

SO/VOCA **Project Abstract**

Following a violent crime, most victims feel powerless and vulnerable. Trauma of the crime itself may be only the beginning, unfortunately for crime victims. Many victims suffer a tremendous amount of physical, financial, and psychological trauma, especially those victims of serious, repeated, or long-term crimes. Additionally, in the chaos during and immediately after the event, the criminal justice system can be terrifying. Assistance from law enforcement can make a significant difference for victims. The Collin County Sheriff's Office Victim Assistance Program seeks to help victims achieve restoration. The Victim Advocate is also professionally trained to support victims of crime. Our Victim Advocate provides on-scene crisis intervention and advocacy, safety plan development, Crime Victims' Compensation claims assistance, and referrals to emergency and social service agencies while also providing victims with reassurance, emotional support, guidance for resolving problems, and case status and progress information. There is no universal solution to meeting the needs of the victims of crime. However, according to research, when Advocates offer coordinated, early, victim-focused interventions, victims are more likely to participate in court-proceedings, access community-based programs, and report decreases in distress, PTSD symptoms, depression, and fear. A strong advocacy program in Collin County helps ensure that victims have the strength and support they need to rebuild their lives. Helping victims is priority for Collin County. The goal of the program is to provide advocacy services that ensure the rights of crime victims, preserves privacy, reduce trauma, promote safety, facilitate recovery, and encourage participation in the criminal justice process. Helping victims is priority for the Collin County.

Problem Statement

The moment a violent crime happens the victim's life is forever changed. They are no longer the exact same person they were prior to the crime. The victimization does not stop when the actual crime is over, with victims suffering a tremendous amount of physical and psychological trauma, especially for victims of serious, repeated, or long-term crimes. For victims, the trauma of the crime itself is only the beginning of what can often be a lifelong struggle. Victims of crime can find their world in disarray for years to come and feel firsthand the crime's impact on their physical, financial, and psychological wellbeing.

In the chaos which envelopes a victim during and immediately after the event, the criminal justice system can seem quite daunting and frightening. Lacking knowledge of the criminal justice system, victims often retreat to the background and their voices go unheard during investigation, prosecution, and sentencing. While our core mission is to pursue justice for criminal acts, which includes justice for the victims and witnesses of crime, how we treat those individuals has a huge impact on their confidence in the criminal justice system and their ability to heal and recover from crime. If a victim feels they are receiving inadequate or delayed services from the criminal justice system, they are less likely to participate in the process of prosecution, creating a higher level of victim attrition and reducing the rate of offender accountability. A victim's cooperation, assistance, and safety are not only essential to the effective detection, investigation, and prosecution of crimes, but also to their ability to recover from the crime.

A law enforcement agency is a natural entry point for victims to seek advocacy and assistance after they have been victimized. Whenever a crime is committed, law enforcement is usually the first to arrive on the scene and interact with victims. This puts our office in a unique position to assist victims immediately after the crime and encourage and facilitate victim participation in the criminal justice system. The initial response to a victim will have a long-lasting impact on that individual's view of the justice system and has been shown to be a key factor in whether or not a victim ultimately accesses needed services and assistance, such as crisis intervention, management, financial compensation, information, and referrals to community programs.

Barriers, such as lack of knowledge and/or ability to access available resources, can pose significant obstacles for victims to overcome in their recovery efforts. The Sheriff's Office investigates crimes in the unincorporated, rural parts of Collin County, which are greatly underserved areas with limited resources and almost non-existent social service providers. In many instances, until a criminal case is filed (which can take days to months), a Victim Advocate attached to the investigating law enforcement office may be the only direct link to services and assistance a victim has. Traumatized victims may have difficulty coping and become more isolated as time passes, making it difficult for a victim to communicate with criminal justice professionals, co-workers, friends, and even family. The

Victim Advocate is there to assist the victim through these difficult times and help the victim recover from a traumatic act of crime.

Crime victimization can affect an individual's ability to perform a variety of roles, including those related to parenting, intimate relationships, and occupational and social functioning. The problems faced by victims of crime are varied and numerous, and each victim's experience may differ greatly from another who suffered the same crime. We believe, regardless of their situation, no victim should ever feel like they are facing these challenges alone. As Dr. Morton Bard, co-author of *The Crime Victim's Book* has described a victim's reaction to crime as the crisis reaction, "victims will react differently depending upon the level of personal violation they experience and their state of equilibrium at the time of victimization" an example such as theft-experience less of a personal violation than victims of violent crimes.

Bard, Morton and Dawn Sangrey. (1986). *The Crime Victim's Book*. Secaucus N.J: Citadel Press.

Supporting Data

Collin County's population increased 97% since 2000, from 491,772 to an estimated 1,064,465 in 2020 as stated in the U.S. Census Bureau. Family violence did increase as well (in 2019 and 2020) with a slight decrease in 2021 due to Covid (less than 2%), 2019 (n= 398), 2020 (n=404), and 2021 to date (n=391). Murders investigated since 2012 is 18, 2 added in 2020, and 5 in 2021, 100% of which were family violence homicides. In an effort to support victims of crime in Collin County and reduce victim attrition for family violence cases in the justice process, the Collin County Sheriff's Office, in cooperation with the City of Frisco, obtained a grant (beginning in FY 2013) to share a Crime Victim Advocate, each jurisdiction receiving advocacy support 20 hours weekly. Following the success of the program, Collin County obtained a grant for a full-time Advocate beginning in FY 2016. In 2012, prior to the Victim Advocate starting, 17.3% (n=44) of family violence offenses resulted in an "exceptional" clearance. An "exceptional" case clearance is when the identity and location of the offender is known and there is enough information to support an arrest; however, the offender cannot be taken into custody because circumstances outside the control of law enforcement prohibits the agency from arresting, charging, and prosecuting the offender. In many cases, this is caused by the victim's refusal to cooperate with the prosecution after the offender has been identified. However, since hiring a Victim Advocate, the overall "exceptional" rate has lowered to 8.1% (n = 97) for the 1,943 family violence cases disposed since 2013. Even with a 59% increase in family violence cases (2017 compared to 2019) we have mentioned the 81.9% exceptional rate. In FY 2019 and 2020, the Victim Advocate served 485 unique victims, representing 842 different types of victimization (some suffer multiple types of victimization).

In FY2021, the Victim Advocate served 391 unique victims, representing 575 different types of victimization (some suffer multiple types of victimization). Of the victimization types 187 were family violence, 305 were adult physical assault, 18 were victims of court order violations, and 65 of the remaining were made of sexual assault, harassment, and elder abuse, survivors of homicide victims, threats, and inference with emergency requests for assistance. During this period, 184 victims received referrals, 66 crisis intervention, and 24 victims were assisted with Crime Victims' Compensation applications.

1. "Collin County QuickFacts." State and County QuickFacts. US Census Bureau. [Accessed April 1, 2020]. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48085.html>.
2. "Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Performance Measures Report – Quarter 4 (303)." Report to Texas A&M University, Public Policy Research Institute, grant number VZ 2877102, Oct 2019.

Project Approach & Activities

Assistance from law enforcement makes a significant difference for victims. The CCSO Victim Assistance Program seeks to help crime victims in achieving restoration of full physical, mental, and emotional health by providing for the unique needs of each individual citizen. The Advocate serves as a contact person for the victim and provides assistance and support services directly to victims of crime. Victims are primarily identified through offense reports taken by CCSO employees. In some cases, such as homicide, aggravated assault or robbery with serious bodily

injury, fatal collisions, child deaths, suicides, sexual assault, and/or hostage/barricade incidents, the Advocate is called to the scene to provide immediate assistance.

Following identification, each victim receives program information through mail, email, or in person. In addition to generic information, the Advocate also provides more individualized information, advocacy, and/or referrals based on the specific situation. For example, family violence victims may receive immediate crisis assistance, transportation, referrals or information regarding local sheltering options, safety planning and Crime Victims' Compensation assistance, and protective order information. While for sexual assault victims, the Advocate may provide immediate crisis assistance, coordination and communication with hospital personnel, and referrals or information regarding the local rape crisis center and other non-profit and counseling options available. As well as providing services such as on-scene crisis intervention and advocacy, safety plan development, Crime Victims' Compensation claims assistance, and referrals to emergency and social service agencies for additional support, the Advocate also provides victims with reassurance, emotional support, guidance for resolving problems, and case status and progress information. Additionally, as research has shown that participating in the criminal justice process can aid victims in rebuilding their lives, the Advocate will, on behalf of victims, act as a liaison the victims and a variety of justice system departments and personnel; advocate for victims' needs and wishes within the system; recognize the impact crime has had on victims and support the important role victims play in criminal justice processes; work to ensure victims are treated fairly and respectfully; and seek to remove all potential barriers (physical, psychological, cultural, etc.) to services.

Each case is unique, and each victim's response may vary greatly - even from another who suffered the same crime. Therefore, victims are assisted for as long as they require services. In some cases, interaction with the Advocate is concluded over a short time period; while, in more serious cases, prolonged interaction and assistance may be required. If a case is turned over to the District Attorney's Office for prosecution, the victim will often be transferred to their Victim Assistance program for continued services.

As the CCSO and the Advocate cannot be the sole providers of necessary services, the program continues to build formal and informal community partnerships, creating and strengthening relationships with local organizations and resources that serve crime victims' needs. We currently work with the Children's Advocacy Center of Collin County, Hope's Door (women's shelter and comprehensive intervention and prevention services for domestic violence), The Turning Point Rape Crisis Center of Collin County, Family Place, and LifePath Systems, as well as other non-profit, medical, and social service organizations. Through countywide collaborative efforts, such as the Collin County Social Services Association and the Collin County Council on Family Violence, we build strong networks, identify gaps in services, provide training, and minimize duplicative efforts. Additionally, Advocates in the District Attorney's Office, the local Rape Crisis Center, Children Advocacy Center, police departments, and social services agencies work together to help victims through their trauma. Due to Covid-19, the majority of 2020 was spent working remotely. Services were provided via phone, email, mail, face time, and zoom rather than in person. Providing victim's their victim rights remained the same during this pandemic in 2020. Packets were either emailed or mailed with information to the victim which included their rights, referrals for services, and a crime victim's compensation packet.

Capacity & Capabilities

The Collin County Sheriff's Office was established in 1846. The Collin County Sheriff's Office is a full service law enforcement agency and its staff are trained to work with the victims of crime. Collin County Sheriff's Office believe that our fundamental duty is to serve and protect the citizens of Collin County with fairness, compassion, and respect. We demand excellence in the quality of our law enforcement, stressing professionalism, integrity, and timeliness, so that those we serve may feel secure. We provide equal enforcement and protection of the law without prejudice of favor. We promote the setting of goals in partnership with the community, and prioritize and address problems based on the concerns of the community. Our officers are first on-scene and are frequently the first interactions for victims with the criminal justice system, making our role in initializing victim services critical. Our department has developed relationships with community organizations and service providers including the Collin County Council on Family Violence, Junior League of Collin County, Turning Point Rape Crisis Center of Collin County, Hope's Door, and the Children's Advocacy Center of Collin County. We have been providing direct victim advocacy services, utilizing an educated and experienced Crime Victim Advocate, since FY 2013.

The Collin County Sheriff's Office Crime Victim Advocate, has earned a Bachelor of Arts in Family Studies and Criminal Justice, as well as a Master of Science in Counseling. Prior to fulfilling her goal of becoming an advocate for crime victims, she worked in a residential treatment center and served as a direct contact to individuals in drug/alcohol recovery, assisting them through the recovery process. Additionally, she has worked as an advocate for persons affected by sickle cell disease and completed a counseling internship where she provided individual, group, family, and couples counseling for individuals and families struggling with addiction and / or homelessness. Since becoming employed at Collin County, she has gained experience in crime victim advocacy, crisis support, crime victim compensation assistance, protective order assistance, and community resource and referral assistance and has completed victim assistance training that will allow her to apply for her Certification in Victim Advocacy in 2021. She also participates in ongoing CE for victim advocacy through yearly trainings; Dallas Crimes Against Women Conference, North Texas Facing Family Violence Conference, OAG Crime Victims Services Conference, TDCOA Victim Assistance Coordinator Seminar and TCFV Statewide Conference. These trainings are essential not only for the Victim Advocate but for the program and victim. The trainings allow the victim advocate to become better equipped to meet the needs of victims and to stay up to date on current laws of victim rights. The Advocate is hoping to attend (due to Covid-19) the National Organizational for Victim Assistance Annual Training (NOVA) which will provide updated information on case studies, victim's rights, provide overview of criminal procedures, advocating and speaking out on accountability of perpetrators and healing for survivors, etc. The Advocate will also be registering and taking part in the following: -National Advocate Credentialing Program and an on-line Victim Advocacy Certificate Course and will complete the course in Spring 2022. It will focus on legal terminology, legal process, and legislation regarding victims' rights, effects of victimization, and counseling skills for victims. It's an intensive online program designed to train and qualify students to provide assistance to crime victims. The course provides an overview of criminal procedure and discusses the effects crime can have on its victims. The Advocate will be attending the Understanding Human Trafficking training in a series of five interactive online modules that offer foundational learning on trauma-informed and victim-centered approaches to human trafficking. She will also be attending the National Victim Assistance Academy which will provide an intensive, interactive learning experience to develop and promote professional skills and knowledge for victim service providers. The training and on-line course will benefit the Victim Advocate which in return will benefit the victims and Collin County.

Performance Management

Goal: Provide victim advocacy services that ensure the rights of crime victims, preserve privacy, reduce trauma, promote safety, facilitate recovery, and encourage participation in the criminal justice process.

Objectives:

1. Ensure minimum of 95% of victims seeking assistance are served.
2. Demonstrate maximum "exceptional" clearance rate of 10% for family violence offenses.

Measures:

1. Provide victim assistance services to 250 victims/survivors. Baseline: 45
2. Provide case management and advocacy for 175 victims / survivors. Baseline: 30
3. Provide advocacy/accompaniment/assistance for criminal justice system interactions for 100 victims/ survivors. Baseline: 10
4. Provide referrals for 250 victims/ survivors. Baseline: 45
5. Assist 100 victims with developing safety plans. Baseline: 20

Client outcome measurements are used to establish and evaluate the program's progress in achieving service goals. The Coordinator will analyze the outcomes and an action plan will be developed and implemented as needed to ensure that objectives are met. Data Management: The Advocate records a summary of pertinent victim assistance data in an Excel spreadsheet maintained on Collin County's secure network. Monthly data points collected include the number of victims/survivors who request services and the number actually served each month, types of services provided (crisis support, CVC information/assistance, safety planning, etc.), number of cases assigned by offense type. Additionally, the Sheriff's Office collects and maintains data for the number and dispositions of family violence cases, as well as numbers of child abuse, homicide, sexual assault, robbery, and other offense types investigated. The Coordinator analyzes the data. The data is used to produce reports on program outputs monthly, quarterly and annually to assess the success of the project. Any increase in needs or decrease in services are

documented to review processes in order to better serve the needs of Collin County crime victims and assist them in their journey through the criminal justice system.

Data Management

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Target Group

Any victim / survivor of serious or violent crime reported to and/or investigated by the Collin County Sheriff's Office and their families. The Collin County Sheriff's Office investigates crime in and provides direct services to the residents of Collin County, whose population has averaged approximately 50,000 with a rate of crime at 937 per 100,000 persons as reported by the Texas Department of Public Safety Crime Report. The target area is the unincorporated/rural areas of Collin County. The area tends to be disparately affected, compared to municipal residents, by a lack of support services readily available to help them navigate the criminal justice process or advocate for their rights. Many victims within the unincorporated areas are dispersed over a large geographical area and often lack sufficient funding, transportation, or other resources to seek assistance from victim services programs. Specifically, the CCSO victim services program seeks to target victims of family violence, sexual assault, and other felonious assaults within the unincorporated areas of Collin County. Texas Department of Public Safety Crime Stats show 4 murders, 62 sexual assault/rapes, and 97 aggravated assaults. We (CCSO RMS) show 173 reported family violence incidents.

http://www.dps.texas.gov/administration/crime_records/pages/crimestatistics.htm

Evidence-Based Practices

The Collin County Sheriff's Office recognizes the importance in incorporating current theory, best practice, and evidence-based service delivery. As such, the Victim Advocate annually attends training to improve and maintain an updated knowledge base regarding effective skills and evidence-based practices (EBP). The program maintains a flexible approach to victim services and is willing to adapt practices to improve services and outreach. The Advocate has primarily worked with family violence victims over the past four years, with 69.9% (n = 628) of the 898 victimization types the Advocate served in FY 2016 and FY 2017 considered domestic / family violence. Of the 716 victims served during this time, 62.4% (n = 447) were women. As such, a large part of the CCSO Victim Assistance Program utilizes the Advocacy Interventions for Women Who Experience Intimate Partner Violence EBP at the National Institute of Justice CrimeSolutions.gov website. Advocacy interventions aim to empower women who have experienced intimate partner violence and link them to helpful services in the community. This practice is rated "Effective" for reducing domestic/intimate partner violence. According to research, women who receive services through advocacy interventions experience significantly less physical abuse, compared with women in control groups, at 12- to 24-month follow-up periods.

Additionally, the CCSO has implemented a Lethality Assessment Program (LAP), a standardized, evidence-based series of eleven questions, to identify victims of domestic violence who are at the highest risk of being seriously injured or killed by their intimate partners, and immediately connect them to the local domestic violence services. The LAP makes use of a research-based screening tool and accompanying referral protocol to enable law enforcement and domestic violence programs to work hand-in-hand to actively engage high-risk victims who otherwise may not seek the support of domestic violence intervention services.

Collin County Sheriff's Office supports and empowers individuals who have been impacted by a crime, helping them restore their dignity and safety. Assisting/working with victims' inherent resiliency and self-determination, the Victim Advocate will encourage the victims to lead their path to restoring their personal power through many different avenues and venues. Making sure to support, identify and prioritize the needs of the victims at all times. Services, process, choices, rights, and safety will always be at the forefront.

1. Ramsay, J., Y. Carter, L Davidson, et.al. Advocacy interventions to reduce or eliminate violence and promote the physical and psychosocial well-being of women who experience intimate partner abuse. Cochrane Database System Rev 2009:5 (CD005043).
2. Lethality Assessment Program for First Responders. Bowie, MD: Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, 2009.
3. Best Practice Guidelines: Crime Victim Services, Office of the Justice Program, Nov. 2010.