young

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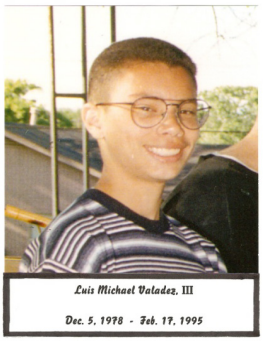
men on the basketball courts, come rain or shine!" I prayed, but it wasn't hard to decide that this is something I had to do. After all, I brought up my kids to help others. I felt I was honoring Mikey's legacy by working with juvenile offenders.

My biggest concern when preparing for the Victim Impact Panel was how to say what I needed to say, without offending anyone, and still have a positive outcome. Fortunately, I was allowed to observe a Victim Impact Panel before serving as a panelist. I was also provided an outline which suggested I tell the juveniles in attendance about the kind of person Mikey was. Victims are allowed to show pictures of their loved ones during the panels. Being a freelance photographer, I decided to create a poster to help me tell the story of Mikey's life. Even today, as I carry the posters from panel to panel, I feel as though he walks with me in and out of the juvenile centers and prisons. It puts a face to the victim and helps put his life into perspective.

I have now been serving on Victim Impact Panels since 1996. I realize that it has helped me to heal my broken heart, to make moving forward easier. I will never forget Mikey, nor ever stop thinking of him. When speaking on Victim Impact Panels a lot of my emotions come out when I least expect them. I have to stay focused on my purpose for being there. That's not to say one cannot cry or express feelings of anger, sadness, loneliness, loss, or even love. It is beneficial for the audience to see these feelings because it helps them to understand what a victim feels every day, especially on birthdays and holidays. Each time I speak on victim impact panels, I get more comfortable expressing my feelings. I felt I could relate to other parents present with the juveniles. I would start out by saying that I am a mother of six kids, married, and I work full-time. Later I talk about what happened when we got the news of Mikey's death, and about how that affected my marriage, my children, other family members, work, school, teachers, friends, and neighbors. These tragedies can have a domino effect on our daily lives. I talk about the fact that Mikey's friends still call me to see how I am doing. I explain to the juveniles that they have a chance to make good choices, set goals, and appreciate their families and loved ones. I encourage them to redirect their lives. I make a point to speak to the fathers about being there for their children and being positive role models. Everyone needs each other in one way or another.

Later I was asked to speak to adult offenders and invited to speak at a conference held by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Victim Services Division. This eventually led to my role as a speaker for a program called 'Bridges to Life,' which has also been extremely rewarding. Bridges to Life asks victims to speak to prison inmates. I address the same issues I do when speaking with juveniles. I remind them that they are getting a second chance to make a life for themselves. If they are being released to parole or mandatory supervision, I ask them to think of me and other victims. I won't ever get to see my son again. When there are holidays and birthdays, I ask them to think of me. On those days, I will be at the cemetery. They have a chance to celebrate life! "Do not commit a new crime," I say, "Do not come back! I do not want to see you again! If I do, it only means there is another victim."

The whole program is about preventing recidivism. How is that possible? We tell them what victims go through. Most are surprised to learn that victims' rights are still a relatively new concept in the criminal justice system. They come to realize what a victim goes through and will continue to go through. Victims often feel that



picture on Memorial Headstone

the sentence a prisoner has received is nothing compared to the sentence they and their families must live with. The program is about victims reaching out to offenders, who more often than not would create more victims. If we can reach just one offender, that is one less victim. I do not want another family to go through what my family went through.

If anyone is considering becoming a speaker on a Victim Impact Panel, I will tell you that it can be very rewarding. It gives you the opportunity to keep the memory of your loved one alive. If you are a victim, you have the chance to speak to others about your experience and how it affected your life, and ask offenders to think about the choices they make and how those choices will affect others. It can open many windows into your soul that you never knew were there. The more victims speak out, the stronger our voice is heard by those who have no idea what a victim and their families go through. Sometimes even people working for the judicial system were surprised to learn about the many ways that victims' families suffer.

For additional information about Bridges to Life, visit www.bridgestolife.org. Other resources of interest include the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's Victim Services Division (www.tdcj.texas.gov/divisions/vs), the National Center for Victims of Crime (victimsofcrime.org), and Parents of Murdered Children (www.pomc.org).

Victim Status and Parole Decisions

from the Board of Pardons and Paroles

This newsletter previously carried several articles from former Board Member Jackie DeNoyelles about victim interaction with the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles in its decision-making role. We hope to revive these regular contibutions from the Board. In this article the Board recaps information from former board member Jackie DeNoyelles' articles. David Gutierrez is a Board Memeber and is the liaison with the Victim Services Division.

Why does the Parole Board even consider parole for some offenders?
Parole eligibility is determined by statute, based on the sentence and the date of the crime. Eligibility dates are calculated based on when an offender is incarcerated. In some cases, the parole eligibility date may change if the offender earns good conduct time. Offenders receiving the death penalty or life without parole are never eligible, but all other offenders potentially become eligible.

If parole is denied, most offenders—by statute—receive an annual review. The "next review" is scheduled automatically for the same month in the next year. Those serving a sentence for a violent offense listed in Section 508.149(a) of the Texas Government Code are subject to up to a five-year set off.

Why would parole be granted?
Decisions to grant or deny parole are made after careful consideration of all information available to the voting members. The Board is committed to protecting the public but also to a fair, individual assessment of each offender.

In cases where an offender is nearing discharge, the Board may vote to require the offender to complete a program of treatment and rehabilitation prior to release. The Board also may want to provide parole supervision as a means for a structured reintegration into society. Board members view treatment programs and supervised reentry as preferable for public safety.

If parole is granted, can safeguards be required?
Pursuant to Section 508.191, Government Code, the Board is required to impose a condition prohibiting the offender from contacting the victim. In addition to standard parole supervision conditions, the Board may impose "special conditions." Victims may also request the Board consider imposing special conditions, including prohibiting the offender from entering a Texas county or counties, requiring electronic monitoring, maximum supervision, or other terms. The Board will consider all such requests.

How may victims participate in this process?
Pursuant to Section 508.153, Government Code, crime victims have the right to appear in person before the parole panel considering the offender for release on parole or mandatory supervision. The victim may meet with the parole panel's lead voter in person (or speak by phone) to discuss the offense, the offender, and the effect of the offense on the victim. If there are multiple victims, one person may represent all or, at the discretion of the lead voter, additional victims also may speak. Interviews are conducted with the lead voter at the designated Board office. The offender is never present.

Victim statements are confidential, and a summary for voter reference will go in the file.

A victim, by statute, is a victim of sexual assault, kidnapping, aggravated robbery, felony stalking, or a person who has suffered bodily injury or death from criminal conduct, the guardian of a victim, or a close relative of a deceased victim. Close relative includes a spouse, parent, adult sibling or child, or the nearest relative by blood if previously listed relatives are deceased or incapacitated (Section 508.117, Government Code).

Any victim wishing to address the Board prior to an offender's parole vote should register with TDCJ Victim Services Division, which provides the Board with the request. The lead voter will arrange the interview with the victim.

Additional information about factors the Board considers, decision reasons, and other topics is available on the Board of Pardons and Parole website: www.tdcj.texas.gov/bpp.

C.O.P.S. Kids Camp Offers Insight to Survivors and Counselors Alike

by Jennie Barr
Office of the Attorney General

As a first-time counselor at COPS Kids Camp, I optimistically anticipated a Boy Scout type setting. "Roughing it," I imagined. To my pleasant surprise, the campground was a sprawling expanse of grassy knolls with cabins and outbuildings set on a picturesque lake out of a postcard, something akin to "On Golden Pond." While beautiful, it paled in comparison to the children and their parent/family member attendees and the purpose for which they were attending. Each of the 330 plus children had lost a law enforcement mom or dad in the line of duty. Many, I learned, had not even been born or were too young to have concrete memories so they faced the challenge of trying to 'remember' or learn about their parent through stories, pictures, and their own imagination. Others were teenagers who may have had to 'step up' to help the family after their parent's death.

Parents are there to spend time, both in quality and quantity, with their children doing fun, normal things that all kids do (or should have the opportunity to do): swimming in the lake, boating, archery, crafts, challenge climbs, and so much more. The importance of experiencing shared family fun is strongly emphasized since that is as much a part of life as having to learn to grieve and move forward without a cherished loved one.

Another amazing gift at camp is the chance for all these children to be around other children who 'get me.' They do not have to hide what happened, pretend everything is OK, or face the blank, uncomfortable looks and awkward words from others who have good intentions but are unable to understand their situation. This is where the counselors at COPS Kids Camp become important. Each child age group had its own dedicated counselor who provides age-appropriate grief groups, encouragement, hugs, and laughter.

Parents are grouped according to the time passed since their spouse was killed, ensuring those in each group are roughly experiencing similar challenges and successes. In the adult groups I facilitated, one of the most impressive elements was the 'mentors' that develop within each group who can provided ideas, encouragement, and hope (e.g., someone who can say, "I've faced that, and here's how I was able to manage").

For parents and caregivers, meeting and seeing those who are further along the path and are doing OK, sometimes even doing very well, provides a glimpse into a future that is possible, even if they are not able to see it at present. Grieving, tears, and sadness are gently encouraged and comforted. Silence and alone time is allowed and supported. Laughter is given a green light—"it's OK to laugh, your spouse would enjoy seeing you smile"—so those who were ready may feel happy again, guilt free.

This was a true summer camp for parents and kids with child-friendly, respectful staff and counselors, and clear guidelines for behavior and fun. The best part of all was watching parents and children relax and enjoy being together as they remembered and honored their fallen loved one.

Retreats, camps, and wilderness experiences are available for various survivor groups from June through October 2013. For more details on dates and registration please visit www.nationalcops.org.

Untitled I
by Vickie Short

Two policemen came to the house tonight,
They told us you were gone.
Your father and I can't believe they're right,
Please tell us that they're wrong.

The day had started out so nice
With laughter, joy, and mirth.
Oh, if we had only known...
It would be your last on earth.

The pictures that you took that night
Were beautiful to behold,
Now to our breast we hold them tight
Our hearts inside grow cold.

We waited up the whole night through
Just praying that we'd see
A glimpse of hair, those beautiful smiles
But that was not to be.

How can this be? God, can't you see?
Our hearts cry out in pain
How could you allow this to happen?
I feel I'm going insane.

They wouldn't let us see you
Until their work was done.
But, you know, I never believed them.
My daughters were not gone!
Instead, we went to the parlor
Attempting to ponder and think
Their caskets, yes, I would like the same...
But would Amber hate the pink?

Finally, they said we could see you
And then I knew the truth would be told,
For I was sure it wasn't my babies
Lying that room, so cold.

One tentative step, then another
And my facial mask started to slip
What was peeking up out of the coffin
But a beautiful golden wisp.

My composure began to shatter
All vanity faded away
But, you see, that did not matter,
For the girls in the coffin were my own.

I stroked Amber's beautiful cheekbones,
And touched her soft hair of gold.
Her velvety eyes were in the slumber
Of one who will never grow old.

And then as I gazed at my youngest,
I kissed her heart-shaped lips
I grabbed her hand... it was so cold
And caressed her fingertips.

I then began to brush her gold hair so fine
The director warned me against it
But Stacy did not mind,
For she is in eternity, her beauty ever shines.

The days to come were all a blur
Of family and of friends
And this one thing I know for sure
Your memory will not end.

A Poem for TDCJ Victim Services
Submitted by L.J.A.

You were hurt but you are strong
    Your heart does more than beat
You do more than carry on
    Your love is never meek

With justice on your side
    You never lost your faith
You'll never need to hide
    We're here to keep you safe.

Untitled II
by Vickie Short

They asked us to write impact statements
Addressed to Mr. James Mears
To open his eyes to the horror
Of realizing ones greatest fears.

Through tears we put pen to paper
And attempted to express how it feels
To lose such a precious treasure
As Amber and Stacy - our girls.

We called upon family - who answered
And called upon friends, as well
They valiantly put pen to paper
Hoping their story to tell.

The hurt within us is tremendous
But on paper it all seems so cold
Will it ever touch someone's heartstrings?
Or will come off as too bold?

We want justice for our daughters
And we want to do everything right
But sometimes it's so overwhelming
The end result is out of our sight.

For now we will continue to edit
Hold on to our paper and pen
To help to convey our true feelings
And hold on tight 'til the end.

NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS WEEK

APRIL 21-27, 2013

Victim Services staff in attendance at the Victims' Tribute in San Antonio

Guest speakers at the Crime Victims' Rights Week Ceremony *(left to right):* Brooke Axtell, Carol Tompkins, and Brooks Douglass. Click here for video footage of this year's ceremony.

Suzanne McDaniel Tree Planting Ceremony

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Working with deaf crime victims:

• Realize that many people who are culturally deaf (from birth or childhood) may not see themselves as having a disability.

• Get the attention of a person who is deaf by waving your hand or by turning off/on a light in a shared space.

• Ask, in writing, how the person prefers to communicate.

• Do not use people who can sign but are not professional interpreters, except to obtain name, address, and other basic information.

• If the person wants to communicate by writing, keep your messages short and direct. English is a second language for many deaf people who communicate using sign language.

• These languages have different grammar and sentence syntax. Always ask for clarification when needed.

• If the person requests a sign language interpreter, use an interpreter service agency to schedule a qualified interpreter with the certification level that fits the legal proceedings.

• Request separate interpreters when interviewing a victim and suspect.

• The interpreter's role is to facilitate communication. You should face and speak directly to the crime victim.

• If interviewing partners or family members, do not allow the hearing person or the person with "better" communication to take over. She/he may be the abuser.

Working with blind crime victims:

• Identify yourself and others by name when entering or leaving the room.

• In groups, address each person by name so the individual can follow the conversation.

• If any assistance is needed, ask how best you may help.

• If needed, offer your arm for the individual to hold as you both walk. If present, walk on the side opposite of any service animal.

• Walk slowly and provide details about obstacles such as steps, wet floors, low-hanging objects, etc.

• Have written materials available in large print, audio, Braille, and electronic formats. Otherwise, offer to read aloud written information.

Working with crime victims with cognitive disabilities:

• Be aware that support people may be potential abusers or control many aspects of the person's life.

• Treat adults as adults.

• It may be necessary to use simple words, short sentences, or concrete ideas to communicate effectively.

• Use both open-ended questions and yes/no questions.

• Visual aids may be helpful.

• Perpetrators may tell their victims that abuse is "special time" or "exercise." Ask the crime victim what happened.

• If you are not sure the person understands, ask them to repeat what was said in his/her own words.

• If the victims keeps repeating the same thing, help them to break it down, step by step.

• Offer assistance completing forms.

• In many organizations, people with cognitive disabilities are taught to comply with authority figures. When questioned by authority figures (e.g., representatives of the criminal justice system), these individuals may answer based on what they believe the person asking wants to hear.

Working with crime victims with mental illness symptoms:

• Strive to create a safe and relaxed environment. Do not touch or crowd the person. Arrange seating so that the person's exit is not blocked.

• Be direct and clear about who you are, what your role will be, and how you fit into the process.

• Structure meetings, explaining what you will talk about and do, and for how long.

• Let the person feel in control of the situation as much as possible.

• If a person seems volatile, but there is no immediate threat, speak gently. Allow the person to calm down. Use non-threatening and non-judgmental tones, avoid power struggles.

• Give the person time to process information and make choices.

• Do not argue with a person, including an individual who may be having hallucinations or delusions.

• If time does not seem to be decreasing a serious psychiatric crisis, consider calling a Mental Health Intervention Team or other community resources.

Working with crime victims with atypical speech:

• Ask the person how she/he prefers to communicate (speaking, typing, using a communication board, etc.).

• Give the person time. Some people's speech may become more slurred when they are stressed or tired.

• Allow a third party to speak for the crime victim, only if she/he agrees.

• Be honest if you do not understand. If you have difficulty understanding: take your time to listen to the whole phrase and context; repeat back what you understood; ask the person to use, spell out, or write down different words; and tell the person which parts you do not understand, and ask her/him to clarify.

You can make an impact to ensure accessibility for crime victims with disabilities. It all starts with just one person!

To learn more about working with crime victims with disabilities, please visit SafePlace's Disability Services website at http://www.SafePlace.org/disabilityservices or contact Cema Mastroleo at cmastroleo@SafePlace.org. To learn more about the ADA, contact the U.S. Department of Justice Americans with Disabilities Office at (800) 514-0301 or www.ada.org.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU !

OUR GOAL IS TO PRINT NEWS OF INTEREST FOR VICTIMS AND VICTIM ADVOCATES

The Victim's Informer newsletter is published quarterly. Articles, meeting notices, and other submissions should be sent to TDCJ Victim Services Division, Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse, 8712 Shoal Creek Blvd, Suite 265, Austin, Texas 78757-6899; faxed to 512-452-0825; or e-mailed to tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.texas.gov. For questions or comments, please call us at 800-848-4284 or 512-406-5931.

Please Note:

You may access the publication at the TDCJ VSD Internet website. If you wish, we will notify you via e-mail each time *The Victim's Informer* becomes available on the TDCJ VSD Internet website and provide an electronic link to *The Victim's Informer*. Send your e-mail address to: tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.texas.gov

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Texas Victim Assistance Training Online

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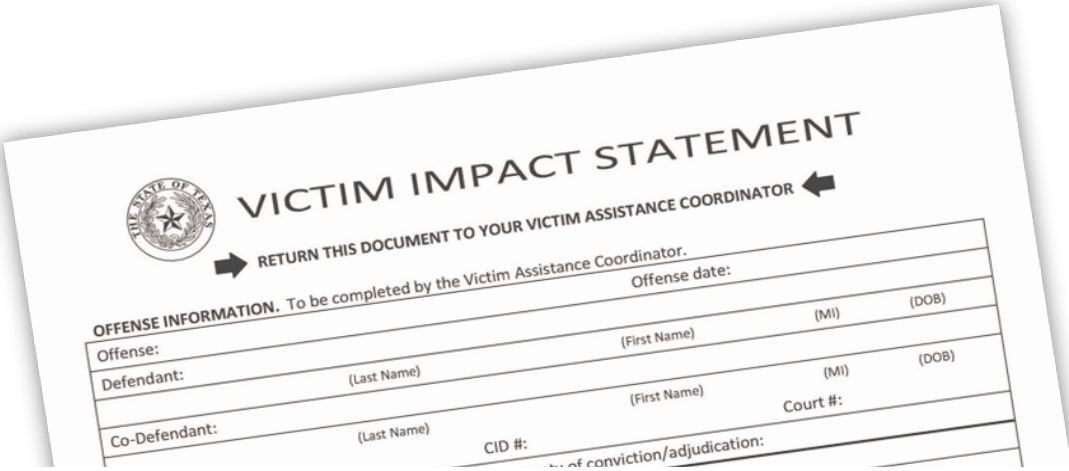
Calendar Announced

The Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse is happy to introduce a calendar feature for the Texas Victim Assistance Training (TVAT) Online. The TVAT Calendar was developed in order to readily provide information regarding webinars, live training, and other victim-related events held in Texas. Criminal justice and victim services professionals can view, search, and submit victim-related trainings and events. If you have an event you would like to submit, please visit the following link for more information: www.tdcj.texas.gov/php/vscalendar/index.php.

2013 Victim Impact Statement Revision Committee Announcement

Following the close of the 83rd Texas Legislature, the TDCJ Victim Services Division will host a series of meetings over the summer for the 2013 Victim Impact Statement (VIS) Revision Committee. Committee members were drawn from a variety of victim services and criminal justice professionals. The committee will meet to consider legislation that will have an impact on victim services and the VIS, as well as to make their own recommendations for improvements to the VIS, the *It's Your Voice* brochure, and the VIS Quarterly Activity Report forms, which the Victim Services Divsion is required by law to collect and report for each Texas county.

A summary of legislative changes, the committee proceedings, and changes that have been made to the Victim Impact Statement and related documents will be published in future issues of the *Victim's Informer*.


VICTIM IMPACT STATEMENT

RETURN THIS DOCUMENT TO YOUR VICTIM ASSISTANCE COORDINATOR

OFFENSE INFORMATION. To be completed by the Victim Assistance Coordinator.

Offense: Offense date:

Defendant: (Last Name) (First Name) (MI) (DOB)

Co-Defendant: (Last Name) (First Name) (MI) (DOB)

CID #: Court #:

of conviction/adjudication: