

SO/VOCA

Project Abstract

Although Collin County has a relatively low crime rate, persons nonetheless commit various crime, including violent or assaultive offenses. The Collin County Sheriff's Office is dedicated to helping these victims, and a civilian victim's advocate is an integral part of these efforts.

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 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.

Domestic violence comes in many forms. The following are some examples but not limited to domestic violence:

- Physical assault
- Sexual assault
- Verbal abuse
- Social abuse
- Stalking
- Strangulation
- Threats to assault or do harm to someone close to that person
- Forced isolation
- Economic/financial abuse
- Using children
- Spiritual abuse
- Cultural and religious practices
- Technological violence

In the confusion which shields/guards 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 may be underserved and have with limited resources and few 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 is often a critical link to services and assistance. Traumatized victims may have difficulty coping and become more isolated as time passes, making it difficult 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.

The following include some serious and negative impacts of violence against women but not limited to:

- Death
- Suicide
- Physical injuries
- Low self-esteem
- Mental illness
- Breakdown of family unit
- Abuse and neglect of children
- Become dependent on services (on community)
- Increase cost of medical, justice, and support services (for county)

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 victims 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

Domestic violence impacts countless people in America each and every day. Victims in Collin County and surrounding cities/counties find themselves in difficult to escape living situations. These victims also struggle to establish the residential and financial independence they need for those who abuse them.

Domestic violence is one of the most prevalent crimes in the U.S., with many cases going unreported. The numbers for national domestic violence static show nearly one in three American women report being physically abused at some point in their lives.

Victims of domestic abuse come from all backgrounds, communities, education levels, economic levels, ethnicities, and religion.

Family violence is the number one cause of injury to adult women, more than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined. (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development).

The following are facts of domestic abuse but not limited to:

- On average, nearly 20 people per minute are victims of physical violence by an intimate partner in the United States. During one year, this equates to more than 10 million women (Project Sanctuary 2021).
- 1 in 5 women killed or severely injured by an intimate partner had no previous warning; the fatal or life threatening incident was the first physical violence they had experienced from their partner (American Psychiatric Association, 2023).
- 48.4% of women have experienced at least one psychologically aggressive behavior by an intimate partner. (Intimate Partner Violence, CDC).
- On a single day in 2021, domestic violence hotlines received over 21,321 calls an average of almost 15 calls every minute (Nat. Network to End Domestic Violence, 2021).
- In domestic violence homicides, women are six times more likely to be killed when there is a gun in the house (Project Sanctuary 2021).
- One in every three Texans is likely to be a victim of a family violence offense (Texas Council on Family Violence, 2020 (TCFV)).
- Two-thirds of victims of domestic violence go unreported to police (New Hope/Violence & Exploitation 2020).
- Women who are victims of intimate partner violence are most likely to be between the ages of 18 to 24 (Plan Street, 2021).
- 33.4% of the relationship between the offenders and victims were marital, either still married or divorced at the time of the incident's occurrence. Female partner/ex-partners were the victim of family violence in 13.1% of the reported incidents (TCFV, 2020).
- 40.1% of Texas women experience intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner rape and/or intimate partner stalking in their lifetimes (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2021).
- 1 in 5 children are exposed to intimate partner violence each year, 90% of these children are eye witnesses to this violence (Apricot for Victims Services).
- 81% of women who have experienced stalking, rape, and physical violence suffer from long-term physical injuries and/or post-traumatic stress disorder (Plan Street, 2021).
- The national economic cost of domestic and family violence is estimated to be over 12 billion per year (Plan Street, 2022).
- HHSC estimates that funded agencies received 281,816 emergencies hotline calls in 2019.
- In 2021, 52% of victims seeking assistance were denied shelter due to lack of space, an increase over nine years of 31% (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence).
- 75% of Texas 16-24 year olds have either experienced dating violence or know another young person who has (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2020).
- On one day in 2020, domestic violence shelters in Texas increased from an average of 77 women annually between 2010-2014 to 96 women annually between 2015-2019 (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2020).
- 1 in 3 women in the United States have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).
- Women who leave their batterers are at 75% greater risk of being killed by the batterer than for those who stay (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence).
- Women with disabilities have a higher risk of family violence (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence).
- 1 in 4 women have been victims of severe physical violence (ex. Beating, burning, strangling) by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

- 72% of all murder-suicides involve an intimate partner; 97% of the victims of these crimes are female (Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 2022).
- Having a gun in the home where domestic violence is taking place increases the likelihood of a homicide by 500%. In fact, 72% of all murder-suicides stem from intimate partner violence (Plan Street, 2022).
- Intimate partner violence results in more than 18.5 million mental health care visits each year (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence).
- National annual cost of medical and mental health care services related to acute domestic violence is estimated at over \$8 billion.
- Those who have been abused by an intimate partner are at a higher risk for mental health problems such as depression,, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, low self-esteem, isolation, fear of intimacy, risk life behaviors, post-traumatic stress disorder, flashbacks, and poor physical health (CDC, 2021).
- In 2021, Texas saw the highest number of family violence related deaths in recent history (Texas Council on Family Violence).

Collin County is the 6th most populous county in Texas. Since 2010, the population has grown from 782,341 to an estimated 1,190,111 as stated in the U.S. Census Bureau. Domestic and family violence has grown with the population. In FY 2023, the Victim Advocate served 226 victims representing 237 different types of victimizations (some suffer multiple types of victimizations). Of the victimization types, 173 were family/domestic violence and the remaining 64 were cases of harassment, sexual assault, arson, burglary, elder abuse, kidnapping, survivors of homicide victims, and impeding breath/circulation charges. During this period, 221 victims received information and referrals such as information about the criminal justice process and referrals to other victim service programs. 105 received emotional or safety services support such as crisis interventions, hotline crisis counseling, individual counseling and attended support groups. 55 victims received criminal justice system assistance such as assistance in obtaining a protective order and free legal aid assistance. 12 victims were assisted with Crime Victims' Compensation applications.

Project Approach & Activities

Crimes of every type, both violent and non-violent, are committed every day, and millions of innocent people are forced to deal with unwanted changes in their lives. The results of these criminal acts can range from emotional injury to death.

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 between the victims and a variety of justice system departments and personnel; advocate for victims' needs and wishes; 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, 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, Collin County Sexual Assault Response Team, 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 generally possesses a Bachelor's degree in Social Work, Behavioral Science, Counseling or a related field and has a minimum of two years' experience. The Advocate has knowledge in the following but not limited to: counseling practices; procedures; methods and techniques related to identification; interviewing; crisis intervention; and support of victims and/or witnesses of violence and criminal activities.

The Crime Victim Advocate will participate in CE for Victim Advocacy through yearly trainings, and plans to attend the 2025 Dallas Crimes against Women's Conference and the 2015 Female Survivors of Violence Conference. These trainings are essential not only for the Victim Advocate but for the program and victim. These 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 also planning to participate in the NOVA Conference, (NOVA) is the oldest national victim advocacy group in the United States. NOVA exists to assist victims of crime, victims of mass casualties, or survivors of natural disasters to understand and normalize their reactions to abnormal situations and allow them to begin their physical, emotional, and financial recovery. The delivery of subject matter based workshops at the annual NOVA Training Event is a key element of fulfilling NOVA's mission to champion dignity and compassion for those harmed by crime and crisis. These training as well as various online webinars will benefit the Victim Advocate which in return will benefit the victims and Collin County.

The Crime Victim Advocate will continue to develop formal and informal collaboration with other crime victim advocates and local service providers to coordinate efforts in meeting the needs of the victims of Collin County. The following is a list of how it will be done: maintain a current list of community resources that provide victim-centered services; develop ongoing relationships with culturally specific program and resources to ensure access for victims; strategize together to leverage existing and available resources; establish and maintain a referral procedure in cooperation with other community agencies; collaborate to develop new ways of integrating and delivering victim centered services; and participate in committees and work groups to increase effectiveness in victim centered responses.

Best Practice Guidelines: Crime Victim Services, Office of the Justice Program, Nov. 2010.

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

The Advocate records a summary of pertinent victim assistance data using a system called VST Tracking (Victim service tracking). Through VST tracking we are able to track, manage, analyze and report on incidents and cases every step of the way. VST helps us to accurately track our victims and services given to victims of crime. VST tracking also allows us to run VOCA approved reports accurately and efficiently. Monthly data is collected and includes the number of victims who requested services and the number actually served each month. Types of services provided include crisis support, CVC information and assistance, safety planning, etc. 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 and uses it to produce reports monthly, quarterly, and annually. 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 though the criminal justice system.

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 73,000 with a rate of crime at 1,499 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 6 murders, 62 sexual assault/rapes, and 302 aggravated assaults. We (CCSO RMS) at this point in time 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. 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, having 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.