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**Strategies for Effective Victim Assistance in Sex Offender Management in Rural Areas**

*Presented by:*  
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Member, APPA Board of Directors



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**Learning Objectives**

- Identify at least two unique aspects of sexual assault and victimization in rural jurisdictions
- Describe at least three good tips on victim assistance in rural jurisdictions
- Describe four model programs and approaches to victim assistance

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**Identifying Resources in Rural Areas**

"Rural populations are neither easy to serve nor easy to reach." (NSVRC)

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**Unique Characteristics**

- Rural populations often marginalized from mainstream power structure, which holds opportunities for assistance & services through resources & policy initiatives.
- Sexual assaults in rural areas are often "unspoken crimes."
- Low population density means rural people have a high degree of familiarity with each other — led experts to refer to rural as a subjective culture, attitude or situation rather than a region.

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**Sexual Assault: Rural Perspective**

- Rural culture & geographic conditions can limit reporting & service delivery, justice & healing for victims.
- Greater physical isolation
- Lack of anonymity
- More likely to know offender
- More likely to re-encounter the offender
- Law enforcement likely to be part of the social network (victims less likely to report)

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**Barriers to Accessing Services**

- Dispersed nature of services & programs can serve as a major deterrent to reporting.
- If victim parks car at the sheriffs station or local rape crisis center, entire community could know very quickly.
- Professionals may care more about maintaining friendly community relations than pursuing justice.

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**Barriers to Accessing Services (2)**

- Transportation can be difficult.
- Communication equipment may not work as well in many rural areas.
- Medical assistance & forensic examiners may be a long distance away.

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**Barriers to Accessing Services (3)**

- Rural values often stress importance of family reputation over personal justice & even personal safety.
- Distrust of outside assistance & public agencies means professionals have to build strong trusting relationships in the community over time before residents will access services.

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**Difficulties for Rural Victim Advocates**

- Funding issues that impact regular outreach and training:
  - *Director of one rural rape crisis program says that to get to the crisis center, it's not unusual to travel 1.5 hours. She reports spending \$15,000 - \$16,000 annually just to provide transportation for victims.*

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**Difficulties for Rural Victim Advocates (2)**

- Time & money required to respond to & process rural case exceeds that for urban cases, yet rural programs have to compete on urban standard. Funding is provided on absolute case numbers, so rural programs get less.

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**Rural Victim Advocates Speak Out (National Sexual Violence Resource Center)**

- More training is needed:
  - Advocates.
  - Law enforcement.
  - Nurses.
    - (ALSO sex offender management teams).
- Awareness & community outreach is essential:
  - Raise awareness.
  - Establish trust.

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**Most Effective Techniques**

- Community visits (speak to community service providers & at public gatherings)
- Community collaboration with as many partners as possible
- Media outreach (radio & weekly newspapers)
- Satellite offices (brings services closer to potential victims & helps build trust)
  - Director of a rural rape crisis program says that when satellite offices were opened in two rural counties, people came to access services "almost immediately...it's hard to rebuild a life from 70-80 miles away."

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**Resources**

- "Unspoken Crimes: Sexual Assault in Rural America." Susan Lewis, National Sexual Violence Resource Center. (2003). (Download from Violence Against Women Online Resources: [www.vaw.umn.edu](http://www.vaw.umn.edu))
- National Victim Assistance Academy Text:
  - "Rural Victims" available for download at: [http://www.cjp.usdoj.gov/ovc/assist/mvaa2002/chapter22\\_6.htm#1](http://www.cjp.usdoj.gov/ovc/assist/mvaa2002/chapter22_6.htm#1)

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**Tips for Victim Assistance and Outreach in Rural Communities (1)**

- Creation of formal or informal sex offender management team:
  - Probation.
  - Law enforcement.
  - Treatment provider.
  - Victim advocate.
- [www.csom.org](http://www.csom.org) has great resources for team development and implementation.

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**Tips for Victim Assistance and Outreach in Rural Communities (2)**

- Many rural jurisdictions have formal or informal venues for policy and decision-making.
- Try to get a strong victim advocate or reentry professional on board.
  - Regularly attend meetings.
  - Making folks aware of problems is part of the solution.
  - Volunteer to help out with non-victim or reentry-related issues (two-way street!)

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**More Good Tips.....(3)**

- Work together with urban and suburban victim advocates:
  - Appeal to local, state and federal law enforcement and legislative bodies to address the lack of resources and/or assistance.
  - Use crime mapping to focus on unserved and underserved victim populations.

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**More Good Tips.....(4)**

- Work to get crime victims who are willing to speak out to attend meetings and be visible as a "voice for victims."
- Identify all state and national toll-free victim assistance numbers and ensure that victims have them:
  - Over 20 national numbers today (see participant handout).

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**More Good Tips.....(5)**

- Ensure that all law enforcement and reentry officials have information about crime victim compensation:
  - All victims of violent crime are eligible to apply for victim compensation.
  - Train law enforcement and reentry officials on victim compensation eligibility and application process.
  - Let them know where advocates are who can assist victims with the compensation process:
    - <http://www.nacvcb.org>

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**More Good Tips.....(6)**

- Identify victim advocates and reentry professionals and volunteers (community-based, law enforcement, etc.) and related helping professionals in rural jurisdictions:
  - Develop a resource list.
  - Publish it in local papers.
  - Distribute it at fairs and other community events.

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**More Good Tips.....(7)**

- Looking at grants:
  - "Rural-remote-frontier" = huge advantage with many federal grant agencies.
  - Get OJP handbook of funding for rural crime/victimization issues:
    - [www.ojp.usdoj.gov/publications](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/publications)
  - Identify volunteer grant writers (from public and private sector) who can help.

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**More Good Tips.....(8)**

- Train, train, train!
  - Schools; hospitals; churches, mosques, temples and synagogues; mental health agencies, etc.
  - Modify training programs to focus on the impact of victimization on the target audience/community.
- Begin a multidisciplinary Victim Advisory Committee to address rural victimization and effective sex offender management.

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**More Good Tips.....(9)**

- Involve the news media:
  - Daily, weekly and throwaway newspapers.
  - Network and cable channels.
  - Talk radio (don't forget farm reports!)
    - **Identify victimization issues unique to rural jurisdictions.**
    - **Focus on scarcity of resources.**
    - **Recognize good media coverage if/when it occurs.**

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**More Good Tips.....(10)**

- Get a collaborative group to develop a 1-5 year strategic plan for victim assistance in rural jurisdictions:
  - A needs assessment and gap analysis are helpful.
  - 866.OVC.TTAC for technical assistance.
- Be inclusive – invite anyone to the table who is willing to be part of the solution

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**More Good Tips.....(11)**

- Voluntarism:
  - Rural community members wear many hats, some of which might intersect with the “victim assistance” and/or “reentry” hats.
  - Ask for volunteers for specific activities (victim support, transportation, safety planning and support)
  - Find ways to allow volunteers to provide services from their homes (counseling, completing forms)

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**Model Programs**

- Victim wraparounds (WA and AK) to address risk and safety issues.
- Engaging professionals who are out in rural settings to be "eyes and ears", i.e. postal workers, gas company staff, etc.
- "Good neighbor networks"

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**Model Programs**

- Engaging interfaith communities:
  - Educate about crime victim issues.
  - Be a resource first; ask for resources second.
  - Utilize National Crime Victims' Rights Week (each April) as a starting point with a sample interdenominational sermon.
  - Recognize that in asking for support, you also provide a valuable service (to victimized members of congregations)

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**State Links for Victim Assistance**

- National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators (NAVAA)
  - [http://www.navaa.org/link\\_matrix.html](http://www.navaa.org/link_matrix.html).
- "State links matrix" offers information about 12 system- and community-based victim services by state.

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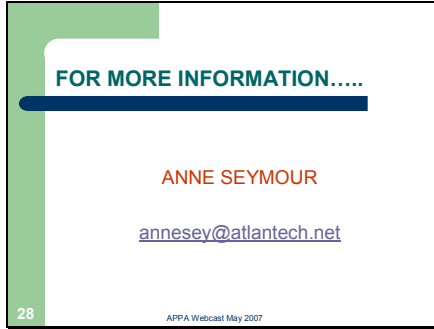
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FOR MORE INFORMATION.....

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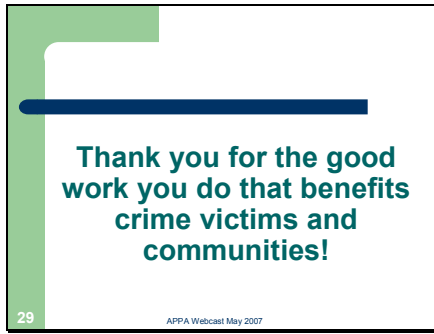
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Thank you for the good work you do that benefits crime victims and communities!

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