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**L**et's face it. Probation, parole and other community corrections professionals wear a lot of hats. Social worker. Law enforcement officer. Drug tester. Counselor. Investigator. Report writer. Compliance officer. Advocate.

And with widespread cuts to community corrections budgets in recent years, the number of hats worn by officers continues to rise. One hat that may be new for many community corrections professionals is that of victim service provider.

A 2011 training needs assessment conducted by the American Probation and Parole Association found that approximately half of the 300 respondents indicated they had a dedicated victim services unit or staff with the primary responsibility of providing programs and services to crime victims. Of those that do not, approximately 85 percent reported that the responsibility to serve victims fell to front-line officers within the agency.

# enhancing victim services in probation and parole

By Carrie Abner

The problem? Available training and technical assistance resources designed to help front-line community corrections professionals improve their capacity in serving crime victims have been limited. More than a decade ago, the American Probation and Parole Association, through funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), developed a training curriculum on Promising Victim Related Practices in Probation and Parole. In the years since, few additional resources have been developed to assist community corrections professionals meet the unique needs of crime victims and many aspects of community corrections practice have evolved. In an effort to update and expand the resources developed in the 1990s, APPA has once again partnered with OVC to develop a range of training material and other resources for the community corrections field on promising victim-related practices in probation and parole.

## **THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS IN SERVING CRIME VICTIMS**

According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, nearly 23 million people were victimized by a violent or property crime in 2011 (Truman and Planty, 2012). The victimization rate for violent crimes increased by 17 percent between 2010 and 2011, as a result of a rise in

### **PROMISING VICTIM- RELATED PRACTICES FACT SHEET SERIES**



In partnership with the Office for Victims of Crime, APPA has published a series of eight fact sheets on topics related to victim services in community corrections settings. This series is designed to be used as reference resources for professionals in probation, parole and other community justice settings. The fact sheets cover a broad range of topics, including:

- The Role of Community Corrections in Victim Services
- Collaboration and Partnerships for Victim Services in Community Corrections
- Family Violence
- Restitution and Other Legal Financial Obligations
- Seeking Victim Input
- Victim Information and Notification
- Victim/Offender Programs
- Workplace Violence

**THESE FACT SHEETS ARE AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD ON THE APPA WEBSITE AT [WWW.APPA-NET.ORG](http://WWW.APPA-NET.ORG)**



aggravated and simple assaults. The same study found that approximately one in four victims of violent crimes last year sustained an injury as a result of the crimes committed against them.

As a direct result of these crimes, victims suffer untold losses from property theft and damage, cash losses, medical expenses, and lost pay due to injuries, participation in the justice process, or other activities related to the crime. Despite the gravity of these losses, however, they do not begin to capture fully the devastating impacts of crime and violence on those who are victimized. Crime is intrusive. It creates a pervasive sense of fear and mistrust. It holds people captive in their homes and negatively affects their overall quality of life—physically, psychologically, and economically. In some cases, sadly, victims are further victimized by a criminal justice system that is ill equipped to meet their needs.

Though the needs of individual crime victims can be varied and often evolve throughout the criminal justice process, there are several common needs among crime victims during the community supervision of the perpetrator. They include:

- Information on the status of their case;
- Information on the status and location of the perpetrator;
- Assistance and referrals to address personal safety issues and security concerns;

- Information about the conditions of community supervision;
- Guidance on what happens in cases of violations of supervision conditions; and,
- Acknowledgment and enforcement of their rights as victims in accordance with the law.

Probation and parole professionals have important obligations for both implementing victims' rights and providing services to crime victims. And there are important benefits to both crime victims and community corrections when these obligations are met. When victims are considered "clients" of community corrections agencies, they are more likely to be kept informed and involved and to receive information about and access to community- and system-based services that can help them in the aftermath of a crime. In return, crime victims often are able to share useful information that can be critical to the effective management and community supervision of their perpetrators.

## **CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS**

There are over 32,000 laws that define and protect victims' rights at the federal, state, and tribal levels (Edmunds and Seymour, 2006). These laws vary across jurisdictions, so it is important for community corrections professionals to know about the laws within their own jurisdictions, as well as their responsibility for implementation and enforcement.

Generally, however, victims' rights relevant to community corrections include the following:

- Information and notification to keep victims informed about the status of the case, their rights as victims, and available services to assist them;
- The opportunity to participate in proceedings, such as pretrial, sentencing, parole and revocation hearings, among others;
- The opportunity to provide input through victim impact statements, pre-sentence investigation (PSI) and pre-parole investigation (PPI) reports, and at parole release and parole/probation revocation hearings;
- Protection from unwanted contact, harassment, threats, or any potential harm by the defendant and/or convicted offender, including the use of protective orders and safety planning to enhance victim security;
- Restitution to help pay for pecuniary losses resulting from a crime;
- Victim compensation, in cases involving violent crimes; and,
- Enforcement of victims' rights.

An important resource for community corrections professionals on state victims' rights laws is VictimLaw ([www.victimlaw.org](http://www.victimlaw.org)). This website, developed through support from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime, provides a comprehensive, user-friendly, online database of victims' rights statutes, tribal laws, constitutional

amendments, court rules, administrative code provisions, and case summaries of related court decisions that is searchable by topic, term, and/or jurisdiction.

## **IMPLEMENTING VICTIMS' RIGHTS IN COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS SETTINGS**

The methods used to implement victims' rights and services in community corrections settings may vary among jurisdictions depending on victims' rights laws within the jurisdiction, the type of community corrections program or agency that is involved, and the resources available within the community corrections agency.

For instance, some community corrections agencies may have a staff person or unit dedicated solely to the delivery of services and programs to victims of crime. These personnel provide a one-stop shop for crime victims and survivors throughout the community corrections process by offering such services as victim notification, opportunities for victim participation and input, and referrals to community-based services and advocacy programs. For instance, the Victim Services Program at the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) of the District of Columbia provides crime victims with information about their rights, delivers technical assistance and orientation to victims and the community about the supervision process, and links victims with appropriate services in the community.

**PARTICIPANTS SPEAK OUT  
ABOUT APPA'S TRAINING  
PROGRAM ON PROMISING  
VICTIM RELATED PRACTICES  
IN PROBATION AND PAROLE**

I had the opportunity to attend APPA's "Promising Victim Related Practices in Parole and Probation" training held in Olathe, Kansas in June 2012. The presentation on restitution was so valuable and had such a practical application, that it sparked an initiative to focus training efforts for state parole on the subject of restitution. Based on the framework of the training, several handouts were created/modified to fit the needs of our state, including the Payment Ability Evaluation (budget form), and our own "Enhancing Restitution Collection" training presentation was delivered four months later to state parole officers in Kansas. The goal was to share the key points of the APPA training and put collection strategies and tools in the hands of our supervision officers, where they could do the most good.

Sarah Herrera, a Topeka Parole Officer, attended the Kansas training and began handing out the Payment Ability Evaluation to offenders on her caseload who weren't paying their restitution.

"One offender realized that she was spending more income on her phone service than she was on food and fuel combined. Having her expenses spelled out in black and white gave me a chance to question her spending priorities and then emphasize the importance of paying that restitution."

Another parole officer started asking offenders "What day will you make a payment?" and actually began seeing an increase in payments made. These are small victories, yet still impacting the collection of restitution as a whole.

The APPA training definitely had a positive impact and provided an opportunity to start those important conversations with parole about restitution. It is our hope that this training initiative will also serve as the jumping-off point for further restitution efforts in our state.

**Janet Good**

*Kansas Dept. of Corrections, Office of Victim Services*



Many community corrections agencies, however, lack adequate resources to establish and maintain dedicated staff positions to provide victim services. In response to a 2011 training needs assessment conducted by APPA, approximately half of the more than 300 community corrections professionals who participated in the assessment indicated that their agency did not have a dedicated victim services staff person or unit. In such agencies, responsibilities for fulfilling crime victims' rights therefore may fall to individual community corrections officers. This makes it critical that front-line officers and first-line supervisors are aware of the agency's specific obligations to implement and enforce victims' rights. At a minimum, community corrections officers should be prepared to undertake the following activities:

- Informing the victim about the community corrections process and the contact information for the supervising officer;
- Providing instructions on submitting victim input through the Victim Impact Statement and other related processes;
- Providing notification to the victim about significant changes in the case and upcoming hearings or other case-related events;
- Referring the victim to appropriate programs and services available through community-based service providers or other justice programs;
- Providing information to the victim about crime victim compensation

programs that may be available; and

- Enforcing any restitution orders imposed by the court for the offender, and holding offenders accountable for noncompliance.

## **APPA RESOURCES ON PROMISING VICTIM RELATED PRACTICES IN PROBATION AND PAROLE**

Historically, community corrections agencies have focused their efforts primarily on the perpetrators of crime. Although community supervision strategies are aimed at protecting the public as a whole from further victimization through the targeted management of defendants/offenders, the interests of individual victims are often lost among the burgeoning caseloads and accompanying paperwork.

During the 1990s, the community corrections field made important strides in engaging victims of crime, providing critical victim services throughout the correctional process, and developing partnerships with community-based victim advocates. Recent trends for the community corrections field, however, such as increasing caseloads and workloads, combined with declining budgets, threatened the field's progress in this area. New training was needed that prepared front-line officers, rather than specialized victim services staff, to support crime victims and that highlighted new, innovative ways to support crime victims more effectively and efficiently.

With funding from OVC, APPA has worked to develop a number of important resources to fill this gap in training and technical assistance and to assist community corrections agencies and staff to improve their services for and support of crime victims. Through the Promising Victim Related Practices in Probation and Parole initiative, APPA has developed a comprehensive training curriculum designed to provide information and skills development for front-line community corrections officers on a range of topics related to crime victims, including: communicating effectively with crime victims; incorporating victim input into the process; victim notification; and enhancing restitution collection and management. The training program was pilot tested in four sites across the country with a variety of probation and parole agencies and professionals in Portland, OR; Albany, NY; LaGrange, KY; and Olathe, KS. The complete training curriculum package, which includes an instructor's manual, participant manual, presentation slides, and handouts, is now available for free download on the APPA web site.

In addition, APPA project staff and consultants have published a series of eight fact sheets devoted to a range of topics related to victim services in probation and parole. See Figure #1 for more information about the APPA

## **ONLINE TRAINING COURSE ON THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS IN VICTIM SERVICES**

The American Probation and Parole Association is pleased to announce the availability of a new online course on, "The Role of Community Corrections in Victim Services," made possible through funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime. This course is designed to provide probation, parole and other community justice professionals with basic information about the role that community corrections agencies play in providing services to those victimized by crime and the strategies that can be used by individual officers to assist crime victims. The course is available for free for a limited time. For more information about the course and additional resources available through this project, please visit the APPA Web site.

**Learn**





## Fact Sheet Series on Promising Victim Related Practices in Probation and Parole.

APPA also delivered a series of three webinar sessions dedicated to victim-related issues. Webinars in the series included sessions on engaging victims in the community corrections process, strategies to enhance restitution collection and management, and preventing and addressing corrections-based sexual abuse in community corrections contexts. Each webinar event was recorded and is available for free viewing on the APPA web site.

Finally, APPA project staff have designed an online course for probation, parole, and other community corrections professionals on the Role of Community Corrections in Victim Services. The self-paced, 90-minute course, which provides basic instruction on the impact of crime on victims, key victims' rights, and community corrections' obligations for implementing and enforcing victims' rights, can be accessed through the APPA web site.

## CONCLUSION

Across the country, probation, parole and other community corrections professionals are being asked to do more with less. With budget shortfalls rampant, designated units, like victim services, within community corrections agencies have been the frequent target of cuts, resulting in added responsibilities for front-line community corrections officers. Though it may be a new hat for many community corrections professionals, the role of victim service provider can have a powerful impact—for

crime victims and community corrections, alike.

New APPA resources on Promising Victim-Related Practices in Probation and Parole, funded by the Office for Victims of Crime, are designed to help community corrections agencies and personnel in building their capacities to serve and assist individuals victimized by crime during the community corrections process. Probation and parole processes can be confusing to crime victims and survivors, and community corrections professionals can be vital source of assistance and information that can help victims navigate the criminal justice system more effectively. What's more, engaging victims of crime throughout the community corrections process, while providing clear benefits to victims, can also benefit probation and parole professionals. By considering victims as "clients" of community corrections, agencies gain new opportunities to enhance accountability and reduce recidivism among supervisees.

## REFERENCES

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