

2024 National Police Week

By Angie McCown, Director, TDCJ Victim Services Division



During the first two weeks of May, Peace Officer Memorial Ceremonies are held in every corner of every state to honor the families of law enforcement officers and correctional officers who made the ultimate sacrifice protecting us and died in the line of duty. In 1962, President John F. Kennedy signed a proclamation which designated May 15 as Peace Officers Memorial Day and the week in which that date falls as National Police Week. The National Memorial Service in Washington D.C. began in 1982 and today continues to be held on the Capitol lawn to honor all officers killed in the line of duty. The National Peace Officers' Memorial Service, which is sponsored by the Grand Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police, is one in a series of events which includes the Candlelight Vigil, which is sponsored by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF) and seminars sponsored by Concerns of Police Survivors (C.O.P.S.). This year we honor those officers killed in 2023, and sadly Texas has 13 names on that list, including Texas

Department of Criminal Justice Correctional Officer Jovian Motley, whose end of watch was November 13, 2023. Please keep these officers and their families in your thoughts, and please take a moment to thank an officer for the sacrifices they make every day when they kiss their families goodbye and head out the door to protect you and me.



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Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles: Training Initiative and Meet Our Team!

By Libby Hamilton, Director Victim Liaison Program, Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles



I can't believe how quickly time flies: along with the start of 2024 came the beginning of the eighth year of the Victim Liaison Program! I'm so excited to share some updates with you and introduce you to our team of liaisons who are dedicated to helping survivors through the parole review process.

When our program started in 2017, we established two main goals: (1) to support victims and survivors, and (2) to provide training to all Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles (Board) employees who interact with them. In my career, I have worked solely within the *post-conviction* phase of the criminal justice system and have hoped (for quite some time) for the opportunity to bridge the gap with those who work in the courts and law enforcement.

It is extremely important for *everyone* working in the criminal justice system to understand how we *all* impact victims throughout its various stages. Once we solidified processes for accomplishing our first two goals, we began visiting District Attorney's offices around Texas. Thankfully, the Board's Chairman, David Gutiérrez, has not only been supportive but joined his Chief of Staff, Tim McDonnell, and me for these presentations. Several offices and agencies have reached out requesting training and information and we are now seeing increased communication and witnessing positive changes. We must all be transparent and honest with victims to earn their trust. As one sexual assault survivor recently stated, "I only participated because I trust you."

Presentation topics generally include parole eligibility, the parole review process, and what it looks like for a victim or survivor to protest an offender's release in Texas (hint: it's probably not what you think! See video link on the next page). Prosecutors, specifically, often ask how they can provide input to the Board and how plea bargains

impact parole eligibility. My office receives frantic calls *daily* from survivors who are shocked after finding out their offender is "already eligible for parole." I think the most exciting outcome of providing the presentations has been prosecutors reaching out to me prior to accepting a plea agreement to gain an understanding of how it could potentially impact the victim. If you are interested in a customized training to cover topics that specifically relate to your office, please reach out!

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), which is a separate agency from the Board, is tasked with inmate time management and calculating parole eligibility based on state law. I am, however, happy to discuss the possible implications of dropping a deadly weapon finding, the Board's voting options and how often they must review an offender, factors considered by the Board, and anything else that might aid in a prosecutor's decision making. If you are a prosecutor or victim advocate who worked closely on a case and feel you have valuable input for the Board to consider, please e-mail that information to the TDCJ Victim Services Division (VSD) at victim.svc@tdcj.texas.gov to be included in the file for the Board to review.

A couple of important things to keep in mind: (1) many offenders are eligible for their first parole review after serving *only one-fourth of their sentence including credit for good conduct time*, and (2) most are required to be reviewed annually. This means that, if the survivor opts in to be notified and participate in the process, they will likely be enduring parole review *sooner and more often* than they are prepared for. Simply being given a lengthy sentence does not necessarily mean that the offender will be incarcerated for a long time. Nor does it guarantee the victim an extended period of relief. It is not uncommon to see an offender sentenced to a 25-year sentence become eligible for parole after three years in prison, or an offender given a life sentence become eligible after six years in prison. Every case is different, but remember that the Board does not decide when to review an offender for possible release and the offender does not get to "apply" for early release. The timing of parole reviews are determined by state law.

Now, let's get back to how the Victim Liaison Program is directly assisting survivors. Parole review is often a lengthy, stressful process. There is rarely a specific

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deadline for voting, which can leave victims anxious and wondering when the phone will ring. We are constantly trying to put ourselves in the shoes of those we are working with and try to think of ways to make this a little more bearable.

Once a person registers for notifications from the TDCJ VSD, **if they are the victim (as defined by government code § 508.117) of the offender’s current offense, the TDCJ VSD will ask if they would like to speak with the Board during the parole review process.** If they accept, TDCJ VSD will ask if they would like accompaniment for that meeting. If they request accompaniment, their case will be assigned to a specific liaison who will ensure the survivor feels informed and supported before, during, and after their meeting with the first (or “lead”) voter. Our liaisons monitor offender files daily and provide updates to the victims, ideally reducing anxiety and providing peace of mind.

You can register for notifications &/or a meeting with the Board by calling TDCJ VSD at 1-800-848-4284.

accompany

/ə'kæmp(ə)ni/

To keep someone company, or to be their companion on a trip or journey.

We are always willing to schedule a “prep call” with a survivor prior to their Board interview to ensure they feel as comfortable as possible, know what to expect, and have all their questions answered.

A victim’s meeting is completely confidential and can be conducted by phone, Zoom, or in-person. There are seven Board offices around the state (located

in Amarillo, Angleton, Austin, Gatesville, Huntsville, Palestine & San Antonio). The offender’s location determines which of the seven offices will begin the voting process. Accompaniment is available for both Zoom and in-person meetings.

During the meeting, water and Kleenex will be provided. As votes are not immediately available upon the conclusion of the meeting, the liaison will again follow up with the victim once the Board has reached a consensus to explain the decision and what happens next.

Please feel free to call my office at (512) 406-5833 with any questions or visit the Board’s website for our Frequently Asked Questions and ten-minute video for victims: <https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/bpp/VictimLiaison/VictimLiaison.html>.

I would personally like to thank our amazing group of victim liaisons, the leadership provided by Chairman Gutiérrez, and the Governor’s Office for supporting our program through Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant funds.

Below is some of the feedback we have received from survivors who benefited from accompaniment. Please know we are here if you feel it might be helpful for you.

“I’m grateful that victims are extended the opportunity to voice our fears and concerns. Thank you for always following up and keeping me informed regarding the process.”



“All of you have been so incredibly helpful. It’s very touching to know that you have reached out to me with so much caring and understanding. The human and compassionate side that I saw was something I never expected. I appreciate you immensely and shall never forget your kindness and your support.”

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"I want to personally thank you for all the time that you have taken to communicate with me. It meant a lot to me to know that I could reach out to you anytime for assistance."



"I can't thank you enough for helping me feel so comfortable in that room and for all the help you have given me. You and your team remind me that we aren't alone in this!"



"I will never have enough words of gratitude to thank you for being there for me. Just your presence gave me peace and a calmness that I would not have had."



"I cannot express how grateful I am! All the information you've provided over the last few months has been very helpful to us. This is a tough process and you've been a bright spot."



"I greatly appreciate your kindness and guidance. Though we are not looking forward to this process, we feel it is necessary to keep <offender> from harming anyone else and we will do whatever it takes to accomplish this."

Meet the Victim Liaison Team!



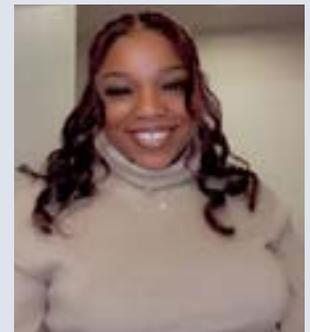
Christine Wall,
Austin



Shree Slay,
Gatesville



Karen Meza,
Amarillo



Tyra McCloud,
Huntsville



Jessie Odoy,
Austin

Getting to Know the New Deputy Director of TDCJ Victim Services Division

By Kayla Smart, Training and Development Specialist IV, Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Victim Services Division (VSD) has experienced many changes over the past few months, including several leadership changes. As we congratulate Amanda Gage for her promotion to Deputy Director of the division, we would like to highlight not only her professional accomplishments, but the personal experiences that shaped her as well.

Amanda was influenced by work in the criminal justice field from an early age. Her mother was a parole officer and unit supervisor at the Temple District Parole Office, setting an example of what hard work and leadership can accomplish within TDCJ. Amanda has always been proud of her mother and the career she built, finding her mother's work as a public servant to be interesting and respectable. After graduating from college, Amanda developed more of an interest in the criminal justice field and decided to follow her mother's example, becoming a parole officer in 2005 primarily supervising a Super Intensive Supervision Program (SISP) case load. After five years, Amanda was promoted to Unit Supervisor and supervised the SISP unit. She continued to excel within TDCJ, being promoted to Program Specialist III in May of 2013, overseeing the Special Needs Offender Program; and just three months later she was selected as the Program Supervisor for the Electronic Monitoring program. During her time with the TDCJ Parole Division, Amanda learned that she enjoyed working in public service and states, "when I can help someone else, it benefits them, and I feel happy that I was able to help them." While her time with the Parole Division was pivotal to her personal and professional development, Amanda's desire to have a greater impact on the work she was doing is what led to her transition to TDCJ VSD in December 2017.

In her role as the Programs Manager, Amanda supervised the [Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse \(TxCVC\)](#) and the [Victim Offender Mediation Dialogue Program \(VOMD\)](#). The Programs section of VSD ensures that victims are afforded a full measure of justice and possible assistance, while providing adequate training and technical assistance to victim service and criminal justice professionals. Amanda

continued to thrive within VSD, transferring into the Notification Manager position in November 2020. In her new role, she would oversee the Notification section consisting of the VSD Hotline staff, the Correspondence Team, and the VSD Analysts, all working tirelessly to ensure that victims who contact VSD are kept informed of their rights and the parole review process. For the next four years, Amanda supervised the daily operations of the Notification section, tended to the modifications and updates of the [Integrated Victim Services System \(IVSS\)](#), and spearheaded the development and launch of the Electronic Victim Impact Statement (eVIS) in October of 2023. While the use of the eVIS is optional, it provides another method for Victim Assistant Coordinators (VACs) to provide the VIS to victims of violent crime and can help facilitate a "warm hand-off" to better meet the needs of victims. When asked about her time with VSD, Amanda stated, "working with victims and with the VSD has changed my life for the better. I hope my work here is having a positive impact on the victims we serve and the VSD staff." In January 2024, Amanda was selected as the Deputy Director of TDCJ VSD.

Burnout
A state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long-term involvement in emotionally demanding situations.

To continue doing this important work, building resiliency and creating moments of rest are imperative to combat **burnout** and build **compassion satisfaction**¹.

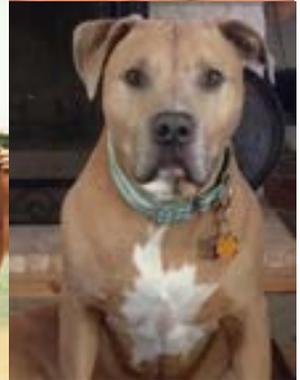
When she is not working, Amanda enjoys cooking, traveling to the beach, and spending time on Lake Travis with family and friends. She describes going to the lake as a cornerstone for many great memories.

Compassion Satisfaction
Refers to the pleasure derived from work, including feeling positively about the meaningfulness of one's contribution to the work and/or greater good of society.

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Memories of boat rides and watching the sunset with family has solidified the lake as one of her favorite places to go in times of rest. Whether it is the lake or the beach, Amanda has always been drawn to the water. Studies conducted by retired University of California (UC) Davis professor of psychology, Richard Coss, and former UC Davis student, Craig Keller found that the average blood pressure and heart rate decreased and relaxation increased while participants of their study viewed bodies of water.² Another way that Amanda decompresses after a long day is playing with her two-year-old American Bully named Whisky. Amanda's love of dogs is what led her to adopt the deaf puppy sometime after the passing of her beloved 13 year old dog, Homer, in 2022. Having pets can be incredibly beneficial in mitigating the effects of stress. The National Institute of Health reports that interacting with animals has been shown to decrease levels of cortisol (a stress-related hormone) and lower blood pressure; while other studies have found that animals can reduce loneliness, increase feelings of support, and boosts your mood.³ Amanda also loves a good bowl of queso, being sure to always order some whenever traveling, even though she feels the "queso is just better in Texas." Finally, I asked Amanda, "if you could have one superpower, what would it be?" Amanda chose time travel or the ability to slow down time. Emphasizing that time goes by too quickly, and that she would want to use her power to spend more time with family and friends. We could all follow that example, choose to slow down, and be present in our lives as well as the lives of the communities that we serve.

Those in positions of leadership should seek opportunities to connect with the people they supervise and the community they pledge to serve. I had the pleasure of being able to ask Ms. Gage questions for this article, in hopes that this would provide an opportunity for myself and the Victim's Informer audience to get to know her better. The TDCJ VSD staff are proud of all that Amanda has accomplished thus far, and we look forward to watching her flourish as our new Deputy Director.



Homer



Whisky



Amanda at the lake with her father, mother, and brother.

References

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Technology and Funding will Power the Next Big Advancement in Equitable Justice

By David Mittelman, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Othram Inc.



In pursuit of an equitable criminal justice system, effective technology is not just an asset; it's a prerequisite. Our mission at Othram is to provide long-awaited answers and justice to countless families burdened by years, even decades, of uncertainty. At the heart of this endeavor is the development and deployment of advanced forensic DNA technology that can power new tools like forensic genetic genealogy. Best-in-class DNA technology empowers us to reduce uncertainty in investigations and successfully close previously "unsolvable" cases. Leveraging these advanced tools, we can bring certainty to unsolved cases, significantly reducing both the time and financial resources traditionally expended by law enforcement in pursuit of justice. This approach streamlines investigations, but most importantly, offers resolution to those who have long awaited the truth.

Forensic genetic genealogy combines genetic genealogical research with modern forensic DNA science, providing a powerful tool in helping solve challenging cold and contemporary cases. The process begins with the extraction of DNA from forensic evidence, often from minute or degraded samples found at crime scenes. This DNA is then subjected to advanced forensic sequencing techniques to build a comprehensive DNA profile. This profile is used in a genetic genealogy search, where it is compared against databases of consented DNA profiles to identify potential genetic matches. Such matches can guide investigators toward suspects in violent crimes such as homicides and sexual assaults, or aid in naming unidentified human remains. Importantly, the success of this method hinges on the quality of DNA profiles obtained from forensic evidence. High-quality DNA profiles are crucial for accurate and meaningful comparisons in genetic databases, while poor-quality profiles make genetic genealogy hard, or sometimes impossible. We must demand the best technology and methods so that every case gets the best chance at a successful resolution. "Good enough" is not good enough for cold cases.

One of the most significant hurdles in fully harnessing the potential of forensic genetic genealogy is funding. Budget constraints

often mean that the technology's benefits are not uniformly accessible, leaving some cases unassisted. We recognized this early on at Othram and tried to address this challenge, in part, with DNASolves, which focuses on community-led fund raising efforts to support forensic genetic genealogy investigations. The success of DNASolves is particularly telling: cases that remained stalled for years, or even decades, often find resolution shortly after being crowd funded, proving that the bottleneck in solving these mysteries lies not in the science, but in the resources allocated to it. Such efforts illustrate the growing recognition of the need for dedicated funding sources, which could come from government grants, private-sector partnerships, and community involvement.

As mentioned, the pursuit of justice in cold cases today is challenged more by funding constraints than by any scientific barriers. This shift underscores the urgency for uniform and broad funding to ensure that everyone, regardless of economic background or the resources of their local law enforcement agencies, has access to this ground-breaking technology. We need to democratize access to forensic genetic genealogy so that every unsolved case has the opportunity to be reopened and every family waiting for answers can hope for resolution. It is through this widespread and equitable funding that the true potential of forensic genetic genealogy can be realized, making it a standard and accessible tool in criminal investigations, and ensuring that justice is not a privilege, but a right accessible to all.

To learn more about forensic genetic genealogy and see hundreds of examples of how this technology has already brought hope and resolution to many, visit DNASolves.com. The stories and case studies there vividly illustrate the impact of cutting-edge DNA testing technology on cold case investigations. However, knowledge is just the first step. We all can drive change. Your advocacy can help make advanced forensic tools widely accessible, bringing justice to more families and communities.

The Role of the Victim Service Professional in Responding to Mass Violence Incidents

By Aurelia Sands Belle, M.Ed., Research Instructor for the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center; & Rochelle F. Hanson, Ph.D., Licensed Psychologist and Professor at the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center

The National Mass Violence Victimization Resource Center (NMVRC) was created on October 1, 2017, at the Medical University of South Carolina, with support from the U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime. The Center's mission is to improve community preparedness and the nation's capacity to serve victims and communities recovering from mass violence through research, planning, training, technology, and collaboration. In October 2023, NMVRC updated their name to the National Mass Violence Center (NMVC).

A 2019 Gallup Poll revealed that nearly half of the United States population fears being the victim of a mass shooting. While this is certainly concerning, the reality is that there has been a significant uptick in the number of violent incidents reported daily by the media. It is important to acknowledge, at the outset, that different terms are used to describe mass violence (i.e., mass casualties, mass shootings, active shooter), with no single agreed-upon definition across various governmental agencies, advocacy groups, the media, and others.

Our work at the NMVC is guided by the Office for Victims of Crime's (OVC) definition:

"...an intentional violent crime that results in physical, emotional, or psychological injury to a sufficiently large number of people and significantly increases the burden of victim assistance and compensation for the responding jurisdiction, as determined by the OVC Director."

OVC's definition is unique because it does not specify a numerical threshold for casualties. This provides them with the flexibility to work with affected communities to determine the level of impact and the types of resources that may be needed.

In the immediate aftermath of a mass violence incident (MVI), nearly everyone will experience significant symptoms of distress, including anxiety, fear, and decreased feelings of safety. Due to the ripple effect of MVIs, those affected will include direct victims and their loved ones, as well as other members of the targeted community. With time, most will recover to their pre-MVI levels of functioning. However, others might develop more serious mental

health problems such as depression, anxiety, extreme lingering and potentially debilitating fear, and even full-blown post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Since NMVC's beginning, we have worked to learn, confirm, and document as much about mass violence as possible. One of the core objectives of the NMVC is to help those who work with victims and survivors. Victim Service Professionals (VSPs), also known as victim advocates, are often the first contact for victims and families in the immediate aftermath of an MVI. However, it is essential that anyone working with MVI victims has a foundation that is grounded in appropriate training, education, and practical application. This article provides an overview for VSPs to support their abilities to deliver services across all phases of an MVI – from Readiness to Recovery and Resilience following a MVI. We encourage readers to seek more information and resources that are available on the [NMVC website](#).

READINESS is the first phase for MVI victim assistance and centers on planning and preparation. The adage, "if you fail to plan, you plan to fail," is undoubtedly true in preparing a response to mass violence. Readiness is all about having a viable plan - already in place - should it be needed. Here are a few of the critical elements of readiness:

- Get to the table! Identify and get to know local partners (e.g., other VSPs, law enforcement, first responders, and volunteers). Establish new (or strengthen existing) relationships across agencies and organizations that assist survivors.
- Develop inter-agency policies that promote collaborative responses. It is best practice to have a Memoranda of Agreement (MOA) or Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) delineating roles and responsibilities. These will foster collaboration and cooperation. We invite you to review the United States Department of Justice (USDJ) [OVC Mass Violence Toolkit](#) for more valuable resources related to planning and preparation.
- Take the initiative to provide training and education about victims' needs. One of the best ways to solidify

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your team is through cross-training. Training helps everyone involved see each other's contributions and strengthens the team's coordination. Ensure all educational trainings are evidence-based and trauma-informed. Topics such as trauma-informed care, crisis intervention and management, psychological first aid, victim compensation, how to provide a sensitive death notification, how to address grief and loss, and cultural awareness and humility are important issues for all team members to understand.

- Participate in the joint drills and disaster response exercises offered by community partners.
- Be sure planning activities and resources are diverse, equitable and inclusive. Planning must reflect the distinct characteristics of a given community in order to address diversity, equity, and inclusion. This also includes how to provide services that are accessible to all [i.e., available to persons with disabilities or differently abled (intellectually, physically, or developmentally), hearing impaired/deaf, speak languages other than English and/or have limited English proficiency].
- Assemble "Go Kits." These are essential tools for VSPs to have ready before an MVI occurs. These are individual and agency kits with contents to help establish and organize the Initial Response and Family Assistance Centers discussed further below. For more information, visit [Go Kit Tip Sheet for Individuals](#) and [Go Kits for Agencies](#).

RESPONSE is the second phase, which refers to the immediate aftermath of an MVI. This is where the carefully crafted plan – developed during the Readiness Phase – is implemented. Remember that no plan is perfect and things will not always go as intended. Responding to a MVI is stressful, making it especially important to remain calm, composed, and flexible.

There are many activities for the VSP during the response phase, such as:

- Triage needs related to physical safety, medical care, physical needs (food, clothing, medicine, etc.), housing, transportation, and financial resources.
- Help victims locate and communicate with loved ones.
- Help establish a secure, private area for law enforcement to interview and maintain the confidentiality of survivors and witnesses.
- Contribute to a centralized, coordinated creation of

an accurate list of victims and survivors.

- Provide information related to Crime Victims' Compensation and help victims/survivors apply on-site or online.

If the perpetrator is apprehended, VSPs can assist victims by providing advocacy and accompaniment to all relevant meetings, hearings, and trials. Most victims are unaware of their statutory rights as crime victims, and VSPs can inform them and refer them to legal professionals for advice and guidance (see [10 Core Rights of Crime Victims & Survivors](#)). The Planning and Implementation guide for Comprehensive Coordinated Victim Assistance for Mass Violence Incident Trials is a detailed resource about court advocacy and can be accessed [here](#).

Interacting with the media can be trying for victims and families. VSPs should have a well-constructed media plan that respects victims' and survivors' privacy. VSPs should inform victims that they have the right to decline an invitation to speak to the media. Publicize social media links that provide timely and accurate information to survivors and the community. Having timely and accurate information is very important to victims and their families. VSPs should foster good working relationships with local media before a community tragedy and receive training on working with the media.

BE AWARE of "experts" coming to offer their services. While having additional help is tempting, VSPs must protect victims because they are vulnerable to any expression of support. While most of these "experts" are well-intentioned, there will not be adequate time to determine their credentials or areas of expertise.

Also, be aware of scam artists who offer to set up donations through platforms such as GoFundMe or telephone donations, as those funds are extremely unlikely to benefit victims. The NMVC has developed some excellent materials to help in the creation of a donation and volunteer plan (link provided [here](#)). There can be many other unexpected challenges and circumstances, such as those who claim the MVI was a hoax or never occurred (i.e., "hoaxers" and "deniers"). These people can inflict a great deal of pain on families, and VSPs should be ready to predict and prepare families in case this happens. See the NMVC tip sheet on handling [Unexpected Challenges](#).

Following most MVIs, there are several different

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centers or systems set up to assist victims across the different phases. Each has a distinct purpose, which is described below.



The Incident Command Center is established

NOTE: We suggest caution in using terms, such as “Reunification” or “Reception,” because they imply favorable outcomes. “Reunification” might suggest reuniting with someone, but that might not happen. “Reception” may denote a happy gathering which is not the case for an MVI.

immediately after the MVI, usually by the lead law enforcement agency with jurisdiction in the community. The purpose is to provide a central coordinating location for emergency responders. It is also a place where critical information can be shared in the immediate aftermath, such as if the assailant has been arrested, the number of casualties or fatalities, the safety of others, and the time of the next briefing.

The Family Assistance Center (FAC; sometimes referred to as a Family Friends and Family Reception/Notification Center) is the first center set up for victims, and it is where VSPs can meet with victims, survivors, and loved ones to provide vital information and support. For more information, refer to the Tip Sheet on [Guidelines for Family Assistance Centers](#) on the NMVC website.

Federal advocates through the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) or the Bureau of Alcohol,

Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives (ATF), often come in to provide direct assistance for a short time to assist in organizing the FAC. To learn more about their work see the [FBI Victim Services](#) and the [ATF Victim/Witness Assistance Program](#).

The Resiliency Center established during the Resiliency Phase (see below), provides a centralized location for victims, survivors, and the impacted community to come for trauma-related services.

RECOVERY & RESILIENCE is the final phase. Here, VSPs can offer emotional support using case management and psychoeducation tools. Often, communities set up Resiliency Centers to have a centralized location for victims, survivors, and the impacted community to come for trauma-related services. VSPs should receive training in brief interventions, such as Psychological First Aid (PFA) and Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR) that focus on support and crisis management to help victims and survivors through the initial trauma. As noted at the outset of this article, nearly all MVI victims will experience symptoms of distress immediately after the incident, and interventions like PFA and SPR target these initial needs. However, some MVI victims will experience long-term, severe and persistent symptoms months after an MVI, warranting a more intensive mental health treatment intervention. Several tip sheets are provided on the [NMVC Tip Sheets](#) web page that describe different brief and more intensive trauma-focused interventions, as well as information on identifying a trauma therapist.

LESSONS LEARNED by the NMVC have been significant.

- First and foremost, most victims do not develop mental disorders, although a minority do.
- Some factors that increase risk for more severe problems include proximity to the MVI, whether an individual or their loved ones were injured or killed, a history of exposure to other traumatic events, and prior or current mental health or substance use/abuse problems.
- Most victims do not seek mental health treatment (even if it would be beneficial).
- Many recover on their own, while others need assistance.
- Social support is protective and program services can help when support is unavailable.
- Disparities exist – these are reflected in terms of the impact of MVIs, as well as the availability and access to potentially helpful services.

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VSPs should plan and work collaboratively, respecting different roles and responsibilities within their organizations and others. They should work in pairs and schedule routine check-ins, especially when working remotely (hospital, providing death notifications, morgue, etc.).

The work of VSPs is always challenging, especially during an incident of mass violence. Be careful to acknowledge when - and the degree to which - you are personally impacted by what has happened. You might likely know or be related to one of the victims, so be careful to exercise appropriate judgment and trust your leaders for guidance on the degree to which you should be involved. All VSPs should take a respite and exercise self-care, remembering to eat, rest, check-in with loved ones, get physical exercise, and rely on your personal source of spiritual strength or philosophical beliefs. Utilize mindfulness techniques and participate in counseling, as needed. Many thanks to you for the role you play in helping others following a very harrowing experience.

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Anger Management and Battering Intervention and Prevention Programs: Two Different Programs Two Different Referrals

By Jennifer Santana, Field Services Director, TDCJ Community Justice Assistance Division

Justice-involved individuals are often required to attend various programs to meet court-ordered requirements, often as conditions of probation or parole. Two such programs include Anger Management and Battering Intervention and Prevention Programs (BIPP). Due to subtle but important distinctions between these two types of programs, there is often confusion about what these programs include and what behaviors they address. As a result, individuals may be referred to a program that does not target appropriate underlying needs.

What is the difference? Why does this matter? To answer these questions, it is important to first understand certain terms such as anger, battering, intimate partner violence, and family violence and identify key differences between anger management programs and BIPPs.

Anger

Webster's dictionary defines anger as "a strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism, or a threatening or violent appearance or state." How a person expresses anger is a learned behavior and will look different from one person to another. Anger can be used to cover other more vulnerable feelings which can include fear, sadness, helplessness, and despair. It can also be an indication of depression.¹

Everyone gets angry; it is a natural emotion like any other. Anger is not necessarily bad in and of itself, but how we express that anger matters. When anger becomes uncontrollable, a problem exists. An even bigger problem is present when anger is used as a tool to control another person.

Addressing Anger Problems

Anger management programs propose that anger is the cause of violence and, as a result, focus on techniques individuals can use to minimize the effects. These techniques often include recognizing the early stages of anger, managing anger while it is still containable, and learning body signals associated with anger. This can lead to problems when these methods are applied by individuals who commit intimate partner violence.

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Battering/Intimate Partner Violence

The terms battering and intimate partner violence are very similar. Battering is defined as repeated acts of violence or threats of violence against an intimate partner that includes using coercion, physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, and stalking. Intimate partner violence is defined as acts of violence and/or threats of violence against a spouse, significant other, or persons involved in a dating relationship that includes using coercion, emotional abuse, physical and sexual abuse, and stalking.² For this article, battering and intimate partner violence are used interchangeably.

Family Violence

Texas Family Code Chapter 71 defines family violence as “an act by a member of a family or household against another member of the family or household.” This definition further outlines the act’s intended result is to cause “physical harm, bodily injury, assault, or sexual assault or that reasonably places the member in fear of imminent physical harm, bodily injury, assault, or sexual assault, but does not include defensive measures to protect oneself.”

Addressing Intimate Partner Violence

The reasons someone chooses to batter run deep; therefore, the approach to address the underlying behavior must go deep as well. Intimate partner violence is a pattern of behavior, not just a one-time occurrence. As mentioned previously, anger management programs propose that anger is the reason a person can become violent. While this may be true outside of intimate partner violence, many apply this same reasoning when abuse occurs within intimate partner relationships. However, an abusive person does not use anger the way everyone else does. An abusive person uses anger to their advantage, thus exerting power and control over their victim. They are very much in control of their feelings, including anger.³ Therefore, sending a batterer to an anger management program instead of a BIPP could make things worse, especially for the victim. The reasons for this are addressed in the section entitled *Why Making the Right Referral Matters*.

Working with Batterers

Effective BIPPs change batterers’ behavior by moving beyond anger and exploring all aspects of abusive behavior. This is accomplished through accountability, addressing underlying attitudes and beliefs, and helping batterers identify how they use anger to control their partner.³ During BIPP sessions, batterers learn that battering is a choice and they can choose not to batter. “The mission of BIPPs in Texas is to eliminate male to female intimate partner violence by providing services to batterers, promoting safety for victims, and bringing about social change necessary to end battering and all other forms of abuse.”²

One specific way BIPPs work with batterers is to help them identify how power and control are expressed in a relationship. Visit a local accredited BIPP and you will most likely see the Power and Control Wheel on a wall where BIPP group sessions are held. The Power and Control Wheel was developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project in Duluth, Minnesota, and can be used by intervention programs as well as those who work directly with victims of domestic violence to help both batterers and victims gain a clearer understanding of power and control. For more information go to <https://www.duluthmodel.org/wheels/understanding-power-control-wheel/>.

The following chart summarizes the differences between anger management programs and accredited BIPPs in Texas.³

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	Anger Management	Accredited BIPPs
LENGTH	May vary between 4 hours to 12 weeks	Must be a minimum of 18 weeks and provide a total of 36 hours of group educational sessions. Some programs may offer programming that is more than 18 weeks.
PROGRAM FOCUS	<p>Addresses an individual’s anger and loss of control. Helps the chronically angry individual overcome rage that arises in specific situations and their general anger against themselves and the world. Utilizes cool-down techniques and Stress Reduction.</p> <p>Problem: Difficulties managing and expressing anger.</p> <p>Goal: To de-escalate internally and externally and more appropriately express anger.</p> <p>Means: Increased self-awareness, internal de-escalation, and external use of behavioral skills.</p>	<p>Addresses the individual’s needs to control their partner. Helps the individual understand the root cause of the need for Power and Control in the abusive relationship. Identifying and changing underlying attitudes and beliefs that promote violence. Emphasis on victim safety.</p> <p>Problem: A person is displaying abusive behavior.</p> <p>Goal: To stop abusive behavior and change the underlying beliefs.</p> <p>Means: Addressing underlying attitudes and beliefs, teaching alternative and equitable skills.</p>
VICTIM OF ABUSE	Anyone	Intimate Partner
PROGRAM VICTIM CONTACT	None	Victims are contacted when the individual enters and exits the program to ensure ongoing safety, notify them of their rights, and provide information about family violence services.
THEORY	Therapeutic techniques and exercises that address excessive and uncomfortable anger and reduce triggers and degrees.	Intimate partner violence is a pattern of behavior, not a single event. BIPP addresses and challenges their unhealthy need to control their partner, which is premeditated and not reactionary. Intimate partner violence is shaped and supported by societal, familial, and cultural norms.
OVERSIGHT	Unregulated	State accredited by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice-Community Justice Assistance Division (TDCJ-CJAD) and is audited every 1-3 years.

Keeping program differences in mind, how can referring agencies ensure individuals are referred to the appropriate program?

Why Making the Right Referral Matters

Because of the differences in these programs, referring someone to the wrong program will not appropriately address the needs of the individual and could lead to further problems. This is especially true when someone who has committed intimate partner violence is referred to an anger management program. Reasons a batterer should not be sent to an anger management program include:

- Refusal/inability to identify source of anger
- Anger management is not taught from domestic violence perspective
- Justifies continued abuse (i.e., I can’t stop, I have an anger problem)
- Anger management techniques are easy to fake
- Anger management does not address the root cause of intimate partner violence⁴

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While both programs provide a needed intervention, it is evident they each target different problems. Anger management programs assist individuals who have trouble expressing and managing their anger while BIPPs focus on and address power and control. Battering results in domination and humiliation of the partner, physical and sexual violence, and intimidation. Anger issues usually do not have the same violent outcomes with an intimate partner. As a result, it is necessary for the referring agency to understand the differences to make the appropriate referral. Referral entities can take action now to become better equipped to make the right referral every time.

Making the Appropriate Referral

Criminal justice professionals face the daunting task of referring the individuals they supervise to appropriate programs and services. Making the appropriate referral means individuals receive programming targeted to meet their needs. How is this accomplished? The following information provides guidelines when making referrals.⁵

Refer an individual to BIPP when that person:

- Has committed family violence
- Is on community supervision (parole or probation) for family violence offenses
- Is the respondent of a protective order
- Is abusive to partner in the presence of their children
- Acknowledges violent behavior and expresses a desire to change

Refer an individual to Anger Management when that person:

- Does not have a history of intimate partner violence
- Does not display patterns of abuse
- Does not appear to have issues with power and control
- Has impulse control problems (frequent embarrassing situations)

A person is inappropriate for BIPP when that person:

- Has untreated psychological disorders
- Needs primary treatment for sexual abuse
- Has untreated substance use problems

When an individual is identified as inappropriate for BIPP:

- The BIPP should refer the individual back to referring agency
- The BIPP may recommend other services
- Referral agencies should consider information provided by the BIPP

Strengthening BIPP Referral Processes:

- Attend regular training from reputable organizations [Events | Texas Council on Family Violence](https://www.tcfv.org) (tcfv.org)
- Carefully review the abuser's case file information and appropriate assessment results from trained professionals familiar with intimate partner violence
- Invite your local BIPP(s) to present program information to you and your colleagues
- Observe an actual BIPP group
- Collaborate with others in your community; establish relationships
- Regularly review your referral processes
- Refer only to accredited BIPPs [BIPP Accreditation Approved](https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/bipp) (tdcj.texas.gov)
- Respond immediately to program non-compliance

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4. Gondolf, Edward; Russell, David. "The Case Against Anger Control Treatment Programs for Batterers." <https://www.biscmi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/THE-CASE-AGAINST-Anger-control-for-batterers.pdf>
5. Texas Council on Family Violence, "Implementing Family Violence Offender Accountability in Texas: An Overview for Professionals Working in the Courts." 2016

Training Opportunities

The Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse (TxCVC) provides training statewide for our partners in the criminal justice and victim assistance fields.

Texas Victim Assistance Training Online

The Texas Victim Assistance Training (TVAT) Online is designed to provide a foundation level training for new victim services professionals who routinely work with victims of crime. Topics include: crime victims' rights, ethics in victim services, stress management, compassion fatigue, crime victims' assistance standards, effective communication skills for working with victims of crime, guiding principles and practices of the victim services field. For more information, please visit the TVAT Online webpage: https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/divisions/vs/tvat_online.html.

Resiliency Module

Serving as a victim service professional can be incredibly fulfilling and rewarding. However, adverse effects can result from continuous interactions with people who have endured horrible criminal acts. Information, preparation, and positive self-care practices can help victim service professionals moderate any adverse effects they may experience. The TVAT Online Resiliency Module explores strategies that can help you recognize, reduce, and transform the adverse effects that may come from working with people who have suffered extreme trauma, grief, and loss. This module teaches coping practices, skills, and techniques that can help you build a resiliency program and prevent or mitigate vicarious trauma. To register for the Resiliency module please go to [TVAT Online Resiliency Module](#) event registration page.

Webinars and Other Trainings

The TxCVC hosts a webinar series designed to provide training on a wide range of topics for criminal justice and victim services professionals. Information regarding future webinars can be found on the [Upcoming Webinars](#) page on the TDCJ VSD website.

Other victim services related trainings and events scheduled in Texas are provided through the search tool found here <https://ivss.tdcj.texas.gov/search-training-event/>.

The database includes trainings, conferences, memorial/remembrance events, webinars, and other relevant events hosted in the state of Texas.

The TxCVC and the TDCJ VSD Regional Victim Service Coordinators (RVSC) can provide training to your agency or coalition. Training content and topics can be developed and integrated to meet your specific training needs and can vary in length. Topics can include post-conviction rights, the Victim Impact Statement (VIS), and victim sensitivity to name a few. We are committed to providing training to meet the individualized needs of communities working to enhance services provided to victims. Trainings provided by TDCJ VSD staff are free of charge. If you would like TDCJ VSD staff to present a training event for your organization, please go to the Event/Training Request page found here <https://ivss.tdcj.texas.gov/training-request/>.

IVSS Links Library

The TDCJ VSD maintains a Links Library on the IVSS website to provide links to helpful tools, information, brochures, and help lines for victims of crime covering topics ranging from Crime Victims' Compensation and safety planning to suicide and self-harm prevention. The Links Library is accessible through the IVSS portal under the Resources tab, but you may click the following link as well: <https://ivss.tdcj.texas.gov/links-library/>.

Texas Victim Resource Directory

The Texas Victim Resource Directory is also located on the IVSS portal at <https://ivss.tdcj.texas.gov/resource-search/>. This directory features a searchable database with over 1,100 service providers from governmental agencies and non-profit organizations that provide services to victims free of charge.

Informational Video Library

The Informational Video Library connects victims of crime to information they may need to navigate the criminal justice system, exercise their rights, and access support and assistance. The library also serves as a resource for victim services and criminal justice professionals who wish to receive training and information on specific subjects related to serving victims of crime. The Informational Video Library is accessible through the Victim Services Website, but you may click the following link as well: https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/divisions/vs/video_library.html.

Staff Wellness Resource Library

While stress and trauma can be an inherent part of the job, you are not alone in navigating your experiences. In addition to victim assistance from the Crisis Response Intervention Support Program (CRISP), Victim Advocates and TDCJ Victim Services Division, the Staff Wellness Resource Library provides links to helpful tools and information for

TDCJ staff regarding wellness and resiliency. Our goal is to connect you to information that may be helpful for you in your work and personal life. By equipping yourself with skills and knowledge for managing the stress of the job, it will help you maintain your quality of life off-duty. The Staff Wellness Resource Library is accessible through the Integrated Victim Services System (IVSS), under the Resources tab, but you may also click the following link: <https://ivss.tdcj.texas.gov/staff-wellness-resources/>.

National Victim Awareness Months

May 2024

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons Awareness Day

May 5th is recognized across the United States and Canada as National Awareness Day for Missing or Murdered Indigenous women and girls. In 2022, the White House issued a proclamation to include all gender identities. While women and girls are the primary victims of violence and human trafficking among Native Americans, they are not alone and people of all ages and gender identities are recognized. For more information, please visit: <https://www.niwrc.org/>.

National Correctional Officers' and Employees' Week

May 5-11, 2024, is National Correctional Officers' and Employees' Week. Established in 1984, the week was created to thank correctional officers and employees for their services and celebrate their contributions to society.

National Police Week

May 12-18, 2024, is National Police Week. The week includes live, in-person events. The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund hold ceremonies, including the 36th Annual Candlelight Vigil to honor fallen officers whose names have recently been added to the memorial. The Candlelight Vigil will be held on Monday, May 13th. For more information about the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund and NPW events, please visit: <https://nleomf.org/>.

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Information About *The Victim's Informer*

Peace Officers' Memorial Day

Every year, May 15th is recognized as National Peace Officers' Memorial Day. This observance takes place during Police Week to honor law enforcement officers who lost their lives in the line of duty.

National Missing Children's Day

May 25, 1983, marked the first National Missing Children's Day. This year marks the day's 41st anniversary, dedicated to encouraging parents, guardians, caregivers, and others concerned with the well-being of children to make child safety a priority. For more information, please visit: <https://ncjtc.fvtc.edu/programs/PR00005772/41st-annual-national-missing-childrens-day>.

June 2024

Pride Month

In June 1999, President Bill Clinton declared June as "Gay & Lesbian Pride Month." In June 2021, President Joe Biden declared June LGBTQ Pride Month. For resources for LGBTQ victims of violent crime, please visit: <https://glaad.org/resourcelist/>.

World Elder Abuse Day

Each year, an estimated 5 million older adults are abused, neglected, or exploited. World Elder Abuse Day was launched on June 15, 2006, by the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) and the World Health Organization at the United Nations (UN). For more information, please visit: <https://ncea.acl.gov>.

The Victim's Informer e-newsletter is published quarterly. Articles and other submissions should be e-mailed to tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.texas.gov. If you would be interested in writing an article and you have questions or comments, please call us at 800-848-4284 or 512-406-5931.

Please Note: You may access the publication at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Victim Services Division (VSD) website by going to www.tdcj.texas.gov/publications/victim_informer_newsletter.html. If you wish, we will notify you via e-mail each time *The Victim's Informer* becomes available on the TDCJ VSD website and provide an electronic link to *The Victim's Informer*.

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