The
VICTIM'S INFORMER
TEXAS CRIME VICTIM CLEARINGHOUSE
VOL. 20, NO. 2 – JUNE / JULY 2015

MARK ODOM, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE
VICTIM SERVICES DIVISION

Angie McCown, Director
TDCJ Victim Services Division

I am pleased and honored to announce that Mark Odom received the Ellen Halbert Crime Victims' Advocacy Award at the 2015 Texas Corrections Association Conference. As a friend and colleague of Ellen Halbert, I can assure you that she would whole-heartedly agree that Mark Odom is deserving of this recognition. In a field often dominated by women, Mark has established himself as an exceptional leader and a passionate advocate.

Mark Odom is a native Texan who grew up in Houston and Austin. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science in 1983 from Southwest Texas State University. Although Mark came from a family of attorneys, where discussions about the criminal justice system were common around the dinner table, he managed to follow his own path and opened a BBQ restaurant in Austin to pursue a career around his love for BBQ. However after several years and many long hot days around the BBQ pit, Mark found himself turning the corner to pursue a career in criminal justice, and what a career it has been.

Mark has been in the criminal justice field for over 25 years. He began his career in 1987 as a Parole Officer in Austin Texas and then as an Administrative Hearing Officer for the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles. In February 1998, Mark began working for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Victim Services Division. He has served as a Victim Liaison preparing victims who witness executions, the Training Coordinator, and the Director of the Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse. He has been instrumental in the development of the Texas Victim Offender Mediation Dialogue Program, and in creating specialized procedures for mediations involving adult sexual assault survivors and adults who were sexually assaulted as children.

Angie McCown

Since 2004, he has served as the Deputy Director of the Victim Services Division and he currently manages the daily operations of the Division. He brings such a unique perspective to the work having been a Parole Officer and a Victim Advocate, and he has extensive historical knowledge regarding the criminal justice system having grown up with his father Wendell Odom, Sr., who served as a Judge on the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals and State District Court, and as aboard member on the Texas Board of Pardons and Parole.

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The VICTIM'S INFORMER

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice Victim Services Division is proud to provide you with an email notification service. Email notifications may be retrieved directly from your computer, mobile device, or wherever internet access is available. Email notifications are time sensitive and notify you of changes in an offender's status. Being a current Victim Notification System registrant will not automatically register you for this email service.

To register, contact the Victim Services Division at 800-848-4284 or visit our website at www.tdcj.texas.gov and complete the victim email notification form. The VNS registrants have the option to receive notifications by letter, email, or both. We would like to encourage all victim service providers who utilize the Victim Notification System to elect to receive email notifications only whenever possible.

MARK ODOM, DEPUTY DIRECTOR TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE VICTIM SERVICES DIVISION

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Mark is a nationally recognized speaker and trainer in victim and offender dialogue, who in 2015 alone has already provided training to the Hawaiian Department of Corrections (where he was able to pay a visit Pearl Harbor in honor of his father who joined the Navy after the attack on Pearl Harbor), participated as a panelist in the National Institute of Corrections webcast, Offender Reentry: The Value of Victim Involvement, and participated in a webinar on victim offender dialogue for the Association of Paroling Authorities International. Mark currently serves as the Vice Chairman of the National Association of Victim Services Professionals in Corrections and the Chairman of the Victim Services Committee for the American Correctional Association.

When Mark is not working tirelessly at the TDCJ Victim Services Division, he enjoys spending time with his family, particularly his wife Glynnis, his son Mark and his dogs Batman and Callie. Besides spending time with family some of Mark's favorite pastimes include mountain biking, fishing, cooking and hanging out on his back porch with his dogs while barbequing.

Most importantly, Mark is a good-hearted person who always makes time for staff and victims, and who when you are in his presence makes you feel like he genuinely cares because he does. I honestly don't know anyone in our field who does not like or respect Mark Odom, and those of us who have had the opportunity to work with Mark are better advocates because of his gentle yet powerful influence. Simply put, Mark Odom is one of the Rock Stars in the field of victim advocacy, always striving to ensure that crime victims are treated with the compassion and respect they deserve. Please join me in congratulating Mark Odom, the 2015 recipient of the Texas Corrections Association Ellen Halbert Crime Victims' Advocacy Award.

COMPASSION RESTORATION "RESTORE, RELAX, REFRESH"

by Eugenia Barr, Ph.D.
Eugenia Barr Counseling and Consulting

There are so many terms now for the impact of the work we do: compassion stress, and compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, vicarious traumatization, and silent injuries. Different professions call it different things but it is essentially the same – the impact of doing the compassionate work we do.

It is known that the road to compassion fatigue includes many contributors to compassion stress, e.g. empathy plus:

- Nature of criminal violence;
- Exposure to traumatic stories;
- Exposure to victim/family reaction to crime;
- Exposure to a victim/family re-victimization;
- Confronting the worst of humanity;
- Seeing the aftermath;
- Walking the journey across time;
- Memories or cases that "stick;"
- Vulnerable victims;
- Agency or organizational impediments, including work overload or lack of resources;
- Cumulative effect; and
- Personal history.

Fortunately, there are as many mediators that offset that potential stress. That is the focus of this article.

For years now, those in the field of victim services have heard the critically important message "take care of yourself." The work we do is intense – listening to those who have experienced trauma, violence, grief, unthinkable pain and loss. Each story is unique. We willingly share the burden they pass to us to help carry their load. If only one story, one victimization was the sum of what we do daily, it would be sufficiently heavy. However, we walk this journey daily, weekly and across time, each story added on to the one before. It is no wonder that we may begin to feel the stress and heaviness that accompanies those stories. This quote from the Canadian Crime Victim Assistance Manual reminds us what is important:

> As we stop taking care of ourselves, we wear down the major tool of our work. We need to have empathy for ourselves. The bottom-line is that if we are trying to help clients rebuild skills, then we need to take care of ourselves. We need to act as models of self-care.

Compassion is defined as a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by suffering or misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the pain or remove its cause. In a nutshell, that is the goal of victim service providers. In order to maintain our compassion over the long haul, it is required that we know how to be present with and listen to those who need us, hold clear boundaries, keep our stress low, balance the light and the dark, surround ourselves with those that love and know us deeply, spend time with those that bring us happiness, humor and joy, and seek meaning.

The term "Compassion Restoration" includes the word "restore" and is at the heart of what we as victim service providers need to pursue in order to have the sustainability to stay in the field. Within that word is "rest" – something many of us are short on having. The recent (and long established) research shows that those with sufficient sleep function better on all fronts in their lives; and the converse is true. Lack of sleep affects clear thinking, increases pain sensitivity and emotional reactivity, leads to weight gain and mimics the effects of alcohol, among other effects. It is essential, then, to identify what 'restores' our compassion and thus our ability to walk the journey with victims.

Compassion Restoration may also include resiliency, physical health, and investing in what energizes.

Resiliency is knowing how you 'bounce back' from stress. It may be related to whom you spend time with outside work that balances your 'heavy' work. What you find uplifting and light can be found in humor, enlightenment, or spiritual anchoring. Resiliency can also be how you respond to stressful situations such as messages to yourself or the ability to put matters in a larger context – "it's bad but not the end of the world and manageable."

Physical health, being active, getting exercise, and receiving physical compassion like massage are essential tools.

Most importantly, it is necessary to invest in what re-energizes your

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COMPASSION RESTORATION "RESTORE, RELAX, REFRESH"

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passion and gives you hope for the future of victims with whom you work and for yourself. A good example that happened recently was that I heard a victim/survivor speak about a history of horrific abuse within her family and how her healing occurred. Her healing was primarily due to simple, loving interactions with caring adults that took the time to look deeply at her, listen fully and reassure her of her value. Witnessing her in her present, – competent, funny, accomplished, fully involved in loving relationships, sharing her story – gave me hope, encouragement and a renewed sense of energy to continue being available to those who need someone to spend a little time along the way. That is something I can do every day. I hope you can do the same.

The Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse (TxCVC) previously hosted a webinar presented by Eugenia Barr, Ph.D. titled Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma. To view a recording of this webinar, please visit: http://www.tdcj.texas.gov/divisions/vs/victim_webinars.html.

IN MEMORY OF PATRICIA ANN DAY

Patricia Ann Day passed away on Tuesday, May 5, 2015 at the age of 72. In 1986, she founded Victims Outreach, a Dallas-based not-for-profit organization that advocated the rights of crime victims and provided vital support to victims and their families. She served as executive director of Victims Outreach for 14 years. As an ardent supporter of victims' rights, she received numerous awards and citations for her work, including the Texas Governor's Award for Victim Assistance for peer advocacy in 1989 and a Certificate of Appreciation from the U.S Department of Justice in 1993. In 1997, then Govenor George W. Bush appointed her to the Texas Board of Criminal Justice (TBCJ), a post she held for 10 years until she retired in 2007.

The TBCJ is comprised of nine members who are appointed by the governor to oversee the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), which provides confinement, supervision, rehabilitation, and reintegration of the state's convicted felons and assists crime victims.

The TDCJ Victim Services Divison greatly appreciates Ms. Day's dedicated services to the victim services community and crime victims. Ms. Day will be missed.

VICTIM-CENTERED VICTIM OFFENDER DIALOGUE IN CRIMES OF SEVERE VIOLENCE

20 ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES FOR CORRECTIONS-BASED VICTIM SERVICES

by Mark Odom, Deputy Director
Texas Department of Criminal Justice - Victim Services Division

At the National Association of Victim Services Professionals in Corrections (NAVSPIC), Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD) Summit held in Kansas City in 2012, a committee was formed to create national standards for VOD. The goal of the committee was to identify and highlight common understandings, clarifying best practices, and provide a more consistent framework for program implementation and VOD services.

There are currently 33 states that have a VOD program in corrections. These standards were developed to assist new programs in implementing and maintaining a victim centered approach to support victim initiated VOD models and to create common understandings around terms, training, and policies.

1. A confidential post-conviction facilitated process initiated only by crime victims/survivors, sometimes many years after the conviction of the offender(s).

Victims/Survivors usually initiate a request for VOD a number of years after the conviction primarily [for two reasons]. Some because they want to tell certain facts and feelings to the offender(s) convicted in the crime(s) against them. Others because they want to ask certain questions of the offender(s). Survivors see VOD as a way to make meaning or sense of what happened to them, but only when the courageous choice to initiate the request lies with them, not the offender. Experience has shown that survivors may feel that offender-initiated requests to meet and talk, or to apologize, can be intrusive, re-traumatizing, and contain risk of inappropriate self-interest.

2. A process "centered" on meeting the victim/survivor's needs through the corrections-based victim service agency in the state where the offender was convicted.

Victim-Centered VOD must be firmly grounded in helping survivors meet some of the unmet needs they continue to experience, including the wish to express strong feelings, and the opportunity to get answers to persisting questions.

Because violent crime victimization is often traumatizing for victims, VOD cannot be "mediation" in the dispute-resolution sense, nor a process for creating any uninvited "agreement" or "reconciliation" between parties.

3. A process that must necessarily be completely voluntary for offenders, who must agree to participate in VOD preparation and dialogue without pressure or expectation.

While the VOD preparation and dialogue process must always be victim-centered, it must also be sufficiently respectful of and sensitive to the emotional needs and concerns of offenders, as their participation will also require courage.

Offenders must be free to decline to participate in VOD preparation and dialogue, however undeserved or "unjust" their declining or refusing to participate may feel to the survivors initiating the request.

4. A process in which participating offenders must be willing to acknowledge their role and responsibility in the crimes(s) of record.

Offenders must be willing to participate in the preparation and dialogue process with no expectation of anything in return. They must also take some measure of responsibility for their role in the crime(s) for which they have been convicted. Experience has shown that offenders appealing their convictions are not appropriate candidates for participation in the VOD process until the appeals have been exhausted. VOD policies and procedures in some states allow for exceptions to this requirement when the survivors are properly informed and prepared for it.

5. A process that strives to keep all risk of physical and emotional harm to the victim/survivor and the offender at an absolute minimum.

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Safety is the highest priority for all stakeholders. The VOD process must strive to keep all risk of harm to the survivor and the offender to a minimum. This includes bodily injury to either participant, or emotional revictimization of the survivor caused by offender lying, denying, minimizing, victim blaming, and other strategies for deflecting responsibility and avoiding accountability.

Survivors have every right to feel anger and outrage, and to want to fully express these feelings. However, VOD is not an appropriate setting to allow such anger to become so uncontrolled that it threatens the offender with physical harm, or causes the offender to "shut down" emotionally. This could lead the offender to withdraw from participation in the dialogue process, and leave the survivor unable to achieve the goals of the VOD. It is the role and responsibility of the facilitator(s) to know when the preparation or dialogue process should be suspended or terminated due to risk of harm or danger of any kind to the participants.

6. A process that must allow either party to cease participation at any time during the preparation or dialogue.

In order for the survivor to know that the offender is participating freely, both parties must understand that they may choose to withdraw from the preparation or dialogue process at any time, for any reason. This can help both parties feel sufficiently "safe" about motives throughout the preparation and dialogue process. In some cases, the survivor or offender may also wish or need to take a temporary break or hiatus from the preparation process for a certain period of time.

7. A process that has absolutely no direct influence on the classification, custody, parole, probation, or release date status of the offender.

VOD and dialogue preparation are "personal" processes, not "legal" ones. Individual states' statutes and policies regarding confidentiality and other legal issues will determine actual VOD guidelines and protocols. Facilitators' case notes, if made, are private and confidential. In most states with VOD programs, these documents do not become part of any departmental, institutional, parole or probation office files. An offender's choice to not participate in the VOD process should also not have any direct adverse effect on the offender's status.

8. A process that consists of three distinct stages: a preparation stage, a dialogue stage, and a post-dialogue stage.

To the extent legally, ethically and practically possible, these stages are designed to fulfill two primary objectives. The stages provide survivors with opportunities to express or give voice to some of the devastating experiences and persistently difficult emotional impacts they have been forced to bear in the aftermath of the crime(s). The stages also provide offenders with opportunities to gain an increased awareness and understanding of those impacts, as well as a sense of what it means to be directly and personally accountable to the survivor.

9. A process intended to lead to a one-time direct dialogue between the victim/survivor and the offender overseen by one or two facilitators properly trained in the principles and practices of Victim-Centered VOD preparation and dialogue facilitation.

A recognized and accepted Victim Centered training of VOD facilitators is essential to the success of Victim-Centered VOD. While a VOD lasts for several hours, and sometimes for a whole day, VOD is intended to be a one-time event.

Exceptions to this one-time limitation are sometimes allowed by individual states' VOD policies and procedures. Subsequent corresponding or visitation relationships may later occur between the survivor and the offender, but such situations are outside the scope of the Victim-Centered VOD preparation and dialogue process. Individual states have policies in place regarding correspondence and visitation between victims/survivors and offenders.

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10. A private and personal process for the victim/survivor that is designed to restore, as much as possible, the sense of "choice" and "control" taken from them.

For most victims/survivors, their loss of choice and control begins with the crime and often continues through the adjudication process. One of the most common and important objectives of the VOD process is to return to the survivor as much of a sense of "choice" and of personal "control" as is possible. This is one of the principal reasons Victim-Centered VOD should not be initiated by offenders.

11. A process that requires a sufficient number of confidential, preparatory pre-dialogue conversation sessions between the facilitator(s) and the survivor, and the facilitator(s) and the offender.

The specific number of these confidential preparation sessions will vary according to the issues, needs, and capacities of the survivor and the offender. The primary objective of these sessions is to ensure that both the survivor and the offender are sufficiently able to thoroughly and safely address the many emotionally complex and difficult details, recollections, feelings, and facts that may come up during the VOD itself. The survivor, offender, and facilitator(s) are usually the only participants in the VOD preparation process. Any other persons present must either be required by an individual state's policy, or mutually agreed upon by the survivor, the offender, and the facilitator(s).

12. A process to be conducted with skill and care by facilitators sufficiently trained in recognized crime victim issues. This helps enable victims/survivors to be fully heard, and to more thoroughly address certain persisting unanswered questions.

The Victim-Centered VOD preparation process must remain rigorously grounded in meeting the needs of the victim/survivor, and invite a thorough understanding of the many persisting impacts and effects a survivor may want or need to address with the offender during the dialogue. In most cases, survivors want offenders to understand some of the devastation they caused, to acknowledge this understanding, and to take responsibility for what they did.

13. A process to be conducted with skill and care by facilitators properly trained in recognized offender issues. This enables offenders to more fully understand how their choices and actions impacted their victims, and allows them the opportunity to take a sufficient degree of responsibility for those choices and actions.

Facilitators must strive to convey a clear understanding of the impacts and effects of the crime to the offender during the preparation process. To achieve this understanding, facilitators must sensitively invite and encourage a measure of reflection, honesty, and personal accountability in the offender. Victim-Centered VOD must not be confused with "mediation," in which "middle ground" is sought, unless this is explicitly what the survivor needs or wants to happen.

14. A process that, from beginning to end, must be confidential for the victim/survivor, the offender, the facilitator(s), and any other support or program persons mutually agreed upon, or required by agency policy, who are involved in the preparation and dialogue processes.

These persons are typically the only ones present during the preparation process, and the only ones present during the dialogue. Security and safety are maintained by facility or other supervisory authority security staff members who have visual, but not auditory, access to the dialogue room at all times.

15. A process that is primarily intended to achieve the objectives in Principle 1. There is no uninvited expectation of forgiveness, reconciliation, exculpation, or other cultural, spiritual, or religious imperative unless this is specifically part of what the survivor wishes to achieve or convey to the offender on the day of the VOD.

During the Victim-Centered VOD preparation process, offenders are advised that VOD is not intended as a setting in which they should ask

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for, or expect, forgiveness. While forgiveness may be a subject the survivor decides to discuss with the offender during the VOD, initial intentions by the survivor to forgive the offender are not conveyed by facilitators to offenders during the preparation process. The survivor decides on this at the time of the dialogue itself.

16. A process designed to lead to a dialogue that is structured, as much as is practically possible, according to the needs of the victim/survivor, subject to the policies of the facility where the offender is housed.

The dialogue setting, agenda, and other details are established to allow the survivor to feel as comfortable as possible. Questions to be addressed in advance of the VOD often include how the survivor wishes to be addressed; the specific nature of their greeting; who speaks first in the dialogue; and whether the survivor is already in the dialogue room when the offender enters, among others. The dialogue will conclude when the survivor has been able to say all that s/he wants to say, to ask all that s/he wants to ask, and feels able to leave the facility with no significant issues or questions unaddressed.

17. A process that provides for immediate and separate follow-up debriefings between the facilitator(s) and the victim/survivor, and the facilitator(s) and the offender.

These immediate debriefings help ensure that both the survivor and the offender feel emotionally "comfortable" and emotionally "safe" enough to return to their lives. It is hoped that the usually powerful emotional conversations in the VOD will help them to move forward, and to reflect upon and integrate their effects. It is understood that any no-contact orders previously imposed by the courts, and temporarily suspended for the VOD, are reinstated at the conclusion of the VOD.

18. A process that provides for a follow-up, within 30 to 60 days of the VOD, between the facilitator(s) and the offender alone and the facilitator(s) and the survivor alone.

These later follow-ups help to ensure that the VOD experience has continued to be a positive and effective one for each. They can also provide both the survivor and the offender with additional support, encouragement, affirmation, or further resource suggestions as they move forward on their own. The essential structure of these follow-up conversations may be described in the policies and procedures of individual states' VOD programs to ensure sufficient consistency and conformity in facilitator practice. The completion of these follow-ups by the facilitator(s) with the survivor and with the offender typically marks the final conclusion of the VOD case. While some facilitators may remain informally in touch with survivors and offenders afterward, the official agency or facility relationship with each is concluded at this time.

19. A process that requires all facilitators, victims/survivors, and offenders to comply with all policies and procedures of the Victim Service agency or department under whose authority their cases are facilitated.

Nothing in these principles absolves staff or volunteer facilitators from their responsibility to adhere to all the Victim Service agency or department policies and procedures regarding Victim-Centered VOD in their state.

20. A process that requires all facilitators, victims/survivors, and offenders to comply with all policies and procedures of the correctional facilities or supervisory authorities under which the offender in each VOD case is housed or supervised

Nothing in these principles absolves any of the parties involved in the preparation and dialogue process from their responsibility to adhere to all departmental, correctional facility, or other supervisory authority policies and procedures or laws regarding Victim-Centered VOD in their state.

Developed by the NAVSPIC VOD National Standards Subcommittee: Monica Crocker (CO), Darlene Deichert (CO), Karin Ho (OH), Spiro Koinis/Chair (CO), Kris Miner (MN), Lydia Newlin (MN), Mark Odom (TX), Mary Roche (IA), Liz Stanosheck (NE), and Jon Wilson (ME).

For more information regarding the TDCJ VSD VOMD program, please contact staff at 800-848-4284, 512-406-5929 or vsd.vomd@tdcj.texas.gov.

ANGIE MCCOWN HONORED WITH JUDGE JOE KEGANS AWARD FOR SERVICE TO CRIME VICTIMS

Reprinted with permission from The Connections Newletter.

In January, Victim Services Division Director Angie McCown was recognized with the American Parole and Probation Association's (APPA) 2015 Judge Joe Kegans Award for victim services in probation and parole.

The award is named after the late Judge Joe Kegans, a founding member of the APPA's Victims Issues Committee who devoted her career to improving the lives of others. The award is presented to an individual in community corrections who leads by example while providing exemplary services to victims of crime.

Ms. McCown holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Texas at Austin, and a Master of Arts degree in Family Therapy from the University of Houston at Clear Lake. She has worked as a victim advocate for more than 25 years and has received numerous awards, including the TDCJ Ellen Halbert Award for Excellence in Victim Services, The Austin Police Department Victim Services Exemplary Service to Texas Crime Victims Award and the Texas Ranger Chief's Award. She is the current Chairwoman of the APPA Victim Issues Committee.

TDCJ Executive Director Brad Livingston congratulated Ms. McCown on winning the award. Mr. Livingston praised her for doing a tremendous job as Victim Services Director, "I can think of no one more deserving than Angie McCown".

2015 GOVERNOR'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARD

Photo Courtesy of TDCJ Media Services. From Left to right: Texas Board of Criminal Justice Chairman Oliver Bell, Chief Justice Nathan L. Hecht, Award Recipient Jessica Middleton and Texas Department of Criminal Justice Executive Director Brad Livingston.

Jessica Middleton was presented the Pathfinder Award during the Governor's 2015 Criminal Justice Volunteer Service Award program. The award is given to an individual or group that has demonstrated leadership qualities in their volunteer service and made significant contributions to the welfare of victims.

Ms. Middleton volunteers much of her time as a victim impact panelist in the Sex Offender Rehabilitation Programs at the Goree Unit (Huntsville) and Hightower Unit (Dayton). As a result of her presentations there have been positive results on audience members, who see the devastating long-term effects of their crimes.

NEW INFORMATIVE BROCHURES AVAILABLE

The TDCJ Victim Services Division is excited to announce two new informative brochures are now available.

The Victim Offender Mediation Dialogue (VOMD) program brochure includes information regarding the crime victims' rights, the program's purpose and available services, and answers to frequently asked questions.

The Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse (TxCVC) brochure describes the available services offered by the program, including professional training, technical assistance, resources and direct victim services.

To order these or other TDCJ VSD publications, complete the online public order form: https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/divisions/vs/victim_clearinghouse_order_form.html.

TEXAS CRIME VICTIM CLEARINGHOUSE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Live Trainings:

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Victim Services Division (VSD) Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse (TxCVC) staff provides training on a variety of topics, which can be tailored to the needs of the requestor. If you would like to host a training in your community, contact the TxCVC at tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.texas.gov or 512-406-5931.

Webinars:

The TDCJ VSD TxCVC hosts a webinar series. Recent webinars provided information on To Forgive or Not To Forgive: That Is the Question; Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse; and When the Intersections of Cultural Identity and Victimology Collide. Webinar descriptions and registration information, as well as recordings and related documents for past webinars may be accessed on the TDCJ VSD website: **http://www.tdcj.texas.gov/divisions/vs/victim_webinars.html**

TVAT Online:

Texas Victim Assistance Training (TVAT) Online is a state-wide online victim assistance training focused on victim-centered service delivery and professional development that enables new advocates to acquire baseline professional skills and competence. To register or obtain more information, visit: **https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/php/tvatonline/**

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Texas Victim Assistance Training Online

CALENDAR

The Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse wishes to remind our readers that a calendar feature has been added for the Texas Victim Assistance Training (TVAT) Online.

Criminal justice and victim services professionals can view, search, and submit victim-related trainings and events on the TVAT Calendar webpage.
www.tdcj.texas.gov/php/vscalendar/

Following the close of the 84th Texas Legislature, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Victim Services Division (VSD) will host a series of meetings over the summer for the 2015 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 make their own recommendations for improvements to the VIS form, *It's Your Voice* brochure, VIS Quarterly Activity Report form and VIS Recommended Processing Procedures.

More information regarding the revisions and availability of the new forms and documents will be published in upcoming issues of *The Victim's Informer.*

2015 Victim Impact Statement Revision Committee Announcement

2015 National Crime Victims' Rights Week Events

During National Crime Victims' Rights Week this year, from April 19-25, victim services organizations throughout the country held events to honor crime victims and their rights in the criminal justice system. Staff members of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Victim Services Division (VSD) participated in numerous events throughout the state, including a wreath laying ceremony for the Fallen Officers Memorial at the San Antonio Police Academy and various Crime Victims' Rights Week ceremonies and panel discussions. We wanted to thank all victims and advocates who participated and helped plan these events, as well as share a few photos.

As a reminder, the Texas Victim Assistance Training (TVAT) Calendar is available to users to submit, search and view victim-related events. We would like to thank the organizations that submitted their events and encouraged others to utilize this service for future events. The TVAT Calendar can be accessed at: **www.tdcj.texas.gov/php/vscalendar/.**

THE TEXAS BOARD OF PARDONS AND PAROLES:

Frequently Asked Questions and Policy Explanations

Parole and Mandatory Supervision Guidelines

by David Gutierrez, Board Member
Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles

In order to ensure victims and their families are well informed of the policies and procedures of the Board of Pardons and Paroles (BPP), we will try our best to outline and describe the factors considered in the voting of a case. The BPP is committed to the protection of the public, the rights of victims and to the fair and individual assessment of each offender. Parole is the discretionary release of an offender, by a Board of Pardons and Paroles decision, to serve the remainder of a sentence in the community under supervision. Parole is a privilege, not a right.

Parole Eligibility

The Correctional Institutions Division Records Office of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) calculates parole eligibility dates for all offenders, except those on death row or in other specific cases. The percentage of a sentence that must be served to reach eligibility varies according to the nature of the offense and as specified by statute. The parole eligibility date may change based on good conduct time. To check on a specific offender's parole eligibility date, visit the BPP Offender Search link at **http://offender.tdcj.texas.gov/OffenderSearch/index.jsp**.

Factors Considered

The BPP seeks to make just decisions in parole cases to restore human potential and to provide prudent conditions of release for a structured reintegration of an offender into the community, always conscious of public safety. When voting individual parole cases, the Parole Panel considers many factors including; seriousness of the offense(s); letters of protest and/or support; sentence length/amount of time served; criminal history - other arrest, probation, parole; number of prison incarcerations; juvenile history; institutional adjustment (participation in specialized programs); and offender age.

Approval and Denial Reasons

When a Parole Panel approves or denies an offender's release to parole/mandatory supervision, the panel will provide one or more of the following reasons. Victims can contact the TDCJ Victim Services Division (VSD) at 800-848-4284 or visit the BPP Offender Search link at **http://offender.tdcj.texas.gov/OffenderSearch/index.jsp** to obtain which reason(s) was provided.

Multiple components indicated in each paragraph listed below may apply but only one is required for approval (A) or denial (D).

1. Criminal History

A-The record does not include a documented pattern of violent or assaultive arrests or convictions on the part of the inmate; criminal history appears to be primarily restricted to non-violent offenses; available information indicates only incarceration.

D-The record indicates that the inmate has repeatedly committed criminal episodes or has a pattern of similar offenses that indicates a predisposition to commit criminal acts upon release; or the record indicates that the inmate is a leader or active participant in gang or organized criminal activity; or the record indicates a juvenile or adult arrest for felony or misdemeanor offenses.

2. Nature of the Offense

A-The record indicates non-violent offenses; instant offense indicates no tendency toward violent/assaultive behavior; offense reveals limited potential for future assaultive type offenses.

D-The record indicates that the inmate committed one or more violent criminal acts indicating a conscious disregard for the lives, safety, or property of others; or the instant offense or pattern of criminal activity has elements of brutality, violence, or conscious selection of victim's vulnerability such that the inmate poses a continuing threat to public safety; or the record indicates use of a weapon.

3. Drug or Alcohol Involvement

A-The record indicates limited or non-involvement with drug sales or usage; the record indicates limited or non-involvement with alcohol consumption.

D-The record indicates excessive drug or alcohol involvement that includes possession, use or delivery in the instant offense or criminal history.

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TEXAS BOARD OF PARDONS AND PAROLES

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4. Institutional Adjustment

A-The record indicates that the inmate has maintained a satisfactory institutional adjustment; i.e., no major disciplinary cases, loss of time or demotion in classification since the previous review.

D-The record indicates that the inmate committed a major disciplinary offense during the preceding six months resulting in a loss of good conduct time or loss of status below that at which the inmate entered prison; or a pattern of disciplinary infractions since the last review indicates a disregard for rules.

5. Adjustment During Periods of Supervision

A-The record indicates successful periods of supervision on probation, parole, or mandatory supervision.

D-The record indicates unsuccessful periods of supervision on previous probation, parole, or mandatory supervision that resulted in incarceration, including parole-in-absentia.

6. Participation in TDCJ-CID Proposed or Specialized Programs

A-The record indicates participation in and completion of TDCJ-CID proposed or specialized programs; the inmate has completed one or more vocational or academic programs that should enhance chances to obtain and maintain full-time stable employment.

D-The record indicates that the inmate refused to participate or intentionally failed to complete TDCJ-CID proposed program(s) made available to the inmate.

7. Time Served

A-The record indicates that length of time served by the inmate is congruent with offense severity and criminal history.

D-The record indicates that length of time served by the inmate is not congruent with offense severity and criminal history.

8. Felony Offense

D-The record indicates that the inmate has been charged before a magistrate, indicted, or convicted by a court of competent jurisdiction, with a felony offense committed while incarcerated.

9. Discretionary Mandatory Supervision

A-Release to Discretionary Mandatory Supervision.

D- (It is necessary to vote both D1 and D2 for a vote not to release, along with any other reasons that apply.)

D1-The record indicates that the inmate's accrued good conduct time is not an accurate reflection o f the inmate's potential for rehabilitation.

D2-The record indicates that the inmate's release would endanger the public.

10. Other

A or D-Write an explanation.

This article is provided by the Board of Pardons and Paroles; Board Member David Gutierrez is the liaison between TDCJ Victim Services Division and the Board. Additional information is available on the Board of Pardons and Parole website: **www.tdcj.texas.gov/bpp/**

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 the 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. If you would like to submit materials, the deadline dates for articles, meeting notices, and other submissions are identified in the box on this page. 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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***The Victim's Informer* newsletter is published quarterly. If you would like to submit materials, the deadline dates for articles, meeting notices, and other submissions are:**

June 30, 2015
Vol. 20, no. 3 (Sept./Oct.)

September 29, 2015
Vol. 20, no. 4 (Dec. 2015/Jan. 2016)