



Publication Date: April 2009

Law enforcement officers are often the first professionals to approach victims after a crime and may be the only contact victims have with the criminal justice system.¹ Increasingly, law enforcement officials are training officers to better work with victims and are establishing victim assistance components in their agencies. Many rural agencies, however, face challenges in making these changes.

Victim Services in Rural Law Enforcement explores creative and economical ways for rural law enforcement agencies to meet the needs of victims at the crime scene and during followup contact, despite the barriers. Based on the experiences of 17 sites that received OVC funding to establish or enhance victim assistance efforts in their law enforcement agencies, the publication—

- Reviews the grant project.
- Highlights site activities.
- Identifies core elements and challenges of rural law enforcement-based victim service programs.
- Offers a blueprint for rural law enforcement agencies interested in initiating their own victim service efforts.

For more detailed summaries highlighting individual site efforts, see the [Site Summaries](#) section.

About This Publication

Acknowledgments

OVC appreciates the efforts of the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), the Alabama Attorney General's Office, Justice Solutions, and the subgrantee law enforcement agencies under this demonstration project. Their work has created models for rural law enforcement agencies throughout the country to use and adapt in undertaking similar victim assistance initiatives.

OVC thanks Teresa Jones, formerly Program Manager with the Alabama Attorney General's Office; Timothy Woods, Director of NSA's Research, Development and Grants Division; and Diane Alexander, Director of Justice Solutions, for their significant contributions to this publication. Appreciation also goes to the subgrantee sites for the information they provided on their grant activities. In addition, OVC thanks other Justice Solutions staff—David Beatty, Executive Director; Trudy Gregorie, Director; and Kerry Naughton, Program Specialist—for preparing written material for the NSA final report to OVC that was incorporated into this publication.

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NCJ 226275

This product was supported by grant numbers 2002-VF-GX-0113 and 2002-VF-GX-K003, awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this product are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Office for Victims of Crime is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

For Further Information

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Message From the Director

The assistance that law enforcement agencies provide to crime victims after a crime occurs is critical—particularly because it may be the only contact that victims ever have with the criminal justice system. Due to the isolation, geographical distances, and limited resources available to law enforcement agencies in rural areas, the challenge of meeting the needs of victims is even greater. In the aftermath of victimization, many victims in rural areas never receive the vital services necessary to begin their emotional, physical, and financial healing. To creatively and economically meet this challenge, rural law enforcement agencies need assistance in identifying resources and promising practices.

In 2002, OVC began funding a demonstration initiative to support the development of models for enhancing or establishing victim assistance efforts in rural law enforcement agencies that might be replicated in other rural jurisdictions around the country. OVC awarded grants under the Victim Services in Rural Law Enforcement Project to the National Sheriffs' Association and the Alabama Attorney General's Office for the administration of a national pilot project and state pilot project, respectively.

This publication reviews the pilot sites' efforts, activities, approaches, challenges, and successes. It is meant to serve as a guide for other rural law enforcement agencies that want to undertake similar efforts.

Joye E. Frost
Acting Director
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Introduction

"How law enforcement first responds to victims is critical in determining how victims cope, first with the immediate crisis and, later, with their recovery from the crime."²

When law enforcement officers respond to victims in a compassionate manner and connect them with community resources, officers can help victims begin their recovery. A helpful initial and followup response to victims by law enforcement also can increase the likelihood that victims will participate in the investigation and prosecution of the crime.³

Recognizing this critical role, U.S. law enforcement leaders are increasingly integrating victimization issues into officer training and incorporating victim assistance components into their agencies.⁴ Urban and suburban law enforcement agencies historically have had greater capacity to support victim assistance initiatives than their rural counterparts. Agencies in rural areas can face challenges that make it difficult to create or expand victim services.⁵ For example—⁶

- **Metropolitan communities sometimes expand into rural areas.** This can tax existing law enforcement and social service resources.
- **Many rural areas have growing ethnically diverse populations.** However, they often lack resources to address the cultural, linguistic, and outreach needs of crime victims from these populations.
- **Rural areas experiencing population growth may not experience parallel economic growth.** Rates of unemployment and poverty in many rural areas are higher than state and national rates. High poverty rates may be accompanied by increased crime and more victims in need of assistance.

- **Rural communities often lack sufficient funding for public safety and victim assistance programs.** Not only do rural areas have a lower local tax base to fund such programs than urban areas, but comparatively lower crime rates and smaller populations also mean less state and federal funding for victim services.⁷ Rural law enforcement agencies may lack the infrastructure, such as personnel, policies, equipment, and training, to support victim services. If a prosecution-based victim assistance program exists, services are usually limited to cases tried in court. There are typically few local and regional community-based victim service agencies and providers.
- **Many rural law enforcement agencies serve populations dispersed over a large geographic area.** Often, only a few officers per shift are responsible for patrolling a significant amount of land. Responding to calls may require officers to travel considerable distances, sometimes through rugged terrain, making timely response all but impossible in some cases.
- **Rural residents may find it difficult to access victim services.** Rural communities may offer only limited public transportation, phone service, and childcare options. In addition to not being able to afford such services as medical treatment and counseling in the aftermath of a crime, victims may find it challenging to seek help if they lack a vehicle or money for transportation, funds for a babysitter to watch their children, or time-off benefits from work. They also may not live close to services.
- **Victims in rural areas may be reluctant to report crimes and use services.** Victims may be wary in general of seeking assistance outside their families or social circles and particularly from public agencies. They may be concerned about a lack of anonymity when they report a crime or seek help or that the responding officer will side with the offender if they are friends or relatives. Victims may also be reluctant to report a crime when the person they accuse lives in the same small, tight-knit community, and they can expect to cross paths in the course of their daily lives. These and other reservations can lead to underreporting of crime, making it difficult to form a clear picture of the extent of crime in the area and to obtain funding to deal with the problem.

Benefits

The rural law enforcement-based victim service programs funded through this grant program provided much needed assistance to a significant number of crime victims. The programs built partnerships with and among local organizations and service providers to connect victims with resources. Not only did these partnerships positively affect victims, they often raised the stature of the law enforcement agency in the community as a champion for victims.

When staff from these programs assisted victims during initial law enforcement response, officers were often able to spend more time on other crime scene duties and quickly move onto other calls. Victim service staff also enhanced case management by working with investigating officers to offer victims assistance and followup information on their cases. The involvement of victim service staff in cases often increased the likelihood that victims would actively participate in the criminal justice process.

This publication explores creative and economical ways for rural law enforcement agencies to meet the needs of victims at the crime scene and during followup contact, despite the barriers.

About the Grant

In 2002, OVC provided funding to the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) and the Alabama Attorney General's Office to develop a 4-year grant project titled Victim Services in Rural Law Enforcement. NSA worked with a consultant, Justice Solutions, to ensure the victim advocate perspective was fully integrated into its project. Each grantee competitively selected 10 rural pilot sites to participate in its projects. The Alabama grant concluded with seven participating sites. The following sites were selected:

NSA Subgrantees

- Arizona: Pinal County Sheriff's Office (Pinal County)
- California: Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office (Siskiyou County)
- Georgia: Monroe County Sheriff's Office (Monroe County)

- Maine: Aroostook and Washington County Sheriff's Offices and the Maine State Police (Aroostook and Washington Counties)
- Minnesota: Mahnomon County Sheriff's Office (Mahnomon County)
- Nebraska: Valley Police Department (Valley)
- New Mexico: Dona Ana County Sheriff's Office (Dona Ana County)
- North Carolina: Cherokee County Sheriff's Office (Cherokee County)
- Ohio: Ross County Sheriff's Office (Ross County)
- Washington: Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribal Police Department (Port Gamble S'Klallam)

Alabama Subgrantees

- Calera Police Department (Calera)
- Hartford Police Department (Hartford)
- Luverne Police Department (Luverne)
- Mobile County Sheriff's Office (Mobile County)
- Montgomery County Sheriff's Office (Montgomery County)
- Pell City Police Department (Pell City)
- Washington County Sheriff's Office (Washington County)

Subgrantees focused on developing a helpful and sensitive initial law enforcement response to crime victims and followup assistance designed to promote victim recovery and participation in the criminal justice process.⁸ Multiyear funding allowed sites to develop their victim service initiatives in three phases. The first phase was dedicated to assessing community needs related to serving victims, planning, building collaborative relationships in the community as needed to meet victims' needs, identifying key grant activities, and creating a plan for implementation. During the second phase, sites implemented grant activities and planned how to evaluate project effectiveness. Sites varied in their actual activities during each phase and the time it took to complete each phase. Sites continued delivery of services during the third phase, evaluated the effectiveness of services, and worked to sustain their efforts beyond the grant period.⁹

In addition to monitoring the programmatic and financial activities of sites, NSA and the Alabama Attorney General's Office conducted periodic site visits to offer technical assistance as needed, including assessing community needs, planning for implementation, coordinating training, and evaluating project outcomes. During each project phase, grantees also convened cluster meetings to offer guidance, training, and an opportunity for information sharing among their subgrantees. At the end of the project, both grantees and subgrantees documented and analyzed their grant activities for OVC.

Most rural law enforcement agencies will not have the level of structured support that the 17 subgrantees had when creating their own victim service initiatives. However, instead of starting from scratch, agencies should use the lessons learned by project grantees and subgrantees in this publication as a guide to developing programs that address the needs of victims in their localities.

Overview of Activities

Numerous sites faced increasing populations and rising crime rates without a parallel rise in law enforcement and victim service resources. Population size of other sites remained unchanged, but they suffered from a shortage of victim services. For example, some indicated that although domestic violence was their most frequently reported crime, their communities lacked resources to address the specialized needs of these victims. For these and other reasons, sites developed law enforcement-based victim service initiatives. This section looks across sites at [needs assessment](#) methods and results, [program variations](#), [impact](#), and [sustainability](#).

More details about each of the 17 sites' grant activities can be found in [Site Summaries](#).

Needs Assessment

To gather information from crime victims, service providers, and law enforcement officers about gaps in victim services, the sites employed various approaches, including written and verbal surveys, community forums, and focus group discussions. Some used volunteers and consultants, such as a university professor or a victim service agency, in addition to internal resources to develop survey instruments, conduct assessments, and compile data. Because it was often difficult to get feedback, some sites relied on multiple data collection methods. For example, the Hartford Police Department surveyed the general population and police personnel and reviewed incident reports to identify the frequency of various crimes. The department also sought feedback from members of its interagency advisory council.

Sites collected data on various factors, including—

- The scope of local crime.
- Community resources and victims' use of those resources.
- Victims' satisfaction with help they received from law enforcement, other agencies, and service providers in the aftermath of a crime.
- Perceptions of law enforcement officers and service providers on the effectiveness of response to victims.

Although each site generated locality-specific findings, there were common findings across sites, such as the need for—

- More training for rural law enforcement officers.
- Greater coordination among those working with or on behalf of crime victims in rural areas.
- More services for rural crime victims, such as on-scene crisis intervention and referrals; financial aid; support and advocacy during the criminal justice process; emergency assistance with food, clothing, and shelter; transportation; mental health services; legal assistance; and victim notification of offender's pending release from incarceration.
- Improved response to victims of specific crimes, particularly domestic violence, sexual assault, and child and elder abuse.
- Overall improvement of the criminal justice system in such areas as the need for more law enforcement followup with victims, a local court, informational materials for victims, services of victim advocates, and better victim notification services.
- Increased public awareness of victimization issues and resources available to crime victims.

Program Variations

This section explores differences among the sites:

- [New or Enhanced Program?](#)
- [Use of Volunteers](#)
- [Demographics](#)
- [Implementation Tasks](#)

New or Enhanced Program?

Six sites used the OVC grant to expand their existing victim service initiatives.

- The Monroe and Montgomery County Sheriff's Offices added staff to their victim service programs and increased resources available to victims and program staff.
- The Mahanomen County Sheriff's Office expanded on its basic victim services to create a more formal victim-witness services program.
- The Dona Ana County Sheriff's Office hired a victim advocate for its existing victim assistance initiative to develop a rural satellite office.
- As an alternative to having in-house victim services, the Valley Police Department partnered with the regional YWCA to expand its victim advocacy program to all crime victims in Valley.
- The Maine State Police, whose site encompassed both the Aroostook and Washington County Sheriff's Offices, built on an existing collaboration with a regional social service program to streamline the victim service referral process for officers in these jurisdictions and to provide support and information to victims referred by them.

Eleven sites created new programs to improve law enforcement response to rural crime victims: the Calera Police Department, Cherokee County Sheriff's Office, Hartford Police Department, Luverne Police Department, Mobile County Sheriff's Office, Pell City Police Department, Pinal County Sheriff's Office, Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribal Police Department, and the Ross County, Siskiyou County, and Washington County (Alabama) Sheriff's Offices.

Most sought to provide prompt assistance to victims in the immediate aftermath of a crime, followup support, and information and assistance to facilitate their healing and participation in the investigation. Many of these sites viewed their programs as a much-needed link between the law enforcement agency, victims, and community service providers.

Use of Volunteers

Nine sites integrated a volunteer component into their initiatives: Aroostook and Washington Counties, Cherokee County, Dona Ana County, Mahanomen County, Monroe County, Pell City, Pinal County, Ross County, and Siskiyou County. Whereas most sites used volunteers to supplement provision of services or to assist with administration, Pinal County used them as primary service providers. Some agencies sought specific types of volunteers—Cherokee County, for example, recruited volunteers with work experience in criminal justice and social service agencies. Siskiyou County, on the other hand, developed a volunteer-based family violence response team to respond to victims of these crimes.

Demographics

As required by the grant, every site created services to respond to the needs of all crime victims. In addition, some sites identified specific types of crimes, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, and child and elder abuse, which occurred with high or increased frequency in their jurisdictions. These sites often developed strategies to improve response to victims of these crimes.

For example, Mahanomen County's Victim-Witness Services Program worked with the county clerk in developing a new court procedure that would assist individuals petitioning to dismiss existing orders for protection. The advisory board for Siskiyou County's Victim Service Unit included groups that advocated for older adults because the unit wanted to address a gap in services for this population.

The grant programs also served various populations. For example, Dona Ana County's initiative responded in large part to the needs of the county's growing Mexican migrant farm worker population, many of whom were undocumented. Ross County served a predominantly Appalachian population. Port Gamble S'Klallam and Mahanomen County provided services primarily to Native Americans.

Some sites had small populations ranging from about 1,900 to 12,000, including Calera, Hartford, Luverne, Mahanomen County, Pell City, Port Gamble S'Klallam, and Valley. Several comprised multiple towns, such as Cherokee County, Monroe County, Ross County, and Washington County (Alabama). Aroostook and Washington Counties and Siskiyou County had large land masses and sparse populations. Some sites were a mix of rural, urban, and suburban areas, such as Dona Ana County, Mobile County, Montgomery County, and Pinal County. The majority of sites were poor compared with state and national averages, including Aroostook and Washington Counties, Cherokee County, Dona Ana County, Hartford, Luverne, Mahanomen County, Mobile County, Siskiyou County, and Washington County (Alabama). A number had fast growing populations, including Calera, Cherokee County, Dona Ana County, Luverne, Monroe County, Pinal County, and Ross County. The number of residents over age 25 with college degrees ranged from 7 percent to 29 percent across sites.

To a certain extent, demographic variations influenced which services and outreach efforts were identified as project priorities and whether site activities were effective in serving local victims. For example, many residents in Ross County came from a culture that was very private. The Victim Service Unit of the Sheriff's Office initially offered a victim support group but, due to lack of participation, altered its outreach strategy to attending meetings of established support groups in the area to provide project information and to encourage victims to contact the unit for support. In terms of addressing variations in language, Calera, Dona Ana County, Mobile County, and Montgomery County developed literature and services in Spanish.

Implementation Tasks

The sites' primary activities varied based on the needs identified in their respective community needs assessments. Activities included the following:

- Establishing a law enforcement-based victim services program and recruiting, hiring, and assigning staff.
- Seeking the support of law enforcement leaders to implement policy changes.
- Building relationships between officers and program staff to coordinate victim assistance.
- Forming partnerships between law enforcement agencies and local victim service and social services agencies to optimize victim services.
- Creating and coordinating interagency advisory committees to provide guidance to the program.
- Coordinating training for officers.
- Seeking out professional development opportunities for in-house victim services staff.
- Developing materials for victims that are distributed by responding officers and victim services staff.
- Providing a range of victim services, including those for specific types of victims.
- Coordinating public education and publicity efforts of the program.

- Evaluating victims' satisfaction with services and community perceptions of program effectiveness.
- Participating on local task forces and attending community meetings and events.
- Working with law enforcement leaders to plan for program sustainability.

Impact

Most sites indicated that their law enforcement agencies and community partners dramatically increased the level and types of assistance provided to victims at the crime scene or following a crime report. Collectively, the sites reported serving more than 14,000 victims in some capacity during the grant period. More specific outcomes included the following:

- [Systems In Place To Facilitate Victim Assistance](#)
- [Victim-Centered Attitudes and Practices](#)
- [Increased Partnerships and Networking](#)
- [Increased Use of Local and Regional Resources](#)
- [Gaps in Responses to Victims Addressed](#)
- [Shifts in Public Attitude](#)
- [Positive Profiles of Law Enforcement Agencies](#)
- [Overwhelmingly Positive Feedback](#)

Systems In Place To Facilitate Victim Assistance

Most sites established procedures to facilitate timely victim assistance during the initial law enforcement response and the investigation. Their victim service initiatives often aided victims who otherwise would not have accessed the criminal justice system or community resources. The Dona Ana County's Victim Assistance Unit, for example, reached out to migrant farm workers.

Victim-Centered Attitudes and Practices

Officers' attitudes shifted regarding their role in assisting victims and their acceptance of a victim service component in their agencies, leading them to adopt a more victim-centered¹⁰ approach to their work. The administrator of Cherokee County's Victim Advocate Program, for instance, facilitated acceptance by riding along with deputies on their patrol shifts to learn about their duties and the challenges they face when responding to domestic violence calls. In turn, the deputies came to understand the positive effect of having a victim advocate on hand to assist the victim. At most sites, officers learned about the benefits of in-house victim services and increasingly connected victims to those services. For example, Pell City assigned an officer to its Victim Service Unit and his established relationships with other officers were invaluable in getting them to refer victims to the unit.

Increased Partnerships and Networking

Law enforcement agencies at several sites contracted with social and victim service agencies to help implement the grant—Montgomery County worked with a local victim service organization, Victims of Crime and Leniency, to conduct a needs assessment. Some sites used multidisciplinary committees to guide their efforts and facilitate coordination with local agencies—Hartford convened an interagency council to establish its Victim Service Office and recruited the County Family Guidance Center to act as its host and facilitator. Many law enforcement agencies began participating in existing crime-related community organizing efforts—Mobile County's victim services coordinator was active on the County Domestic Violence Task Force. In a few instances, victim services program staff helped rejuvenate or expand

collaborative initiatives—Mahnomen County's Victim-Witness Services Program and Siskiyou County's Victim Service Unit played a leading role in enhancing their local coordinated responses to sexual assault victims.

Although some local organizations were initially cautious about partnering with a law enforcement-based victim services program, over time these programs proved their value as a resource for victims and a partner to other agencies serving victims.

Increased Use of Local and Regional Resources

Referrals from law enforcement-based victim service programs led more victims to obtain help from local service providers—Montgomery County's Victim Service Unit created a toll free hotline so that victims could obtain recorded information on area resources. Community service providers also began referring victims to the law enforcement-based victim service programs—Port Gamble S'Klallam established procedures with the Harrison Hospital Sexual Assault Nursing Team and Social Work Department, and with the Kitsap County Sexual Assault Center, to contact its Crime Victim Advocate Program if a Native American victim came to their agencies.

Gaps in Responses to Victims Addressed

The needs assessment process helped sites identify gaps in the law enforcement and community response to victims, and they designed programs to bridge those gaps; when the Maine State Police's Project Connection learned that elder victims and victims whose cases were not prosecuted were not applying for victim compensation, it began helping victims fill out these applications.

Shifts in Public Attitude

At many sites, community outreach and education efforts increased the public's awareness of victimization issues and its willingness to use law enforcement-based victim service programs and other local resources. For example, Ross County placed kiosks in different locations to help connect residents with resources. Each kiosk had a touch screen personal computer containing information on the project and the resources available to local crime victims. Montgomery County's Victim Service Unit printed a hand fan in English and Spanish with information about local resources and distributed it mainly to churches.

Positive Profiles of Law Enforcement Agencies

The reputation of law enforcement agencies at most sites benefited from their victim service efforts, partnerships built with local organizations, publicity campaigns to raise awareness of services, and staff participation in local events and meetings. At a few sites, including Mahnomen County, Monroe County, Pinal County, and Ross County, the victim services initiative garnered state and national recognition.

Overwhelmingly Positive Feedback

Sites evaluated the effectiveness of their efforts using such means as victim comment forms and written and phone surveys. Victims who provided feedback overwhelmingly indicated satisfaction with the help they received from the victim service programs and law enforcement agencies. They commented that the victim services staff/law enforcement agency helped them recognize their rights as victims, participate in the criminal justice process, learn about and access other resources, and cope with their situation. Some sites also surveyed officers, other justice office personnel, and local service providers and mainly received encouraging and constructive feedback on the usefulness of their initiatives.

Sustainability

The majority of sites sustained their law enforcement-based victim service initiatives beyond the grant period.¹¹ Approaches to sustainability varied, and most agencies used multiple strategies to increase the likelihood that their of program would continue.

Institutionalizing the Program

Some programs worked to institutionalize their initiatives in their law enforcement agencies. For example, Mahnomen County's Victim-Witness Service Program gathered data to demonstrate its usefulness to victims and the agency, developed a slideshow highlighting the program, and drafted a position description to be added to the county's *Policy Information and Record Manual*.

Absorbing Costs

Some programs encouraged their law enforcement agencies to absorb program costs into their existing budgets. For example, Monroe County committed to support a victim service coordinator's position within its budget. Several programs focused on building infrastructures in their agencies so their costs would be absorbed into agency budgets. For example, Calera's Victim Service Unit encouraged the police chief to make policy changes related to assisting victims and to create mechanisms to ensure officer compliance with those policies. The unit developed an array of materials to standardize the agency's response to victims.

Requesting Funding From Local Government

Some programs encouraged their law enforcement leaders to request increased funding from their local governing bodies. For example, funding from the county permitted the Dona Ana County Sheriff's Office to make two additional advocate positions in the Victim Assistance Unit permanent.

Seeking Grant Funding

Several programs sought federal and state government grants and nongovernmental grants. For example, the Office on Violence Against Women awarded grants to Pinal County and Port Gamble S'Klallam to support their victim assistance initiatives. Pinal County's Volunteer Service Team partnered with the state Department of Corrections to allow prisoners to raise funds or donate directly to the team. Private foundation funding and in-kind support allowed the Maine State Police to continue offering Project Connection services in Aroostook and Washington Counties.

Seeking In-Kind Contributions

Several programs sought in-kind contributions for services, equipment, office space, and publicity. For example, Valley and the YWCA sustained their relationship after the grant period ended, with the YWCA using its existing revenue sources to continue to provide services to all Valley crime victims. Luverne's Victim Service Unit partnered with a local motel owner to arrange for short-term accommodations for domestic violence victims. A key to this approach was being creative in identifying potential resources.

Integrating the Program Into Existing Efforts

A few law enforcement agencies integrated elements of their victim service programs into other agency initiatives. For example, when faced with budget cuts, Siskiyou County combined its Victim Service Unit with other agency units to sustain its efforts.

Success in sustaining these rural law enforcement-based victim services programs was affected by factors such as personnel turnover, staff tenacity and experience in seeking funding and resources, and the degree of support received from law enforcement leaders, governing bodies, community agencies, and the public. Other factors included local politics and administration changes in law enforcement agencies and local government. Sustaining these efforts required vigilance from program staff to counter factors that could negatively affect program continuance and to maintain the support of the law enforcement agency, the community, and funders.

Core Elements and Challenges

The success of the rural law enforcement-based victim service programs developed or enhanced through the OVC grant appeared to be linked to some or all of the 10 elements described below. Note that many of the elements come with challenges to surmount.

Support at All Levels

The leadership of sheriffs and police chiefs is essential to ensuring that agency resources are committed to the victim services program, policy changes are institutionalized to reflect victim-centered practices, agency personnel are held accountable for complying with policies, and the program is sustained over time. Program success also depends on support from officers and their supervisors. Sites often relied on officers to provide victims with written information about their rights, community resources, and law enforcement-based victim services. Coordination between victim services staff and officers also was helpful in following up with victims, addressing victim concerns, and promoting victim involvement in the investigation.

Developing and sustaining law enforcement-based victim service programs may require similar tasks across rural, urban, and suburban sites. However, the impetus for creating the program, challenges to establishing and maintaining it, and approaches used to overcome challenges may be unique to each type of location. Sites funded through this OVC grant had to cope with common challenges facing rural areas. See [Introduction](#) for a list of these challenges.

Challenges

Without the support of agency leaders, it may be difficult to implement and sustain a victim services program.

It is important to take the time early in program planning, or if there has been a change in agency administration, to explain to leaders the benefits of law enforcement-based victim services. It may help to stress that having an in-house program to address victim needs and connect victims to officers and community resources can streamline the case management process, allow officers to handle an increased number of calls and spend more time on other aspects of investigation, and increase the likelihood that victims will participate in the criminal justice process. Agency leaders may be more supportive of starting and sustaining an in-house program if the results of a community needs assessment demonstrate that such an initiative is needed, if they are presented with a realistic plan for funding and implementing the effort, and if feedback from victims on program services is positive.

It may take considerable effort to shift officer attitudes related to assisting victims.

At many sites, victim services staff coordinated training seminars for officers on topics such as domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, trauma related to criminal victimization, victim sensitivity during evidence collection, and barriers victims face in accessing help. They coordinated with agency leaders to instruct officers on related policy changes, including handing out brochures to victims, requesting an advocate at the crime scene, and referring victims to their programs. Officers appeared to be more receptive to policy changes when department heads or supervisors presented them and consequences for noncompliance were clear. Victim services staff also met individually with officers to explain the program and elicit their cooperation. Although one-on-one interactions were time consuming, they were highly effective in facilitating positive relationships between victim services staff and officers.

Coordination and Collaboration

Law enforcement-based victim services programs must work with local criminal justice offices, social service agencies, and victim service providers to coordinate, streamline, and optimize victim services. It also makes sense for rural law enforcement agencies in the same region to consider partnering to ensure consistent victim services and maximize use of personnel.

Most of the grant sites emphasized nurturing relationships with local agencies that served victims. One-on-one interaction with agency representatives to introduce the law enforcement-based victim services initiative was invaluable in building trust. As relationships developed, those involved became more comfortable about referring victims to local services, working together to assist victims in a timely manner, and collaborating to enhance the community response to victims.

Challenge

Local community organizations that serve victims may initially be reluctant to work with a law enforcement-based victim services program.

They may be cautious if they have no history of partnering with their law enforcement agency or if they have had past conflicts. They may be concerned that the existence of such a program might lead them to lose funding, detract from the public support they receive, or duplicate services they provide.

To overcome reluctance, site programs sometimes created forums for discussions with community organizations. They held meetings and did individual outreach to discuss what the agency planned to accomplish and how they hoped to partner with community organizations rather than compete with them for funding. They stressed that their services could help reach victims who traditionally did not take advantage of community resources and aid them in connecting with local organizations that could address their needs. Community organizations were asked to serve on their advisory boards and assist with needs assessments and evaluations. Some of the law enforcement subgrantees participated in community task forces to network with local organizations and increase their credibility as legitimate victim service providers. After addressing initial concerns, most sites gained the support of community organizations.

Advisory Committee

An advisory group that represents a cross section of the criminal justice system and social and victim services can be a tremendous asset when gathering data for a needs assessment, seeking qualified staff, devising a program that speaks to local needs, developing a well-thought-out plan of action, coordinating services across disciplines, and otherwise guiding program staff as they implement the program and challenges arise.

Committee members should understand that creating and sustaining law enforcement-based victim services requires adjusting to shifts in victims' needs and in the resources available to support these initiatives.

Dedicated Staff

The sites found that developing, making operational, and maintaining victim-centered practices in a rural law enforcement agency requires dedicated staff. Most sites used grant funding to support staff positions that developed and oversaw their victim services programs and provided direct services. Some also used consultants to complete short-term tasks, such as conducting needs assessments and evaluations, and some used volunteers.

Challenge

Some sites had difficulty hiring and retaining staff, securing sufficient staff to meet their needs, providing an optimal working environment, and sustaining staff positions.

To counter these problems, law enforcement agencies planning these initiatives should consider the following:

- How will qualified staff be found? The more rural the site, the harder it often was to find qualified staff. To attract more candidates, some sites advertised locally and in surrounding area newspapers and forwarded job announcements to local and regional social service agencies.
- Will staff be civilians or officers? Some agencies hired civilian staff, while others assigned staff, usually sworn officers, with an interest in victim issues. If assigning agency personnel, think about whether they are motivated to remain in the position over the long term and if the time period for the assignment is sufficient to develop and sustain the initiative.
- Will volunteers be used? Several agencies used volunteers to expand their capacity to serve victims. Successful use of volunteers requires support and cooperation from agency personnel and a system for managing, recruiting, training, and supervising volunteers.
- How will personnel turnover be handled? At several sites, officers initially assigned to the program were rotated to other initiatives in their agencies. A few sites that hired civilian staff dealt with resignations during the grant period. If turnover occurs, the law enforcement agency should plan to quickly reassign personnel or should hire new staff with the appropriate skills, interests, and background.
- Where will the office be located? An important factor in choosing an office for the victim services program was whether the location maximized accessibility for victims and allowed staff to easily coordinate their services with investigating officers.
- How will the agency sustain positions over time? Most sites found the resources they needed to sustain their victim service positions. A few law enforcement agencies partnered with local or regional service organizations to ensure continued assistance for victims.

Information Gathering

Assessing community needs helped the subgrantees to identify local problems and strengths related to serving crime victims and develop customized strategies to address gaps. In some instances, assessment results led agencies to emphasize working with particular groups of victims. Once the program was operational, staff periodically sought input on program effectiveness from victims, law enforcement officers, other criminal justice personnel, and service providers. Evaluative measures—victims' satisfaction forms, written and phone surveys, and focus group discussions—helped ensure programs were in tune with victims' needs. Some sites established databases to track the victim services they provided, which they then tapped into for evaluative statistics, excluding identifying information. Evaluation results can be used to increase the effectiveness of the response to victims and support program staff as they seek additional funding.

Challenge

Discovering how to best serve victims in a community can be a resource-intensive process.

To help gather needs assessment and evaluative data, some sites used resources of member agencies on their multidisciplinary committees. Some law enforcement agencies partnered with local service organizations experienced in community surveying. Several enlisted consultants, such as university faculty, to lead needs assessment and evaluation efforts. Some used volunteers to gather data, including college interns and graduate assistants.

Sites used numerous strategies to deal with the common problem of low response rates to needs assessment surveys. Some relied on multiple methods to collect data, such as written surveys, focus groups, town hall meetings, and targeted surveys for specific populations. Some embedded their needs assessment questions in broader community surveys. Some surveyed large pools of victims as identified in law enforcement records over a specific time period. The aid of community organizations and groups was sought to distribute surveys and increase victim participation in focus groups and meetings.

Implementation Plan

After assessing community needs, law enforcement agencies should consider which activities they can realistically undertake to fill identified gaps in victim services. Rather than start from scratch, they can build on existing victim service initiatives within their law enforcement agencies, criminal justice systems, and communities. Plans for sustaining the program should be incorporated into the implementation strategy—when planning focuses on producing a programmatically and fiscally sound project, the program is more likely to be sustained.

Challenge

Planning and implementing a rural victim services initiative may take more time than anticipated.

Be generous when estimating the time it will take to educate officers and the public, put new policies into practice, establish a new office, hire staff, build relationships with other criminal justice offices and community organizations, provide outreach to victims, and institutionalize the initiative. *The plan must also take the rural nature of the jurisdiction into account.* For example, how far do victims need to travel to seek victim services and attend court hearings? What will it take for crime victims to be able to easily access program services? How can the program overcome a victim's reluctance to seek help? How quickly can victim services staff respond to requests for crime scene assistance?

Training

Most law enforcement agencies at the sites trained their officers on victim-centered practices and on implementing new policies related to victim services. At several sites, victim services staff became instructors for the law enforcement academy to help standardize officers' response to victims. Some agencies offered training to their officers and those from law enforcement agencies in the region. Most sites also sought training for victim services staff to improve their capacity to assist victims.

Challenge

It was hard to find time for officers to gather for trainings on victimization issues and for the introduction to the new victim services program and policies.

To overcome this difficulty, victim services staff frequently met with officers one-on-one to introduce the program, get their feedback on victims' needs, and identify training topics. Some agencies made certain training seminars mandatory and repeated seminars as needed to ensure that all officers attended.

Provision of Services

Victim services differed across sites, depending on local needs and law enforcement capacity. Examples of services initiated included round-the-clock crime scene assistance and hotline phone service, assistance for those reporting at the law enforcement agency, information and community referrals, followup contact, counseling and support groups, court advocacy, 911 phones, transportation assistance, housing assistance, financial assistance, materials in English and Spanish, and victim notification of their offender's imminent release.

Challenges

As much as sites wanted to meet all the needs of crime victims, they could initiate only services that were feasible through the law enforcement agency or in collaboration with community partners.

The primary goal was to create a structure in which officers were trained to interact with victims appropriately and victims could receive information about their rights and services. Most sites went beyond this goal.

Although needs assessments indicated that victims wanted certain services, some services, including free

counseling and transportation assistance, were rarely used.

It may take a concerted effort on the part of the victim services program for victims to feel comfortable seeking assistance through a law enforcement agency.

Community Awareness

Many site programs needed to transform the public's perception of their agencies—often, residents were not accustomed to having a law enforcement agency initiate victim services. To enhance their credibility, victim services staff at many sites presented workshops, participated in community events, and wrote newspaper articles to educate the public on victimization issues and services offered by the law enforcement agency and in the community. Many coordinated publicity campaigns to raise public awareness of their programs, nurture a positive view of the agency in the community, and encourage officers to support their efforts. Some reached out to specific populations such as older adults to build their trust in and use of their programs.

Tools for Success

To begin operation and institutionalization of their victim services programs, law enforcement agencies at the sites used the following:

- Written materials in multiple languages.
- Publicity tools, such as public service announcements and paid advertisements for print, radio, Internet, television, and billboards; promotional items; regular newspaper columns; and Web sites.
- Memorandums of understanding among agencies.
- Policies and operational procedures for officers and victim services staff.
- Procedures to encourage officers to comply with policy changes, such as requiring them to document on the incident report that they gave the victim a victims' rights brochure.
- Databases for tracking the victim services provided and other case information.
- Needs assessment and evaluation methods and tools.

Starting Victim Services

This section should guide rural law enforcement agencies in establishing in-house victim service initiatives. Note that tasks listed in the following subsections may occur concurrently and do not have to happen in the order listed. Agencies should consider whether tasks need to be customized to fit their jurisdictions' needs.

Explore Feasibility

- Consider whether the victim services program can be built on an existing service or collaboration.
- Initiate discussions with law enforcement agency leaders about supporting an in-house victim services program. Be ready to discuss and provide materials on potential program activities and benefits, needs assessment results, funding ideas, and

how the project might be implemented.

- Consider using an interagency advisory committee to guide the effort. Involving community and government agencies in the needs assessment process and program design and implementation sends a message that the goal is to work together to serve victims rather than compete with each other.
- Seek guidance from others around the country who have developed similar programs or can provide expertise on specific topics such as victims' rights, policy development, and collaboration. OVC's Training and Technical Assistance Center (<http://www.ovc.gov/assist/welcome.html>) can help connect you with experts and programs. In addition, the International Association of Chiefs of Police offers a number of valuable training opportunities (<http://theiacp.org/Training/tabid/68/Default.aspx>).

Assess Needs

- Determine how data on community needs will be collected—through surveys, focus groups, or town hall meetings, for example, and who will gather and analyze the data. Consider retaining a consultant with research experience—the consultant's expertise and skill may increase the quantity and quality of data collected.
- Use multiple methods to survey victims to learn about their experiences in the criminal justice system, what would have improved their experiences and their level of awareness, and their use of and satisfaction with local resources.
- Survey law enforcement personnel, staff from other government agencies, and service providers. Seek input on the effectiveness of existing services and resources and gaps in services.
- Gather local crime statistics during a specific time period to learn which crimes are most frequently reported and their rates of prosecution and conviction. Compare reported figures to the numbers of victims seen by community agencies such as domestic violence shelters or rape crisis centers.
- Consider how local demographics can influence which services and outreach efforts are needed—language-appropriate services for a growing non-English speaking population; transportation assistance in a large, sparsely populated jurisdiction; and education on victimization issues and services offered for older adults who may be reluctant to use law enforcement-based victim services.
- Compile and analyze the results. Identify gaps in services and brainstorm solutions for filling those gaps.
- Use the results as a basis for discussion on how the law enforcement-based victim service initiative will build on strengths and address gaps in the community response to crime victims.

For a helpful resource on conducting a needs assessment, see the OVC bulletin *Denver Victim Services 2000 Needs Assessment* (http://www.ovc.gov/publications/bulletins/dv_10_2000_1/welcome.html).

Design the Program

- Develop an action plan based on the results of the needs assessment. Identify specific strategies the program will use to address gaps in victim services. Be realistic about the limitations of the law enforcement agency when planning strategies. Develop a timeline and identify tasks for implementing each strategy, persons who ideally will be responsible for completing each task, and which resources will be needed. Be clear about whether the strategy will focus on all crime victims or specific populations of victims.
- Identify factors that could facilitate or impede successful implementation of program strategies and sustainability over time. Consider how to build on positive elements and overcome challenges.
- Consider how each program component will be sustained. Sustaining an effort depends on more than obtaining funding. It is also essential to create an infrastructure of policies, methods to facilitate policy compliance, and community education to

support success and continuance, plus materials and training.

- Incorporate mechanisms that allow victims to comment on their satisfaction with the services they received and for law enforcement officers and community partners to comment on the program's strengths and challenges. There should be a way to enhance the project based on this feedback. Plan multiple evaluation methods as it is often difficult to get feedback from crime victims.
- Develop a written implementation plan and disseminate it to law enforcement personnel, criminal justice personnel, and community service providers—those with whom you want to implement tasks, support and fund the initiative, coordinate provision of services, or assist in reaching out to victims. Invite their input on the plan and assess their capacity to collaborate with the program. Demonstrate to them that the program wants to be their partner, not their competitor.
- Once criminal justice and community partners commit to the initiative, consider developing memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with them. MOUs identify the agreed-upon responsibilities of each agency involved and are signed by agency leaders. MOUs can help actively engage agencies in working together to enhance local provision of victim services.

Obtain Resources

- Consider what types of funding and resources are needed to implement the project. Expenses might include personnel and training; meetings and conference calls among partnering agencies; victim assistance (items to give victims at the crime scene, transportation and housing vouchers); program publicity and outreach such as advertisements, printed materials, Web sites, and promotional items; equipment including computers, software, cell phones, pagers, and vehicles; services such as phone and printing; supplies; and equipment to enhance evidence collection.
- Explore what can be done without seeking additional funding. Consider existing regional resources that might be useful. For example, law enforcement agencies, prosecution offices, local organizations, and businesses may be willing to donate office space, personnel time and expertise, services, equipment, and supplies. Residents and college students might be willing to volunteer.
- Determine what types of additional funding are required to implement and sustain the project, if any.
- Identify potential funding sources and apply for funding. Governmental grant funding is a staple of any development plan. In addition, be proactive and creative in seeking nongovernmental funding—from national, state, and local foundations and local businesses and organizations. Consider applying jointly with other entities if it will assist in implementation or increase your chances of receiving a financial award. If your agency does not have experience writing funding proposals, seek assistance from someone with experience or attend a workshop on grant writing.

Hire Personnel

- Determine the program's needs for contractual versus salaried personnel. How long will staff be needed and for what specific tasks? Consider getting victim services staff in place as early as possible to allow time for them to build relationships with law enforcement officers and local service providers, which is essential to successful program implementation. Think about how the agency will sustain permanent staff positions over time.
- Clarify how each position will be financed and supervised.
- Consider whether staff will be civilians or officers. Civilians can bring knowledge of community resources and experience working on victim issues, administering service programs, and building partnerships. However, those with little experience in victim or social services and few community connections may take significant time to gain support from officers, prosecution office and court personnel, and local service providers. If sworn officers are assigned to the program, consider their experience or level of interest in working with victims and related training they have received or may need.

- Develop job descriptions and applications for each position.
- Determine how to recruit qualified civilian staff, such as advertising through multiple outlets, conducting a regional search, and using local organizations to circulate job announcements and identify candidates.
- Advertise positions, screen candidates, and hire.
- Provide staff with sufficient training opportunities and supervision related to administering the program and delivering victim services. Also, encourage staff to network with local victim services and social services providers for support and guidance, attend related conferences at the state and national level, and learn about and model practices of successful victim services programs.
- If staff turnover occurs, reassess personnel needs and promptly seek new staff with the appropriate skills, interest, and experience.

Recruit Volunteers

- In addition to paid staff, consider using volunteers to expand the project's capacity to serve victims. Obtain the commitment of agency personnel to work alongside volunteers.
- Think about which activities would be appropriate for volunteers, such as information gathering for needs assessments and evaluations, clerical support, and direct victim assistance.
- Create volunteer job descriptions and applications, commitment and confidentiality agreement forms, training and resource materials, and written protocols, procedures, and forms.
- To recruit and retain volunteers, consider their interests, skills, and willingness to participate in training and supervision and to be subject to background checks. Although it may be challenging to recruit specific types of volunteers, it may be relatively easy to retain them if they are a good fit for the position.
- Recruit volunteers for training sessions and provide training. Allow volunteers to shadow staff or more experienced volunteers after they complete classroom training but before they begin to deliver services on their own. Provide volunteers with routine supervision, continuing education, and opportunities to debrief about individual cases as needed.
- Periodically recruit for volunteers, as some turnover in the volunteer pool is likely. In addition, the law enforcement agency may occasionally want to expand the program's volunteer component.

Make the Program Operational

- Establish a program office. The location should maximize accessibility for victims and allow staff to easily coordinate with officers. If multiple counties are served, consider using satellite offices.
- Be clear about which services the program will offer victims—will it solely provide information and referrals, or will it offer a broader range of services? Consider steps involved in delivering each service. Train staff to provide/coordinate services. Create a system for communicating with law enforcement officers and community partners to activate services or coordinate service delivery.
- Obtain equipment and supplies needed to implement the program.
- Develop policies, protocols, and procedures that outline how each program component will operate and be coordinated with law enforcement officers and other agencies. Pilot test protocols and procedures and make revisions as needed. Take

steps to facilitate officer compliance with these policies, protocols, and procedures.

- Develop forms to track the services provided; activate coordinated response by victim services staff, officers, and community partners; and facilitate compliance with program policies. Also consider developing a computer database to track service delivery.
- Take steps to gain officers' cooperation in implementing the program. Start by developing and distributing informational materials to officers and providing them with victim resources. Determine the best methods to train officers on victimization issues, victims' rights, and local resources, and instruct them on new policies, protocols, and procedures. Provide training seminars on a regular basis if there is a high staff turnover. In addition, reach out to officers and their supervisors individually to increase their understanding of the program, learn what they think victims need, demonstrate program benefits, and build their comfort level in using the program. These one-on-one interactions can be invaluable in creating positive relationships between victim services staff and officers. Also, recognize that little things such as simply acknowledging a job well done can make a difference in building trust between officers and victim services staff.
- Develop program materials for victims and the public in the languages and formats appropriate to predominant populations. Distribute materials to victims via law enforcement officers and to residents during local events and through outlets in the community.
- Market the program to the community. It may take time for the public to become comfortable using a law enforcement-based victim services program. First, raise public awareness and the awareness of community organizations of the availability of the program, using various marketing methods, including public service announcements or paid advertisements for print, radio, Internet, television, and billboards; promotional items; regular newspaper columns; Web sites; staff participation in community events and meetings; and staff involvement in crime prevention task forces. Seek positive media coverage. Public awareness efforts should work to counter victim reluctance to report crimes and seek services and be customized to address community-specific needs, such as outreach to farm workers that can be done after their work day, at locations they frequent, and in their language of preference. Also, initiate relationships with community partners to ensure that they refer victims to the program and coordinate with the program on individual cases.

Sustain the Program

- Celebrate program successes and milestones.
- Conduct periodic evaluation of victims' satisfaction with services, as well as law enforcement and community perceptions of program effectiveness. The information gained can be used to enhance the program and support staff as they seek continuance funding.
- Be willing to adjust services if victims' needs change or there is a way for the program to conserve resources while still effectively meeting victim needs. Also, be flexible in changing methods of community outreach and program publicity if it seems certain services are not being used.
- Encourage victim services staff to work with law enforcement leaders, community partners, and their advisory committees, if they exist, to deal with program-related challenges as they arise.
- Work to institutionalize the program in the law enforcement agency. Gather data that supports the program, draft job and program descriptions, develop materials highlighting program accomplishments and present them to agency leadership and local governing bodies, and develop proposals for potential funders. Seek to permanently fund staff positions.
- Seek renewed commitment from law enforcement agencies and community partners. Memorandums of understanding (MOUs) can come in handy—agency leaders can be asked to review their responsibilities periodically and sign the MOU again to indicate ongoing commitment to supporting the initiative.
- Seek additional funding and resources to maintain the program—consider governmental grants, nongovernmental funding and donations, in-kind contributions, and partnering opportunities.

Conclusion

The OVC grant allowed participating rural law enforcement agencies and their community partners to provide assistance to more than 14,000 crime victims collectively during the grant period. The site initiatives helped these victims begin their healing, tap into community resources, and raise their comfort level in participating in the criminal justice process. The accomplishment of serving these victims takes on even greater magnitude when the challenges that rural law enforcement agencies had to overcome to provide these services are considered: geographic isolation, poverty and rising crime rates, shortage of public transportation, lack of public awareness of community resources, victim confidentiality issues, and shortage of public safety and victim assistance resources. These initiatives also allowed law enforcement officers in rural areas to spend more time focusing on their investigative duties and provided an in-house liaison to victims in each case.

The efforts of the subgrantee sites laid a foundation for other rural areas interested in implementing or enhancing law enforcement-based victim services. Using this publication as a guide, rural law enforcement agencies are encouraged to consider the strengths and gaps in their responses to crime victims and explore how to initiate an in-house victim services program or to expand an existing effort to address some or all of these gaps.

Notes

¹Office for Victims of Crime, 2006, "[OVC Focus On... Victim Services in Rural Law Enforcement](#)" (Web page), Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime.

²National Sheriffs' Association, Updated 2001, [First Response to Victims of Crime: A Handbook for Law Enforcement Officers on How To Approach and Help Elderly Victims, Victims of Sexual Assault, Child Victims, Victims of Domestic Violence, Victims of Alcohol-Related Driving Crashes, and Survivors of Homicide Victims](#), Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime, iii.

³Parker, Susan, 2001, [Establishing Victim Services Within a Law Enforcement Agency: The Austin Experience](#), Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime, 1.

⁴Adapted from Parker, 1.

⁵American Prosecutors Research Institute, Updated 2007, [Rural Victim Assistance: A Victim/Witness Guide for Rural Prosecutors](#), Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime, 3. Although this sentence refers to prosecution-based victim services, it also can be applied to law enforcement-based victim services and other local victim service providers.

⁶Bulleted section adapted in part from: Lewis, Susan, 2003, [Unspoken Crimes: Sexual Assault in Rural America](#), Enola, PA: National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 3–6. Littel, Kristin, 2007, [Sexual Assault Response and Resource Teams \(SARRT\): A Guide for Rural and Remote Communities](#), On-Line Training Institute Course EAW 11, Addy, WA: Ending Violence Against Women International, and [Rural Victim Assistance: A Victim/Witness Guide for Rural Prosecutors](#), 3–4 and 7–11.

⁷[Rural Victim Assistance: A Victim/Witness Guide for Rural Prosecutors](#), 3.

⁸Adapted from "[Victim Services in Rural Law Enforcement \(Cooperative Agreement\)](#)," [Office for Victims of Crime FY 2002 Discretionary Grant Application Kit](#), Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime.

⁹This paragraph was partially drawn from the unpublished final report to OVC on this grant project from the Alabama Attorney General's Office.

¹⁰In this document, the term "victim-centered" refers to practices that address the needs of crime victims related to law enforcement response. The following publications offer a further discussion of these needs: *Victim Services and Law Enforcement: Next Steps*, summary page, and *What Do Victims Want? Recommendations from the 1999 IACP Summit on Victims of Crime*, iii, both published by the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

¹¹The 10 NSA sites and four Alabama sites were able to sustain their victim service efforts at some level after the grant ended. Two law enforcement agencies discontinued their victim service programs due to lack of funds to support staff positions. Resignations of key staff at another agency led to the discontinuation of its victim service program.

Site Summaries

Under the OVC-funded Victim Services in Rural Law Enforcement program, the National Sheriffs' Association (<http://www.sheriffs.org/>) and the Alabama Attorney General's Office (<http://www.ago.state.al.us/>) awarded competitive subgrants to rural law enforcement agencies to develop or enhance victim assistance efforts. Both NSA and the Alabama Attorney General's Office created structures to manage their projects. NSA selected sites across the country, while the Alabama Attorney General's Office selected sites within its state.

In addition to overseeing site activities, the grantees provided training, opportunities for information sharing among subgrantees, and technical assistance as needed to facilitate project implementation at each site. Ultimately, OVC and grantees hoped to learn from the experiences of the sites what it takes to establish, enhance, and sustain a rural law enforcement-based victim services initiative and to develop blueprints to guide other law enforcement agencies in replicating these efforts.

This section discusses the two grant projects and highlights activities of each of the 17 subgrantee sites rather than providing a detailed account of needs assessment methods and results, site activities, challenges and accomplishments, and evaluation methods and results. Unless a date is otherwise indicated, any statistics provided were current as of the time the site submitted its final project report. Statistics regarding numbers of personnel were reported by each agency and differ in format.

NSA Sites

Throughout its 68-year history, the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) has offered programs designed to aid sheriffs, deputies, police chiefs, police officers, and others in the public safety field in performing their jobs and serving residents of their jurisdictions in the best possible manner. OVC awarded NSA the Victim Services in Rural Law Enforcement grant to develop and manage a project to integrate and enhance victim services in rural law enforcement agencies across the country.

NSA partnered with Justice Solutions to ensure that a victim advocate perspective was fully integrated into the project. Justice Solutions is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing rights, resources, and respect for victims and communities hurt by crime; improving governmental and societal responses to crime; and strengthening crime prevention initiatives. NSA funded 10 rural sites to participate in the project out of 32 that submitted grant proposals:

- [Arizona: Pinal County Sheriff's Office](#)
- [California: Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office](#)
- [Georgia: Monroe County Sheriff's Office](#)
- [Maine: Aroostook and Washington County Sheriff's Offices and the Maine State Police](#)
- [Minnesota: Mahnomon County Sheriff's Office](#)

- [Nebraska: Valley Police Department](#)
- [New Mexico: Dona Ana County Sheriff's Office](#)
- [North Carolina: Cherokee County Sheriff's Office](#)
- [Ohio: Ross County Sheriff's Office](#)
- [Washington: Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribal Police Department](#)

Arizona: Pinal County Sheriff's Office

Pinal County, Arizona, between Phoenix and Tucson, covers 5,374 square miles with an average of 34 persons per square mile. Western Pinal County is open desert and home to bedroom communities of both metropolitan areas, while the east is mountainous and rural. The county is contiguous to three Indian reservations. It is the second fastest growing county in the Nation, with a population of 179,727 in 2000 and an estimated 271,059 in 2006.

Residents are predominantly White (59 percent), Hispanic (30 percent), Native American (7 percent), and Black (4 percent). The median household income is \$40,255, and 15 percent of the population lives in poverty. Less than 12 percent of residents 25 years and older have a college degree, and 25 percent speak a language other than English in their homes. There is no public transportation in unincorporated regions and limited access in incorporated areas. The Pinal County Sheriff's Office has 602 employees: 246 sworn officers, 111 civilian employees, and 245 jail and corrections employees.

Due to rapid growth in the county population, the Pinal County Sheriff's Office faced increases in crime and demand for its services. To address this demand, it needed to find a way to allow its deputies to more quickly clear calls while ensuring response to crime victims did not suffer. Its solution was to create a Victim Services Division Volunteer Corps to provide on-scene assistance to crime victims 24/7 and followup support. The sheriff's office hired a volunteer coordinator through the OVC grant to act as the program administrator and trainer, as well as office liaison to the County Attorney's Victim Services Division and other government and community agencies that serve victims.

The coordinator used information gathered through a needs assessment and from key stakeholders in the community and county government to design the program and develop policies, procedures, forms, and protocols. During the process of recruiting volunteers, the sheriff's office realized there was interest from citizens, retired law enforcement officers, and criminal justice employees in a wide range of volunteer activities within the agency. This interest, paired with the county's changing law enforcement needs, led the sheriff's office to widen the scope of work volunteers could undertake. Subsequently, the Volunteer Corps became the Criminal Investigations Bureau (CIB) Volunteer Service Program, consisting of the following:

- **Victim service volunteers** provided crime scene aid to victims and their families, including crisis response, grief/loss intervention, information and referral, transportation, aid with basic needs, and followup assistance. Volunteers were recruited from each of the three regions and eight communities the sheriff's office served, so response time was reduced when they were dispatched from their homes.
- **Identification unit volunteers** assisted and supported the Crime Scene Unit in working with technicians at crime scenes and storing evidence files, photographs, and written documentation.
- **Cold case squad members**, usually retired law enforcement officers, worked individual homicide cases.
- **Administrative support volunteers** provided clerical and administrative support to CIB departments.

The program has since expanded to include chaplain's unit volunteers, victim service domestic violence response members, Gold Canyon Citizens on Patrol, and professional volunteers including forensic artists and fraud investigators. There was some resistance to program expansion from community and governmental stakeholders involved in initial planning—in retrospect, the sheriff's office would have stressed from the start that flexibility was critical in planning and implementation of this project. The coordinator was charged with developing a system to manage this volunteer program that met county and sheriff's office standards. Although the rapid expansion of the program created additional development and management work for the coordinator, it also made her indispensable to the agency.

The sheriff's office donated four seized vehicles to the Victim Service Program. An auto dealership and tire company provided maintenance in exchange for advertising on the vehicles. Volunteers used pagers, wore uniforms, and had access to police radios when on call. Bags stocked with flashlights, first aid kits, personal care items for victims, and games and stuffed animals for children also were available to volunteers responding to calls.

By the grant's end, 130 volunteer candidates had been screened using criminal and traffic violation histories, an oral board interview, fingerprinting, and a background investigation. Of these candidates, 79 completed a 43-hour training program. Although the intensive screening process limited the number of candidates who went on to volunteer, it was a useful measure of the candidates' commitment to the work. Volunteers attended monthly supervision/training meetings.

Between March 2005 and December 2006, the Victim Service Program responded to 128 calls, mostly to victims' homes or the crime scene, and served 1,550 victims. Average response time was 42 minutes. In a majority of cases, victims also received followup assistance or support. Not only did the program allow deputies to connect victims with useful resources, but it also enabled them to spend less time at the crime scene.

The coordinator received certification as an Arizona Police Officers Standards and Training Instructor in victimology and became an instructor at the regional police academy, training all new law enforcement officers in the county and its municipalities. She also created a training program on victimology for county justices of the peace and superior court judges and worked with the Adult Probation Office to develop a presentence services program for victims.

The sheriff's office continued the program and sustained the coordinator's position at the end of the grant period. The office also received a grant award from the Office on Violence Against Women to enhance its response to domestic violence victims and their children. In addition, the coordinator entered into an agreement with the state Department of Corrections—each month, prisoners at one facility were to raise funds for or donate directly to a Victim Service Program fund.

In 2006, the coordinator received the Pinal County Sheriff's Office Employee of the Year Award. The Arizona Attorney General selected the project for the 2006 Most Innovative Victim Services Award. In 2007, NSA recognized the program with its Crime Victim Services Award. The program was slated to be replicated in multiple jurisdictions in Arizona.

California: Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office

Siskiyou County is located on the northern border of California adjacent to Oregon, with 6,287 square miles and an average of seven persons per square mile. Its land includes five national forests, four major wilderness areas, and a large number of lakes, rivers, and wetlands. Elevations vary from a low of 520 feet near its western boundary to 14,162 feet atop Mt. Shasta. The county has an estimated population of 46,091 (2006), with residents dispersed over a dozen small communities (54 percent reside in unincorporated areas).

Residents are predominantly White (83 percent), Hispanic (9 percent), and Native American/Alaska Native (4 percent). Much of western Siskiyou County lies outside of the power grid, making telephone service available only to residents of incorporated towns and those who live along main transportation routes. The median household income is \$32,531, and 15 percent of residents live in poverty. Of residents 25 years of age and over, 18 percent have a college degree. Public services have suffered since the closure of most of the county's lumber mills and the reduction of tax revenues from this industry. The Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office has 95 staff in enforcement/patrol and 40 staff in the jail.

Using the OVC grant, the Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office created a Victim Service Unit to build its capacity to assist crime victims and support them in accessing services available in the community. Specifically, the unit strove to enhance its immediate response to victims, improve safety for victims and first responders, reduce victim trauma, encourage victims to use local services, and increase involvement of community agencies in serving crime victims and coordination across agencies to maximize services.

The administrator who was assigned to the Victim Service Unit had previously managed the office's Community Crisis Resistance Unit. She brought with her knowledge of the county's courts, social services, and advocacy systems and was state certified as a victim-witness advocate. Her duties included overseeing a countywide needs assessment of resources and gaps in victim assistance, operating the unit, facilitating collaborative activities, and serving as a liaison for the sheriff's office with the community.

As a result of the needs assessment, the unit sought to provide or coordinate the following victim services: on-scene crisis intervention, financial assistance, criminal justice support and advocacy, transportation assistance, mental health services, legal assistance, and emergency food, clothing, and shelter. To assist her in services provision, the administrator trained three volunteers to be part of a family violence response team piloted in one area within the county. She anticipated expanding the area served by this team in the future.

An advisory board was created to advise the unit. The board included representatives from countywide law enforcement agencies, the county district attorney's office, the county Victim Witness Program, the Violence and Crisis Center, the local domestic violence program, Adult Protective Services, Child Protective Services, the Senior Peer Counseling Program, and the Yreka Senior Program. The regional Area Agency on Aging and the Senior Advocacy Center of Northern California were also partners—the involvement of several groups that advocated for older adults was due to a project focus on addressing a gap in responding to domestic elder abuse. The board met regularly to assess unit goals, objectives, and progress. As part of its community awareness campaign, the unit and its partners presented unit goals and objectives to the County Board of Supervisors to gain its support.

The sheriff's office developed policies to enhance initial response to crime victims. Education was critical in building agency personnel's awareness of victim issues and in getting local organizations to coordinate with the unit. In addition to training deputies on the new policies, the unit trained first responders on responses to family violence and dispatcher liability in domestic violence calls. Programs on sexual assault and elder and dependent adult abuse were offered to victim service providers and criminal justice personnel within the county. The unit conducted train-the-trainer classes for first responders and local resource providers to build capacity for more training across the county on responding to crime victims. The administrator also did community outreach—presentations, newspaper articles, and victim service Web site information were used to increase residents' knowledge of victims' rights and encourage their use of local resources if they became victims of crime.

The unit assisted 146 crime victims during the grant period. Although it took time to build relationships between the sheriff's office Victim Service Unit and local organizations, the result was increased networking among these agencies to address the needs of individual victims. Unit efforts also led to systemic improvements in response to crime victims. For example, prior to the grant, rape victims had to travel to neighboring county hospitals for examinations and treatment. With a more coordinated response to victims spearheaded by the unit, the Siskiyou Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) was able to establish an examination site at a local hospital.

Toward the end of the grant period, the administrator focused on making the unit and her position permanent within the sheriff's office. But with budget cuts looming, it was impossible to sustain the momentum for institutionalization of the unit. Ultimately, the Elder Abuse Unit, the Veterans Office, and the Victims Service Unit were combined into one unit under the project administrator.

Georgia: Monroe County Sheriff's Office

Monroe County is located in the heart of Georgia, covering 397 square miles. It has an estimated population of 24,433 (2006). Its largest town and county seat, Forsyth, has an estimated 4,171 residents (2006). The county is growing due to the expansion of surrounding towns and an influx of people from the Macon and Atlanta areas; the

population in 2000 was 21,757.

Residents are predominantly White (72 percent) and Black (26 percent). The median household income is \$44,195, and 10 percent of the population lives in poverty. Of residents 25 years of age and over, 17 percent have a college degree. The Monroe County Sheriff's Office has 124 employees: 58 sworn officers, 66 civilian employees, and 26 jail and corrections employees.

In 1992, the Monroe County Sheriff's Office established a children's advocacy center, the C.A.R.E. (Child Abuse Reporting Enforcement) Cottage. Over time, the C.A.R.E. Cottage expanded to include the Sheriff's Victim-Witness Program and to provide assistance to all crime victims in the county. By the time the sheriff's office was awarded the OVC grant, the C.A.R.E. Cottage was in need of increased resources to respond to the steady rise in crime victims seeking its services.

The director of the C.A.R.E. Cottage brought together a multidisciplinary working group to assist with a needs assessment to identify gaps in services and guide planning and implementation of the grant project. The goal was to heighten the comprehensiveness of services offered to victims. The group included representatives from law enforcement, prosecution, probation, schools, mental health services, the Department of Family and Children Services, and other service agencies. The working group was invaluable in ensuring grant activities reflected the needs of the community as indicated in the needs assessment and keeping project implementation on course.

Grant funding made it possible to enhance the capabilities of the C.A.R.E. Cottage. A full-time victim services coordinator was hired to supplement existing staff. Through the grant, the director obtained state and national accreditation as an advanced victim advocate and the victim services coordinator obtained state and national accreditation as a basic victim advocate. The C.A.R.E. Cottage provided direct victim services, such as making contact with victims at the crime scene, the hospital, or a safe location as quickly after a crime occurs as possible; assisting the victim in obtaining medical, emotional, and financial assistance; providing information and referrals; accompanying victims during court proceedings; and providing transportation assistance. College student volunteers assisted staff in meeting demand for C.A.R.E. Cottage services by helping to mail out victim packets, aiding with victim followup, and providing office support. The C.A.R.E. Cottage assisted approximately 1,780 victims during the grant period.

To respond to the lack of affordable, local counseling services for crime victims, the project contracted with area mental health therapists to provide two free group therapy/victim support classes at the C.A.R.E. Cottage. One therapist led a loosely structured program that could incorporate new members easily. Another offered a more structured program on a different night.

Beyond direct victim services, the C.A.R.E. Cottage produced public awareness resources including magnets, bookmarks, and handouts; a brochure describing C.A.R.E. Cottage services; instructional materials for deputies on response to victims; and materials for deputies to give to victims. To optimize services for victims, the C.A.R.E. Cottage built partnerships with local service providers, such as the Department of Family and Children Services, the Macon Rescue Mission, and the River Edge Behavioral Health Center.

The project's decision to create only one victim services coordinator position was based on sustainability—the sheriff's office did not have the budgetary resources to assume more than one additional employee. Toward the end of the grant period, the sheriff's office committed to support this position within its budget. It also continued the counseling program.

Maine: Aroostook and Washington County Sheriff's Offices and the Maine State Police

Aroostook County is Maine's northernmost county, covering 6,453 square miles with an average of 11 persons per square mile. The estimated population of 73,008 (2006) is predominately Franco-American and 96 percent White. The median household income is \$32,629, and 15 percent of residents live in poverty. Of residents 25 years of age and over, 14 percent have a college degree. The county is home to the Maliseet and Micmac Bands, who do not live on reservations.

Washington County, Maine, is the easternmost county in the United States, covering 2,528 square miles with an average of 13 persons per square mile. The estimated population of 33,288 (2006) is 94 percent White and 5 percent Native American. The Passamaquoddy Tribe lives here on two reservations. The median household income is \$29,087, and 17 percent of residents live in poverty. Of residents 25 years of age and over, 15 percent have a college degree.

In both counties, seasonal work is a major source of industry. Both have poverty and crime rates that are higher than state and national averages. Both have economies that were negatively affected by the closing of military bases in the 1990s. Both share borders with Canada. Aroostook and Washington County Sheriff's Offices and the Maine State Police share responsibility for providing law enforcement services in the two counties. They have a call-share agreement in which the closest officer is dispatched to a call, allowing each agency to maximize limited personnel resources. Each county has 1.1 officers per 1,000 residents and the state police average 1.4 officers per 1,000 residents.

For the OVC grant, the Maine State Police, the Rapid Response Trauma Network (RRTN), and the Aroostook and Washington County Sheriff's Offices collaborated to form Project Connection. The project sought to streamline the victim services referral process for officers responding to a crime scene. Prior to the grant, RRTN worked with the State Police Criminal Investigation Division III to provide services to children exposed to violence and trauma in Penobscot, Piscataquis, Aroostook, Washington, and Hancock Counties. The grant allowed the state police to contract with RRTN to expand its services to include all crime victims in Aroostook and Washington Counties.

Project Connection partners signed a memorandum of understanding and met monthly to implement the program. RRTN hired a coordinator to facilitate and manage the program. The coordinator surveyed crime victims and law enforcement officers to gain feedback on current response to victims and unmet needs. She established offices in each county to allow her to interact and build relationships with officers from the three law enforcement agencies. The coordinator also recruited and trained a small number of volunteers to maximize the project's capacity to assist victims.

By using Project Connection as a referral source, officers at any of the three agencies could make one telephone call connecting victims to additional services. The referral protocol for officers was as follows:

- During initial law enforcement response, officers offered victims written information about the project.
- Officers left a message on the project's toll free phone line—each county had its own line—including victim contact data, a summary of the crime, and the officer's callback number.
- The coordinator checked lines twice a day and assigned cases to volunteers for followup contact or, when appropriate, handled the calls directly. As needed, the coordinator met face-to-face with victims.
- Before leaving the crime scene, officers provided each victim with a packet containing a letter explaining Project Connection and information on available services. To obtain victim feedback on services, the packet also included a stamped, anonymous satisfaction survey card that victims could complete and return to the program. The project struggled to get victim feedback despite use of these cards.

To implement the protocol, partners created a work group consisting of patrol officers and supervisors from each law enforcement agency. The group met monthly, and then quarterly, to provide oversight and feedback. A workshop was presented to officers and RRTN staff on the one-call approach. The coordinator did community outreach to explain the new procedures to social service agencies and the public and to encourage project utilization.

To encourage officers to follow the protocol, the coordinator communicated with them individually through phone calls, e-mails, and meetings; provided them with promotional materials; and accompanied them on patrol. Agency command staff made it clear they supported the project and instructed their officers on its use. For example, Washington County's protocol directed its deputies to e-mail computer aided dispatch sheets to the coordinator every 2 days. She reviewed them to make sure she was following up with victims in each case and contacted the responding deputy as needed to discuss cases. When the rate of victim referrals to Project Connection from deputies started to drop, refresher training was provided to all officers.

Over the grant period, 184 victims were referred to the project. In many cases, project staff provided support and assistance beyond the initial referral. Project Connection also helped identify and fill gaps in local services. For example, when the project learned that elder victims and those victims whose cases were not prosecuted were not applying for victim compensation, it began assisting victims in completing these applications.

The longstanding collaboration among the law enforcement agencies allowed Project Connection to withstand the retirement of the Washington County sheriff and two key state police lieutenants and gain the full support of the newly elected sheriff and lieutenants. The new sheriff even provided RRTN with office space, conference facilities, and technical support (the project office was originally housed with Catholic Charities). This new location offered greater access to deputies and the operations of the sheriff's office.

The state police agency has continued project services in Aroostook and Washington Counties through private foundation funding and in-kind support.

Minnesota: Mahnomen County Sheriff's Office

Mahnomen County, covering approximately 576 square miles with an average of nine persons per square mile, lies within the borders of the White Earth Ojibwe Reservation. There are 16 townships and no metropolitan areas. The estimated population of 5,072 (2006) is predominantly White (63 percent) and Native American (29 percent). Seven percent reported being two or more races. Native Americans live primarily in the eastern part of the county. Of residents 25 years of age and over, 12 percent have a college degree. The county is one of the state's poorest—16 percent of residents live in poverty—and has one of the state's highest crime rates. The Mahnomen County Sheriff's Office has 18 employees, with 17 sworn personnel.

The Mahnomen County Sheriff's Office began providing crime victim services in 1999 and experienced a considerable increase in numbers of victims seeking assistance from 2000 to 2002. To respond to this demand, the office used the OVC grant to expand existing victim services efforts and create a formal Victim-Witness Services Program based in the courthouse, in close proximity to the sheriff's office and other county agencies.

A project administrator was hired to implement the program. She surveyed crime victims and service providers to identify strengths and weaknesses in the community and criminal justice response to victims. The administrator almost immediately began assisting victims, streamlining the referral process, and expanding the types of services offered. She created a victim referral/crisis phone line and a Reverse Miranda card for deputies to give to victims. She met with deputies individually to introduce the program, gain insight into the needs of victims they encountered, and instruct them on providing information to victims and referring them to the program. She also trained five volunteers to assist with answering the crisis line, entering data in the computer, monitoring court hearings, and hosting information booths. The administrator estimated she provided direct services to 50 to 60 victims per month. A majority of victims served by the program were from the White Earth Ojibwe Tribe.

The administrator fostered partnerships with local service providers and county agencies to reduce duplication of services and use resources efficiently. She visited with staff of community and government agencies to introduce the program and attended community meetings designed to facilitate coordinated response to crime issues. She also did outreach to local businesses that interact with crime victims or offer services useful to them. Some outcomes of her efforts included the following:

- A local bus service established a voucher system for crime victims needing transportation.
- Two funeral homes offered information on healing to survivors of homicide with whom they interacted.
- A local sexual assault response team was developed and training was offered to first responders.

- A secure room for sexual assault victims awaiting court hearings was established.
- A new court procedure was established to assist individuals petitioning to dismiss existing orders for protection (OFP). Before an OFP is dismissed, the petitioner meets with the administrator to discuss the situation, the dynamics of domestic violence, and safety planning. The administrator then makes a recommendation to the court regarding the petition.

To raise community awareness of the Victim-Witness Services program, the administrator presented to community groups, participated in local events, and developed and disseminated materials. In addition to advertising on radio and in newspapers, she disseminated posters for National Crime Victims' Rights Week and placemats for National Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

The program's reputation grew beyond the county. The administrator was contacted by several law enforcement agencies in the state that were interested in starting their own victim-witness services. She provided them with materials and encouraged their questions. Subsequently, representatives from five law enforcement victim-witness service programs formed a state Law Enforcement Victim Services Coalition. The administrator hosted the coalition's first meeting.

To support program continuance, the administrator gathered data using evaluations from victims who received services and feedback from crisis line callers that demonstrated program usefulness to victims and the agency, developed a slideshow highlighting the program, and drafted a description of her job to be included in the county's *Policy Information and Record Manual*. When the grant ended, her position was included in the county's budget. The administrator also pursued additional funding opportunities to help sustain the program.

Nebraska: Valley Police Department

Valley is a rural community of an estimated 1,862 residents (2006) who are predominantly White (96 percent). It is located in western Douglas County, between Omaha and Fremont, and close to 50 miles from the state capital of Lincoln. The median household income is \$39,200, and 11 percent of residents live in poverty. Of residents 25 years of age and over, 12 percent have a college degree. The Valley Police Department has a chief, four full-time officers, and six part-time officers.

A large number of the calls received by the Valley Police Department come from domestic violence victims. The department realized its ability to respond to the needs of these and other crime victims was restricted by its limited personnel resources. Also, there are no victim assistance programs within city limits. As a remedy, the police department used the OVC grant to contract with the well-established Omaha YWCA's Women Against Violence Program to provide 24/7 phone and in-person assistance to all crime victims in Valley. The YWCA assigned this role to a full-time victim advocate and provided her with supervision. Valley is 30 miles from Omaha, but in the response area of the YWCA.

The police department made the decision to partner with the YWCA for this project rather than create an in-house victim services program because it recognized neither the department nor the town could sustain an additional staff position. The department assigned an officer to work with the police chief and the YWCA to achieve project goals. The police department also collaborated with the Valley Domestic Violence Task Force and the YWCA to conduct a needs assessment by surveying residents, businesses, and service providers; develop and provide resource materials for victims; and present community education programs. Education presentations covered topics such as domestic violence, child abuse, teen dating violence, abuse of elder and vulnerable adults, the criminal court process, alcohol awareness, and Internet safety.

The YWCA served 128 crime victims from Valley during the grant period. Valley police officers made more referrals to the YWCA for victim assistance than ever before and more crime victims than usual contacted the YWCA to discuss their needs. Officers realized that when the advocate responded to their calls to provide crime scene victim assistance they were able to quickly move onto their next call.

After the grant ended, the YWCA and the police department sustained their working relationship. The YWCA absorbed this initiative through its existing revenue sources. The combined efforts of the police department, the Valley Domestic Violence Task Force, and the YWCA to enhance responses to victims and to increase public awareness of victimization

issues also continued. For the police department, these efforts occurred through the assignment of existing personnel.

New Mexico: Dona Ana County Sheriff's Office

Dona Ana County, in south-central New Mexico, shares borders with El Paso County, Texas, and Chihuahua, Mexico. This primarily rural county covers 3,806 miles, with an average of 46 persons per square mile. In rural areas, public transportation is virtually nonexistent, and many citizens do not have telephones. Its estimated population of 193,888 (2006) is primarily Hispanic (65 percent) and White (31 percent). The population grew by about 19,000 since 2000.

The median household income is \$30,740, and 23 percent of citizens live in poverty. Of residents 25 years of age and over, 22 percent have a college degree. Las Cruces, the county seat, and the town of Hatch, the focus of the grant, are 45 minutes apart. The Hatch Valley area, estimated population 1,649 (2006), is made up of 8 farming communities. The population estimate would be higher if undocumented immigrant farm workers were included. The Hatch Valley area is served by a local police department and the Dona Ana County Sheriff's Office. The Dona Ana County Sheriff's Office has 155 sworn and 30 reserve deputies.

The Dona Ana County Sheriff's Office used OVC funding to hire a victim advocate for its existing Victim Assistance Unit and to develop a satellite office in the Hatch Valley area. The advocate focused in particular on serving victims of domestic and sexual violence, the most frequently committed crimes in the county, and reaching out to the significant undocumented migrant worker population. To assist with providing services on a 24/7 basis in Hatch Valley and the rest of the county, the unit recruited and trained 13 volunteers.

The advocate sought input from victims for a needs assessment. After getting no response to a survey, she successfully gathered data through face-to-face interviews with victims and surveyed local service providers. Subsequently, the advocate worked to raise public awareness in the Hatch Valley area about victimization issues and the availability of unit services to all crime victims. She used paid advertising, such as bulletin boards and newspaper advertisements in English and Spanish, developed and disseminated printed materials for victims in English and Spanish, distributed project materials at community events and through outlets in the community, and made educational presentations in English and Spanish. She also built partnerships with local organizations to expand resources for victims and encourage referrals to the unit. She participated on various task forces to network with service providers and raise unit visibility. She reached out to the Hatch Police Department, state police, the local public school system, a health clinic, and local churches.

The unit did outreach to get undocumented immigrants to use its services. Key to building trust was positive word of mouth among this population regarding the usefulness of services and staff efforts to advocate on their behalf. For example, all individuals traveling to Hatch Valley are required to stop at a U.S. Border Patrol checkpoint running through the northern part of the county. Undocumented individuals are typically taken into custody and deported. The unit worked to ensure that its staff could transport undocumented victims of trafficking or domestic violence to Las Cruces for criminal justice services in compliance with the Violence Against Women Act of 2005.

Unit staff provided training and materials for deputies. An advanced training included information on the dynamics of rural crime victimization, barriers victims face, and specific information on domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault. While the sheriff demonstrated support for victim services, the advocate had to prove that establishing these services in Hatch Valley was beneficial to deputies as well as victims. By the last year of the grant, both sheriff's deputies and Hatch police officers were referring victims to the advocate. The Hatch Police Department even invited the sheriff's office to move its victim advocate into a new municipal building that housed the police department and the state police. The advocate made the move and reported it was a convenient location for victims to access services.

More than 400 victims were served by the project during the grant period; 85 percent were domestic violence and/or sexual assault victims. Toward the grant's end, the sheriff's office requested the county board make permanent the advocate's position and another grant-funded position in the Victim Assistance Unit. Both positions were funded.

North Carolina: Cherokee County Sheriff's Office

Cherokee County is in the Smoky Mountain range in western North Carolina. It is within a 2-hour drive of Asheville, North Carolina; Atlanta, Georgia; and Chattanooga, Tennessee. It covers 466 square miles with an average of 53 persons per square mile and has a significant amount of National Forest Service land. The county consists of the towns of Murphy and Andrews, the community of Brasstown, and eight smaller communities.

The estimated population of 26,309 (2006) is 95 percent White; it has grown by about 2,000 since 2000. The median household income is \$30,177, and 15 percent of residents live in poverty. Of residents 25 years of age and over, 11 percent have a college degree. The Cherokee County Sheriff's Office has a sheriff, lieutenant, chief deputy, 12 deputies, 5 investigators, 15 detention officers, 2 victim advocates, and 4 administrative staff.

The Cherokee County Sheriff's Office created a Victim Advocate Program (VAP) to positively affect its ability to meet the needs of crime victims, particularly victims of domestic violence. VAP staff offered services such as on-scene crisis counseling, information and referrals, hospital and court accompaniment, aid with compensation applications, and overall case coordination. They acted as liaisons between law enforcement deputies and crime victims. During the grant period, VAP served 1,420 victims.

Initially, a program administrator was hired as the sole staff member, responsible for serving victims and developing and implementing the program. The administrator conducted a community needs assessment to identify gaps in victim services. To build a strong program infrastructure, she designed a database to track victim contact, legal case information, and program statistics. She drafted protocols for incorporating her duties into existing law enforcement practices and met with the sheriff to discuss unveiling the program to deputies. The sheriff released a memorandum to announce VAP to office personnel. Three key outreach activities helped launch the program:

- **Gaining deputies' acceptance of the program.** The administrator rode along with deputies to learn about their duties and show them how the presence of a victim advocate could make their jobs easier. Under the sheriff's direction, deputies were mandated to call for assistance from a victim advocate when responding to serious crimes. Over time, investigators increasingly called VAP for victim assistance.
- **Fostering collaboration with local agencies.** When introducing VAP to local agencies, the administrator demonstrated how the program could help fill gaps in serving victims without duplicating existing services. As a result of networking, she became involved in numerous boards and collaborative projects. Involvement in these efforts eased the way for VAP to coordinate services across agencies.
- **Using the media to introduce VAP to the community.** The administrator secured coverage for the program in local newspapers continuously over the grant period. She became adept at generating press releases and articles. She also was able to get two OVC-sponsored public service announcements aired on local television stations during prime-time evening hours.

In time, an additional part-time staff person was hired and a Volunteer Victim Advocate Response Team was created to allow the program to provide services 24/7. Volunteers were recruited from criminal justice and social service agencies, completed 6 hours of training, observed sheriff's office dispatchers at work, and rode along with deputies. Each volunteer specialized in a specific type of victimization to strengthen overall team capabilities. The sheriff provided the team with two unmarked cars and radios. Team members received uniform shirts, designated radio call numbers, a response bag containing literature for victims, a digital camera, stuffed animals for children, a road finder, and business cards. There were 15 volunteers at the end of the grant. VAP also benefited from college student interns who assisted in the office and served as court watchers. The local high school recently started a similar internship program for seniors.

In addition to assisting individual victims, VAP worked more broadly to enhance several areas of criminal justice system response to victims. It trained deputies and other local law enforcement officers on filing incident reports in domestic violence cases. The sheriff's office initiated a procedure in which all domestic violence incidents were to be reported for further investigation, with reports sent to VAP. VAP encouraged the district attorney's office to proceed with evidence-based prosecutions. It developed an on-call process for victims so they didn't have to sit in court waiting for their cases to

be called. Improved law enforcement response to domestic violence has meant more solid cases are referred for prosecution.

The sheriff agreed to cover maintenance expenses for program vehicles and absorbed the two victim advocate positions into his budget.

Ohio: Ross County Sheriff's Office

Ross County, in south central Ohio, is 687 square miles and divided into 16 townships. Of its estimated population of 75,556 (2006), 50,000 live in unincorporated areas. Since 2000, the population increased by 2,000. Chillicothe, the county seat, has 21,000 residents and is 46 miles from Columbus. The county population is predominately Appalachian (92 percent White) and Black (6 percent).

The median household income is \$38,939, and 12 percent of residents live in poverty. Of residents 25 years of age and over, 11 percent have a college degree. The county is served by the Ross County Sheriff's Office, the Chillicothe Police Department, and the State Highway Patrol. Townships and villages outside of Chillicothe are under the authority of the sheriff's office. The Ross County Sheriff's Office has 110 employees: 60 sworn officers, 11 civilian employees, and 39 jail and corrections employees.

The Ross County Sheriff's Office recognized that while numerous victim assistance organizations existed in the county, crime victims were often unaware of available services or had difficulty determining which agencies could best address their needs. Using the OVC grant, the sheriff's office created Project Unite—a coordinated victim services network comprising law enforcement agencies, victim services organizations, and allied professionals—to enhance provision of victim assistance in the county. The project was first housed in the Red Cross building in Chillicothe and then relocated to another site to address visibility and accessibility concerns. Later it moved to the sheriff's office.

Project staff positions were filled by existing sheriff's office employees. Initially, a project director oversaw grant compliance and a victim advocate designed the project. By the second year, the victim advocate rotated off the project to fulfill other duties. The project gained a coordinator responsible for project implementation and finances and a victim liaison responsible for victim assistance, education, and outreach. Volunteers also helped implement the project (e.g., one developed a PowerPoint presentation on the project for educational purposes).

One of the first steps the sheriff's office took was to create a multidisciplinary, multiagency team to guide project planning and implementation and act as a referral network for victim services. Team membership grew as project staff built relationships with local organizations—by the end of the grant period, there were 17 member organizations. The team met monthly to discuss ideas, concerns, and upcoming events. It was involved in assessing community needs and gaps related to victim services. Needs assessment results led the project to go beyond its original goal of facilitating referrals and coordination of victim services to also promoting victims' rights and educating those who served victims on victimization issues and victims' rights. With the team's guidance, Project Unite did the following:

- Marketed its services through the use of billboard advertising and distribution of a project brochure at libraries, conferences, and local events.
- Created informational kiosks, consisting of a user-friendly, touch screen personal computer containing information on the project and local resources. The kiosks were moved periodically to different locations, such as hospital emergency rooms, schools, libraries, banks, and service agencies.
- Purchased a Palm Pilot, with the same information found on the kiosk installed—it was a useful resource for the victim liaison when she met with victims.
- Attended community meetings, conferences, fairs, and other events to provide outreach, education on victims' rights and project services, and assistance to crime victims.

- Instructed deputies on assisting victims and advising them of their rights; subsequently, deputies began providing victims with information on their rights and community resources during initial response.
- Offered trainings, including a victimology seminar for law enforcement, a victim advocacy seminar, and a diversity seminar cosponsored by the Child Protection Center.
- Incorporated information about victims' rights and the project into the county's Community Law Enforcement Academy, a free 7-week program that educated citizens on law enforcement policies.
- Collaborated with local agencies to provide outreach to residents and assist victims—for example, a project staff member worked at Child Protective Services 1 day a week to assist nonoffending parents of abused children and assisted victims during parole violation hearings at the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) when an ODRC staff member was absent.
- Assisted 1,770 victims via telephone calls or in-person meetings between September 2003 and September 2004, and 2,750 victims between October 2004 and June 2006.
- Assisted an additional 51 children through the project's partnership with Child Protective Services.
- Developed a system for tracking victim assistance and followup.

The project has been well received in Ross County. It has also been highlighted throughout the state, most notably in the magazine of the Buckeye State Sheriffs' Association. At the end of the grant period, the sheriff's office funded a full-time victim advocate/public relations officer position filled by the project's victim liaison. Its Cell Watch Program provided supplemental funding to the project—helping victims who have no other means of compensation to replace locks, fix broken windows, or cover travel costs to court. The project coordinator completed a free grant-writing program to help obtain additional funds.

Washington: Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribal Police Department

The federally recognized Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribal Reservation is located on 1,301 acres near the town of Kingston in Kitsap County, Washington. There is no individual or private ownership of land on the reservation. Over 40 percent of this rural land is forested. Bremerton is a 1-hour drive, and Seattle is a 2- to 3-hour drive. The reservation has a population of 1,100—935 of whom are enrolled tribal members. The tribe is one of three bands of Pacific Northwest Native American S'Klallam. It is governed by a six-member Tribal Council. Major employers for tribal members include tribal government, individual treaty fishing enterprises, gaming, and local area businesses. The Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribal Police Department has a chief, a lieutenant, four officers, and three reserve officers.

Through the OVC grant, the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribal Police Department created a Crime Victim Advocate Program to provide culturally sensitive support and services to crime victims. Prior to the grant project, no formalized system of victim assistance existed within the tribe. Because the police department had experienced an increase in violations involving domestic violence over recent years, the program focused on victims of domestic and sexual violence.

An advocate position was created to coordinate the program, with an office in the Tribal Wellness Program building. A Crime Victims' Task Force was formed and met monthly to advise the program. The police chief and advocate were cochairs. Tribal entities participating on the task force included the police department, mental health program, health department, health clinic, court, social services, tribal council, and Indian child welfare. Numerous tribal residents were members. Nontribal partners included the Kitsap County Sheriff's Office and multiple county programs.

With the advocate hired and the task force established, a needs assessment was completed to identify existing resources and gaps in victim services. One challenge identified was the fact that tribal criminal court sessions were only held once or twice a month because the prosecuting attorney and judge were shared with a tribal court consortium. There were

numerous case continuances, lengthening case prosecution for months at a time and creating frustration for victims.

The advocate worked with the tribal police department and tribal court to develop and implement protocols that promoted timely victim referrals to the advocate program by police officers and advocate followup with victims within 72 hours after initial police response (e.g., officers were instructed to give the advocate a copy of a triplicate form they fill out for each complaint). The advocate created a victims' rights packet for officers to give to victims. She also began to attend all tribal court hearings to provide support to victims. A data collection and confidential filing system was developed to track referrals, services, and related statistics. In the second and third years of the grant, the advocate assisted 69 victims. One barrier to delivering comprehensive victim services was that when the advocate was not on duty, mental health counselors were available only to provide backup phone counseling and referrals, not onsite assistance.

The advocate worked to increase community awareness of victimization issues. She developed and disseminated a program brochure to tribal agencies and the community. She wrote articles and provided program information for the monthly tribal newsletter. She promoted the program at tribal conferences, parent retreats, youth camps, and community fairs. Training on the program was developed and delivered to tribal agency staff, with ongoing training for police department personnel on interdepartmental procedures, victims' rights, and victim services. The advocate also sought to increase her program's collaboration with tribal and off-reservation agencies in responding to crime victims. For example, the advocate—

- Coordinated with Tribal Mental Health to provide a therapist for crime victims.
- Developed a relationship with the State Crime Victims' Compensation Program to refer eligible tribal crime victims.
- Worked to determine the availability of shelters and safe houses in north Kitsap County for domestic violence victims from the reservation and collaborated with county and regional agencies to assist in the referral process and support victims.
- Coordinated with the county to develop and implement cross-jurisdictional protocols for enforcement of protection orders between the tribe and Kitsap County.
- Cofacilitated a weekly support group for victims of crimes against women—averaging five to six victims per session.
- Helped coordinate and host two statewide intertribal workshops on sexual assault.
- Developed relationships with the Harrison Hospital sexual assault nursing team and social work department and the Kitsap County Sexual Assault Center—which led to the advocate being contacted for assistance when Native American victims presented at their agencies.

The tribe committed to sustaining the program for at least 2 years beyond the grant period, including the 75-percent advocate position and monthly task force meetings. It planned to continue public education, training for tribal staff, and finalization of law enforcement protocols for responding to crimes, particularly sexual assault and stalking.

Alabama Sites

In terms of victim assistance, the Alabama Attorney General's Office offers information and support to crime victims and their families in capital murder trials and pardons/parole hearings, as well as notification of change of offender incarceration status. In addition, the state's district attorneys' offices provide assistance to victims when their cases reach district court.

The Attorney General's Office recognized, however, that many victims were left without these structured forms of assistance because their cases were not prosecuted. Rural areas that had few community resources available to assist victims were particularly affected by this gap in victim service programs in the criminal justice system. Through funding under the OVC Victim Services in Rural Law Enforcement grant program, the Attorney General's Office was able to support law enforcement agencies that served rural areas of the state in establishing or enhancing their services to victims. Out of 24 agencies that submitted grant applications, 10 were selected to participate in the project. The project ended with

seven participating subgrantees:

- [Calera Police Department](#)
- [Hartford Police Department](#)
- [Luverne Police Department](#)
- [Mobile County Sheriff's Office](#)
- [Montgomery County Sheriff's Office](#)
- [Pell City Police Department](#)
- [Washington County Sheriff's Office](#)

Some statistics on Alabama help frame the demographic information provided on the sites: 16 percent of individuals in the state live in poverty, and the median household income for the state is \$37,062 (2004 census). The 2000 census reported 19 percent of individuals over 25 have attained a college degree. According to the 2005 census, the vast majority of the population is White (71 percent) and Black (26 percent). The state averages 88 persons per square mile (2000 census).

Calera Police Department

Calera is a central Alabama town with an estimated population of 8,329 residents (2006). A dramatic increase in population over the past few years (3,158 people in 2000), has made it one of the fastest growing cities in the state. Calera's population is mostly White (77 percent) and Black (20 percent). The median household income is \$35,650, and 13 percent of residents live in poverty. Of residents 25 years of age and over, 13 percent have a college degree. The Calera Police Department has 37 employees: 26 sworn officers and 11 civilian employees.

Through the OVC grant, the Calera Police Department created a Victim Service Unit to help deal with increases in reported crime it experienced in the early to mid-2000s and the accompanying demand for services for crime victims. The department first conducted a community needs assessment to determine victims' needs and identify existing services for victims. Then, the department hired a part-time victim service officer (VSO) to oversee the unit. The department's records clerk and an outside consultant assisted the VSO. The unit provided initial and followup contact to victims of violent crime, court advocacy, and referrals to and coordination with local service agencies as needed to assist victims. The VSO noted that small courtesies often helped build trusting relationships with the victims she served. For example, offering candy from a basket she kept on her desk seemed to help victims relax as they discussed difficult topics. From July 2005 through April 2007, the unit provided 325 victims with services.

The unit developed an informational brochure in English and Spanish explaining victims' rights, local resources, unit services, and what to expect during court proceedings. Officers distributed the brochures to victims during the initial contact, according to departmental regulations. The VSO also distributed brochures at community service programs and made them available at governmental and community-based agencies around the city. The VSO estimated 1,000 brochures are distributed per year. In addition, a pamphlet on protection orders was developed for officers to give to interested victims. The VSO conducted several presentations to inform the community about unit services and wrote monthly articles in the local newspaper on what to do if you are a victim of crime. Information about the unit was incorporated into the [city's Web site](#).

The VSO worked diligently to nurture partnerships with officers so they understood her role and the assistance she required from them to reach victims. To this end, she coordinated trainings on officer response to victims of violent crime, as well as on domestic violence, sex crimes, mental health issues affecting crime victims, child victimization, and elder abuse. She created unit operating procedures and forms to standardize and track services. She worked with the police chief to

ensure officers recognized the value of giving unit brochures to victims at the crime scene. Officers were required to note in their reports that they gave victims the brochure. If they did not provide the brochure and document it, they had to contact the victim to provide the information verbally and write a supplemental report to document the call.

Officers learned on which calls they should request onsite assistance from the VSO, typically in cases involving severe injury from domestic violence, sexual assault, shootings/death notification, and child abuse situations. The unit also created backpacks with toys, books, and crayons—many officers used these items to calm and comfort children at the crime scene. The VSO reported officers regularly consulted with her to express their concerns or the need for followup in specific cases.

The VSO worked with the county jail to establish guidelines for informing the unit when an inmate was scheduled to be released or prosecuted. She then developed the following procedure for notifying victims of the imminent release or prosecution: During her initial contact with victims, the VSO asked them to complete a form stating if they would like to be informed of changes in the status of the offender, and when the unit received information from the jail, she checked her record to see if anyone needed to be notified.

The feedback received from victims indicated overall satisfaction with the Victim Service Unit and the police department. When the grant ended, the department successfully petitioned the city to include expenses for the unit in its budget to the end of the fiscal year. It continued all unit activities and extended services to victims of nonviolent crimes. It is likely the city will sustain the program in future years.

Hartford Police Department

The city of Hartford, in Geneva County, has an estimated population of 2,397 (2006) and covers about 6 square miles. It is located along the southern Alabama border, 8 miles from Florida. There is a 10-percent unemployment rate, and 7 percent of residents age 25 or older have a college degree. The majority of residents are White (79 percent) and Black (20 percent). The median household income is \$30,919, and 20 percent of the population lives in poverty. The Hartford Police Department has 10 sworn officers and serves Hartford, but also works with other law enforcement agencies to provide coverage across the county (approximately 415 square miles).

Through the OVC grant, the Hartford Police Department created a victim service officer (VSO) position to enhance its capacity to respond to crime victims, particularly those experiencing domestic violence, its most reported crime. To help plan and implement the effort, the department convened an interagency council with members from the police department, the Geneva County Family Guidance Center, Family Court, Spectra Care, a mental health clinic, Circuit Court, Wiregrass Hospital, the district attorney's office, and the juvenile probation office.

Hartford recruited the Family Guidance Center to assist with an area needs assessment, coordinate education and training efforts, and act as host and facilitator to the council. Based on the extensive information collected through the needs assessment, the police department assigned an officer to this role to provide services to victims and serve as a liaison between victims, the department, and local social service agencies. In terms of direct services—

- The VSO developed a victims' rights brochure and requested that officers distribute it to victims at the crime scene. The first year the brochure was available, 85 percent or more of victims received it.
- The VSO reviewed incident reports and contacted victims within 72 hours of an incident to explain victims' rights and available services. He also offered monthly followup until the case was resolved.
- The department arranged for victims to receive free counseling services through a local licensed professional counselor. The VSO was responsible for offering this service to victims and setting up the initial appointment. The department also arranged for the counselor to debrief and counsel officers following an incident, as deemed necessary by the police chief. The free counseling services for victims and the counseling support for police officers were not used during the grant period.

- The VSO assisted victims with transportation as needed; transportation services were rarely used.
- The VSO provided emergency kits to victims if needed, stocked with water, blankets, a flashlight, and toiletries.
- The VSO tracked contact with victims through the criminal justice process using a software program purchased through the grant.

A billboard announcement was displayed for 2 years in Hartford, informing residents of the victim services available and a number to call for assistance. There was an average of 15 calls per month from victims.

Recognizing consistent response by law enforcement agencies across the county could help alleviate some gaps in serving victims, the interagency council created a countywide law enforcement response protocol for domestic violence cases and arranged for all domestic violence cases in the county to be prosecuted in the same court. The VSO worked with the Family Guidance Center to coordinate trainings for law enforcement officers and emergency personnel in the county on topics including domestic violence, dispatch training, and victim interviewing skills. The VSO also purchased equipment to enhance evidence collection from victims, including a digital camera, recording device for incoming calls, and victim comfort kits for officers to carry in their patrol vehicles, and arranged instruction for officers on the use of this equipment.

Victims generally expressed satisfaction concerning their treatment by law enforcement. However, due to resignations of the then police chief and the VSO around the time the grant ended, activities were discontinued.

Luverne Police Department

Luverne is located in Crenshaw County in southeastern Alabama, about 50 miles from Montgomery. It has an estimated 2,728 residents (2006) and is gradually growing with the increase of incoming factories. Residents are predominantly White (70 percent) and Black (28 percent). Primary jobs include farming, poultry production, and factory work and there is a 2-percent unemployment rate. The median household income is \$30,950, and 23 percent of residents live in poverty. Of residents 25 years of age and over, 20 percent have a college degree. The Luverne Police Department has 12 sworn officers.

With a growing city population and an increase in violent crime, the Luverne Police Department experienced a corresponding rise in demand for police services, particularly from victims of domestic violence. The OVC grant allowed the department to create a Victim Service Unit to assist crime victims and educate police officers, victims, their families, and the public about victimization issues. An office was established in City Hall, two blocks from the police department, and a victim service officer (VSO) was hired to serve as a liaison between police officers and victims.

The VSO developed a brochure for officers to provide to victims at the crime scene with information on their rights, space for the responding officer's contact data, and services offered through the police department and the community. Copies of the brochure were also given to other area police departments and placed in local businesses, medical facilities and offices, schools, and other locations. As far as direct services—

- The VSO was on call 24/7, providing on-scene assistance to victims as needed, callback referral services, and followup contact to keep victims up-to-date on their case status.
- The VSO provided transportation assistance to enable victims to access safe housing and services.
- In the absence of temporary housing resources for domestic violence victims, the VSO partnered with a local motel owner who was willing to provide a room for victims for up to 3 days.
- The VSO assembled 100 child backpacks with crayons, coloring books, and toys. Officers gave the backpacks to child victims and witnesses when they removed them from dangerous situations.

- The department contracted with a licensed psychologist to provide free individual counseling to victims.
- The VSO implemented "A Child Is Missing" service to ensure local agencies were aware of procedures to quickly respond to child abductions.

During the grant period, the VSO provided crime scene assistance 16 times, 5 victims took advantage of the free counseling, and 15 victims received transportation assistance. The VSO also assisted victims through the county sheriff's office more than two dozen times.

The VSO coordinated a community forum to educate police officers and the public on domestic violence, and an 8-hour training program on domestic violence and victim services for area law enforcement officers. In addition, the grant provided funding for a number of officers to attend other trainings. The VSO wrote monthly articles in the local newspaper on topics of victimization, counseling, support groups, legal options, and the criminal justice system. She became a member of the county Domestic Violence Task Force. She spoke to local groups on the victim services the police department offered.

Evaluative feedback from victims who used the services offered by the VSO was generally positive. Recognizing the value of the Victim Service Unit, the police department continued the VSO position for 5 months after the end of the grant period. The hope was that additional funds could be found to sustain the initiative. The department worked to gain financial support from the city and local businesses for its victim service efforts. Because the VSO had assisted victims from the county sheriff's office, the department also proposed a plan for several local and county law enforcement agencies to share the cost for the VSO to cover all areas in the county. Unfortunately, the department was not able to secure the funding necessary to support the VSO position and discontinued the effort. However, officers continue to provide domestic violence victims with resource materials to help connect them with the assistance they need.

Mobile County Sheriff's Office

Mobile County in southwestern Alabama has an estimated 404,157 residents (2006). Its 1,233 square miles include urban and rural communities. The population in unincorporated areas (127,535) increased 27 percent from 1990 to 2002, while the population of Mobile, the county's largest city, declined. County residents are primarily White (61 percent) and Black (35 percent). Small but growing Asian and Hispanic populations may not be represented in county census statistics. The median household income is \$33,191, and 20 percent of residents live in poverty. Of residents 25 years of age and over, 19 percent have a college degree. The Mobile County Sheriff's Office has 161 sworn personnel.

The Mobile County Sheriff's Office used the OVC grant to create a Victim Service Program to address gaps in law enforcement and victim services in the rural parts of the county. The office needed to stretch its resources to adequately serve the growing population in unincorporated areas. It also responded to a disproportionate number of domestic violence calls in these areas.

Planning for this program kicked off with a community needs assessment conducted by a local university professor. Feedback was sought from victims on their satisfaction with law enforcement and prosecution and gaps in victim services. A review of local resources and promising practices in victim assistance was done. Based on the needs identified, the Victim Service Program took the following form:

- A victim services coordinator was hired to serve as the liaison between victims, the office, and social services. The coordinator received incident reports from deputies and contacted victims within 72 hours of the crime to provide them with resources and referrals. She collaborated with local agencies to assist victims; a volunteer from Catholic Hispanic Ministry, for example, helped her reply to Spanish-speaking victims.
- The sheriff's office transferred a deputy detective from its child protection unit to serve as a domestic violence officer, providing support to the coordinator in domestic violence cases. The domestic violence officer attended court for cases that she investigated, signed warrants, and/or received a subpoena. The victim services coordinator attended court hearings as requested to support victims.

- An existing information card that deputies provided to victims during initial response was redesigned to be more user-friendly and include space for the responding deputy's contact data. It was printed in English and Spanish.
- The coordinator developed a recycled 911 cell phone program, which distributed phones to domestic violence victims and elder victims. The local domestic violence shelter collected used cell phones in return for funding, so the sheriff's office sought used phones only from county government employees.
- The coordinator and domestic violence officer coordinated a 30-minute victim services training session and a 90-minute domestic violence training session for deputies. These trainings were incorporated into the office's yearly in-service training program that every deputy was required to attend.
- The coordinator and domestic violence officer participated on the County Domestic Violence Task Force.
- A database was developed to keep track of offense data, contacts with victims, and referrals to community services. The existing domestic violence database was also enhanced.
- The sheriff's office established a multidisciplinary Victim Services Committee to monitor the effectiveness of the program. A ranking deputy in administration and a patrol deputy were involved to ensure law enforcement input. This committee met quarterly to review progress and assess for needed changes. It also provided the program with additional resources, training, and volunteer assistance.
- Staff mailed 1,784 letters to victims during the last year and a half of the grant. They conducted 885 victim followups and provided referrals to social service agencies more than 350 times. The program received overwhelmingly positive feedback from victims on the usefulness of the new services.

During the last year of the grant, a new sheriff was appointed, a new administration put in place, and changes in office personnel and procedures were made. Program staff met with the new administration regarding the continuation of the victim service program. At the end of the grant period, the sheriff's office used agency discretionary funds to extend the program on a short-term basis and give the victim services coordinator time to secure additional funding. However, funds were not secured and the position was discontinued.

Services implemented by the program that continued included victim followup by detectives in investigated cases, distribution of the new victim services cards, agency participation on the Domestic Violence Task Force, the attendance of the domestic violence officer in court for required cases and as requested by victims, the cell phone recycling program, and deputy training on domestic violence and victim services.

Montgomery County Sheriff's Office

Montgomery County is located in central Alabama, covering 790 square miles. Of its estimated 223,571 residents (2006), 22,000 live outside the city of Montgomery. The county population is primarily Black (53 percent) and White (44 percent). The median household income is \$35,680, and 19 percent of residents live in poverty. Of residents 25 years of age and over, 29 percent have a college degree. The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office has 114 sworn and 47 non-sworn personnel.

The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office used the OVC grant to address gaps in services for rural crime victims in its existing Victim Service Unit. The office first worked with a local victim services organization, Victims of Crime and Leniency, to conduct a community needs assessment. It assigned a victim services deputy to the unit, as well as a lieutenant to provide supervision and monitor and analyze statistical data garnered through calls for service. In terms of direct services—

- The victim services deputy maintained followup contact with victims, providing emotional support, assistance accessing community resources, and accompaniment to court proceedings.

- A toll free hotline was created so residents could call the unit 24/7 to obtain recorded information on available area resources. Obtaining a toll free number for this hotline took time because the county did not already have a vendor to provide this service.
- A victims' rights brochure was developed in English and Spanish (there is a small Hispanic population) and given to deputies to distribute to victims when they answer a call for service or see an opportunity.
- Backpacks filled with toys, coloring books, and crayons were assembled for child victims and witnesses at the crime scene. These backpacks helped comfort the children and build trust between deputies and children. Designing and producing the backpack was time-consuming for two reasons: first, the state of mind of child victims/witnesses had to be considered during the design process; and second, the county process of bidding had to be used to select a vendor to produce the backpack.
- During the grant period, the unit provided assistance to 94 victims—66 were victims of violent crime.

Unit staff trained deputies on use of the victim service brochure, information to provide to victims, responsibilities of the victim service deputy, and services available to victims through the unit. They participated in numerous community meetings and events to publicize unit services, gain community support, and get feedback on ways to enhance response to rural victims. As a publicity tool, a hand fan, commonly used in southern churches, was developed in English and Spanish and distributed mainly to churches. The fan listed contact information for emergency and social services resources and the Victim Service Unit. The chief deputy of the sheriff's office spent considerable time working with local radio and television stations and technicians to create and air a public service announcement (PSA) informing residents of the unit, contact information for resources, and reporting procedures.

Based on the largely positive feedback it received from victims and community members, the sheriff's office decided to absorb the costs of personnel for the Victim Services Unit, brochures, fans, the victim service hotline, and child backpacks. PSA airing remained free of charge.

Pell City Police Department

Pell City is located in northeast Alabama, 35 miles east of Birmingham, with an estimated 2006 population of 11,894 (up from 9,565 in 2000). Residents are predominantly White (83 percent) and Black (15 percent). The median household income is \$37,250, and 11 percent of residents live in poverty. Of residents 25 years of age and over, 16 percent have a college degree. The Pell City Police Department has 30 sworn and 2 non-sworn personnel.

Through the OVC grant, the Pell City Police Department created a Victim Service Unit to address the needs of crime victims in its jurisdiction. While the department was experiencing an increasing number of calls from victims, it was also aware that many crimes were unreported, particularly domestic violence. As a first step in implementing the unit, the department assessed local response to victims and gaps in services by surveying crime victims and police officers. The results of the needs assessment led the department to assign a full-time victim services officer (VSO) to follow up with victims of crimes against persons and coordinate victim services.

The selected VSO was an officer in the department with extensive education and experience in counseling—he was both a minister and a licensed professional counselor. His role was to make initial contact with victims either at the crime scene, when on duty or called in after hours, at the police department if victims came in to report a crime, or by telephone within 3 days after the crime was reported. He offered crisis counseling to victims during the initial contact, assessed their needs, and referred them to local agencies. He made counseling referrals to licensed counselors associated with local organizations that offered services for free or on a sliding fee scale. On starting the position, the VSO immediately began to provide victim assistance. In hindsight, he thought it would have been useful to first have a period focused solely on the administrative tasks involved in starting the unit, such as developing written materials and a filing system, identifying and cataloging local resources, developing a volunteer base, and training officers.

The VSO had a good working relationship with the officers in the department, which was critical to the unit being accepted and integrated into the department. The VSO coordinated several well-attended training seminars on topics such as critical incident stress management, domestic violence, and elder abuse. The Victim Service Unit also sponsored training for a volunteer chaplain program. The goal of this program was to have clergy assist the VSO in providing onsite assistance and referral services for victims. Chaplains were required to be trained in critical incident stress management within 6 months of becoming volunteers.

A victims' rights brochure was developed; officers were instructed to inform victims of their rights and give them the brochure. Brochures were also given to merchants to display near their cash registers. Pens with the unit's phone number were passed out to crime victims and the public. The VSO conducted community education presentations at local churches, schools, and social organizations that addressed victims' rights and domestic violence law. Several interviews with the VSO and articles he wrote were printed in local and surrounding newspapers to announce the new unit. The VSO also worked closely with the VSO from the district attorney's office to make sure all victims received services from one or both offices.

During the last year and a half of the grant, the VSO assisted more than 300 victims, providing crime scene assistance, referrals for social services, and help obtaining protection orders. Officers provided victims with brochures and communicated with the VSO regarding victims' needs in individual cases. Based on feedback from victims and police officers indicating general satisfaction with the services the unit provided, the department decided to continue all of the implemented services. To sustain these efforts, it incorporated the VSO's activities into the department's city-funded detective division.

Washington County Sheriff's Office

Washington County is located in southeastern Alabama, covering 1,081 square miles with 17 people per square mile. About 88 percent of the land is forests and pine plantations. Towns include Chatom, McIntosh, and Millry, and unincorporated municipalities include Leroy and Fruitdale. Chatom, the county seat, is about 60 miles north of Mobile. The estimated county population of 17,651 (2006) is predominantly White (66 percent), Black (26 percent), and Native American (7 percent). Logging, farming, and chemical factories are the main industries. The median income is \$32,147, and 18 percent of individuals live in poverty. Of residents age 25 and over, 9 percent have a college degree. The Washington County Sheriff's Office has 15 sworn personnel and answers calls to all rural parts of the county, as well as those that can't be handled by local town police departments.

Through the OVC grant, the Washington County Sheriff's Office created a Victim Service Program with the goal of consistently providing aid to crime victims throughout the county. A particular focus of the project was domestic violence, as reports of this crime doubled from 2000 to 2006, and there were very limited services for victims locally. The closest domestic violence shelter was 80 miles away in Mobile. The initiative had the support of police departments in the county. The sheriff's office hired a consultant to oversee a community needs assessment, using written and telephone surveys to learn about victims' experiences with crime and the criminal justice system. Based on the results of the needs assessment, the sheriff's office implemented the following activities:

- A civilian victim services officer (VSO) was hired in the grant's second year. She spent considerable time early in her tenure gaining support for the program from criminal justice and community agencies.
- The VSO provided information to the community regarding the program via newspaper interviews and articles. She created a victims' rights brochure with data on county services and space for the responding deputy's contact information. Deputies were asked to provide the brochure to victims they encountered. The VSO also placed brochures in public places such as medical clinics and city offices.
- The VSO established phone, fax, and Internet service for the program. She provided victims who contacted her with support and referrals to local and regional agencies based on their individual needs. She provided 911 cell phones to those interested. She also met with victims attending district and municipal court proceedings and assisted them through the judicial process. A VSO in the district attorney's office assisted victims in circuit court cases.

- The VSO worked with a licensed professional counselor to offer free counseling services to crime victims, with the sheriff's office covering the costs; only a few individuals took advantage of this service, due in part to concerns about confidentiality.

During her year and a half on the job, the VSO worked with more than 70 victims and distributed more than 480 brochures. Despite the generally positive feedback from victims regarding services received, the sheriff's office was not able to secure additional funding from the county commission and discontinued the program.

Sources

The site summaries were drawn primarily from the final reports to OVC from the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) and the Alabama Attorney General's Office and the 17 subgrantees' final reports. The demographic information found at the beginning of each site summary was obtained from the final reports of NSA and the Alabama Attorney General's Office, final reports of the subgrantees, and the U.S. Census Bureau's State and County Quick Facts Web site (<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html>).

Census information cited in this section includes the 2000 census (persons per square mile, percentage of residents 25 years and older who have college degrees, percentage of residents who speak a language other than English in their homes, and population of counties, cities, and towns); 2004 census (median household income and poverty rates); 2005 census (racial/ethnic breakdown of population); and 2006 census (population estimates for counties).

Population estimates (2006) for cities and towns were drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau's Population Estimates for All Places: 2000 to 2006 (<http://www.census.gov/popest/cities/SUB-EST2006-4.html>). Note that the demographic data were drawn from multiple U.S. Census years due to availability of estimates; hence, demographic snapshots of sites may not be fully up-to-date; a 2006 population estimate may be presented with a 2005 breakdown of the population by race/ethnicity. However, keep in mind that the intent of the demographic information presented in each site summary is to provide the reader with a general introduction to the site.

Resources

Publications

American Prosecutors Research Institute (2007). [*Rural Victim Assistance: A Victim/Witness Guide for Rural Prosecutors*](#). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime.

International Association of Chiefs of Police (2000). [*What Do Victims Want? Effective Strategies to Achieve Justice for Victims of Crime*](#). Alexandria, VA: International Association of Chiefs of Police.

International Association of Chiefs of Police (2003). [*Victim Services and Law Enforcement: Next Steps*](#). Alexandria, VA: International Association of Chiefs of Police.

International Association of Chiefs of Police (2008). [*Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims: A 21st Century Strategy*](#). Alexandria, VA: International Association of Chiefs of Police.

National Sheriffs' Association (2008). [*First Response to Victims of Crime*](#). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime.

Parker, Susan (March 2001). [*Establishing Victim Services Within a Law Enforcement Agency: The Austin Experience*](#). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime.

Stark, Erin (October 2000). [Denver Victim Services 2000 Needs Assessment](#). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime.

Funding

A wealth of Web sites provide information on funding opportunities that may help start and sustain rural law enforcement-based victim service initiatives, including OVC (<http://www.ovc.gov/fund/welcome.html>), the Office of Justice Programs (<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/funding/funding.htm>), the Office on Violence Against Women (<http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/open-solicitations.htm>), Grants.gov—a site managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that lists all federal funding opportunities (<http://www.grants.gov/>), and The Foundation Center (<http://www.foundationcenter.org/findfunders>) for other federal and private funding. The University of Wisconsin's Grants Information Collection (<http://grants.library.wisc.edu/>) offers access to useful online resources on grant-writing basics.

Related Links

[National Sheriffs' Association](#)

The National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to raising the level of professionalism among those in the criminal justice field. Throughout its 68-year history, NSA has offered programs designed to aid sheriffs, deputies, chiefs of police, police officers, and others in the public safety field in performing their jobs and serving residents in their jurisdictions in the best possible manner.

[Alabama Attorney General's Office](#)

In terms of victim assistance, the Alabama Attorney General's Office offers information and support to crime victims and their families in capital murder trials and pardons/parole hearings, as well as notification of change of offender incarceration status. In addition, the state's district attorneys' offices provide assistance to victims when their cases reach district court. The Attorney General's Office recognized, however, that many victims were left without these structured forms of assistance because their cases were not prosecuted. Rural areas that had few community resources available to assist victims were particularly affected by this gap in criminal justice system-based victim services.

[Justice Solutions](#)

Justice Solutions is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing rights, resources, and respect for victims and communities hurt by crime; improving governmental and societal responses to crime; and strengthening crime prevention initiatives. The organization—

- Provides education and training and technical assistance to victims, service providers, criminal justice and juvenile justice professionals, allied professionals, and communities.
- Promotes research-to-practice as the foundation for related policy development and community safety and victim assistance programs.
- Promotes public policy that enhances victims' rights and services, offender accountability, and community protection.
- Collaborates with individuals, organizations, and government agencies that share its vision and goals.

This

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document was last updated on June 15, 2009.