

# FACT SHEET

## PROMISING VICTIM RELATED PRACTICES IN PROBATION AND PAROLE



## THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS IN VICTIM SERVICES



According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 18.7 million people were victimized by a violent or property crime in 2010. Approximately 29 percent of individuals victimized by violence that year—or more than 1 million people—sustained an injury as a result of the crime committed against them (Truman, 2011). 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 or activities related to the crime.

Despite the gravity of these statistics, 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. Compounding the trauma many victims experience, they often are further victimized by a criminal justice system that continues to be ill equipped to meet—or is indifferent to—their needs.

Victims of crime have a variety of needs, some of which evolve throughout the criminal justice process—from arrest to trial to sentencing and beyond. When defendants or convicted offenders are

---

This publication was produced by the Council of State Government/American Probation and Parole Association under Cooperative Agreement Number 2009-SZ-B9-K001, 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 document are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

placed under any form of community supervision—including pretrial release, probation, or parole—victims of crime often share many of the same needs for:

- Information on the status of their case;
- Information on the status and location of the perpetrator;
- Assistance and referrals to address personal safety and security concerns;
- Information about the conditions of community supervision;
- Guidance on what happens in cases of violations of the conditions of community supervision; and
- Acknowledgement and enforcement of their rights as victims in accordance with state law.

Probation and parole agencies and officials have important obligations for both implementing victims' rights and providing services to victims. 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 effective management and supervision of defendants/convicted offenders.

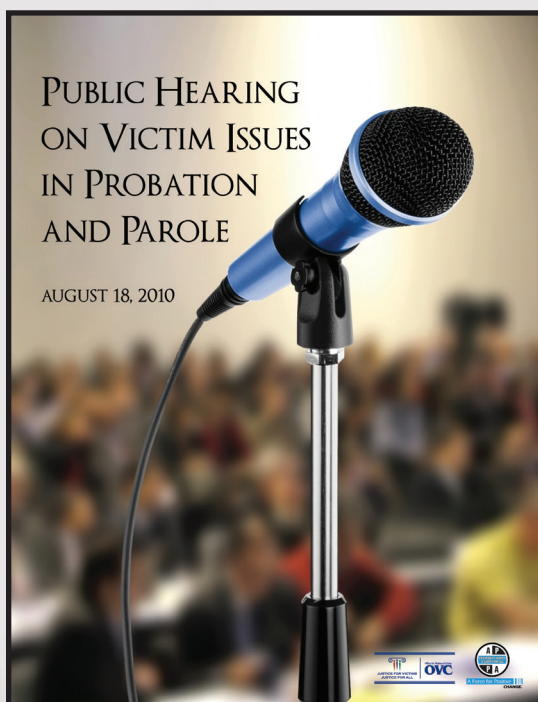
Proactive engagement of victims ensures two-way communications that are beneficial to victims and to supervising agencies.

Historically, community corrections agencies have focused their efforts primarily on the perpetrators of crime and have ignored or passively responded to the concerns of crime victims. While 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 burgeoning caseloads and accompanying paperwork.

ACCORDING TO THE  
U.S. BUREAU OF  
JUSTICE STATISTICS,  
18.7 MILLION PEOPLE  
WERE VICTIMIZED BY A  
VIOLENT OR PROPERTY  
CRIME IN 2010.

Over the past 2 decades, however, community corrections agencies have made significant strides in engaging crime victims and those who serve them throughout the correctional process. Many probation agencies have designated victim assistance personnel or have assigned victim services to officers as a collateral duty; nearly all paroling authorities have victim assistance staff who help victims through the parole hearing and parole supervision processes.

Unique partnerships have emerged at the state and local levels that unite victim assistance and community corrections professionals in supporting victims/survivors of crime during the critical period in which their perpetrators are under community supervision. These partnerships are contributing to the development of a more victim-centered focus in the community corrections field, while they



DOWNLOAD THE FULL REPORT  
FROM THE APPA WEBSITE



system (with an emphasis on their experiences with the community corrections phase) and to help community corrections practitioners identify strategies for responding to victims' needs and rights more effectively.

- To obtain input about how APPA and its member agencies can collaborate with crime victim and survivors, victim assistance agencies, and allied professionals to best identify and meet the needs of victims throughout the community corrections processes.

The hearing featured a witness panel comprising six survivors of crime and a victim advocate who testified about their experiences with the criminal justice system, including community corrections. Collectively, those who testified at the hearing highlighted a number of strategies through which community corrections agencies and staff can play an integral role in the provision of support and services to crime victims. A report of the *Public Hearing on Victim Issues in Probation and Parole*, including 10 recommendations for improving services to crime victims and survivors throughout the community corrections process, is available for download.

## FIGURE I

### APPA PUBLIC HEARING ON VICTIMS ISSUES IN PROBATION AND PAROLE

On August 18, 2010, the American Probation and Parole Association sponsored a Public Hearing on Victim Issues in Probation and Parole, through support from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC).

Three important goals of this Public Hearing were:

- To seek input from crime victims and survivors, and those who serve them, about their most significant needs when the offenders who victimized them are released to pretrial, probation, or parole supervision.
- To increase community corrections professionals' knowledge and appreciation of crime victims' and survivors' experiences with the justice

simultaneously enhance the accountability and rehabilitation of individuals under supervision. For example:

- Victims participate in victim/offender programs that are designed to help convicted offenders understand the impact of their crimes on victims and the community; examples include victim impact panels and classes and victim/offender dialogue.
- Victim advocates often participate in intervention and treatment programs for domestic violence and sex offenders.
- Community corrections officials actively participate in coalitions and task forces that seek to coordinate and improve direct services to victims.

The end result of all these efforts has been increased awareness of the importance of proactively engaging victims throughout the entire community corrections process, as well as a richer understanding of the powerful role that community corrections agencies and staff can play in supporting victims of crime.

## KEY ELEMENTS

### AWARENESS OF 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 officials to know about their jurisdiction's laws and any responsibility they have for implementation and enforcement.

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

- Information and notification to keep victims informed about the status of their case, about their rights as victims, and about the services that are available to help them;
- Participation in proceedings such as pretrial, sentencing, parole, and revocation hearings, among others;
- Input through victim impact statements, via presentence 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;
- Compensation (In cases involving violent crimes, victims receive compensation through a state fund to help them pay for the costs resulting from a crime. Referrals from community corrections officials may be necessary for victims to receive these funds.); and

THERE ARE OVER  
32,000 LAWS THAT  
DEFINE AND PROTECT  
VICTIMS' RIGHTS AT  
THE FEDERAL, STATE,  
AND TRIBAL LEVELS.



- Enforcement (Increasingly, states are passing laws that provide recourse for victims who feel their statutory and/or constitutional rights were purposefully or willfully neglected by agencies within the justice system).

Victim service providers within a state or local jurisdiction can help community corrections officials become knowledgeable about victims' rights specific to probation and parole. (For more information, see the APPA Fact Sheet on "Collaboration and Partnerships for Victim Services in Community Corrections.")

Another important resource for community corrections professionals is VictimLaw ([www.victimlaw.org](http://www.victimlaw.org)). VictimLaw was developed through support from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime. It 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.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF VICTIMS' RIGHTS AND SERVICES**

The methods used to implement victims' rights and services in community corrections settings may vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, depending on victims' specific legal rights within that jurisdiction, the type of community corrections program or agency that is involved (pretrial services, probation, parole, etc.), and the resources available within the community corrections agency.



For instance, in some jurisdictions, 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. Examples of the critical services these agencies provide to victims include:

- Explaining the community corrections process;
- Identifying the community corrections officer who will provide supervision for the perpetrator of the crime;
- Notifying the victim of changes in the case and/or upcoming hearings or other case-related events;
- Facilitating the submission of victim input through the Victim Impact Statement and related processes;
- Informing victims of available services in the community that can assist in meeting their unique needs; and
- Referring victims to community-based victim advocates.

Victim services staff in community corrections also can provide critical training to others within the agency on the rights and needs of crime victims and the role that community corrections professionals can play in implementing victim rights.

## FIGURE #2

Through funding from the U. S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) has developed a series of fact sheets focusing on critical victim-related programs and services in community corrections.

In addition to this fact sheet on the “The Role of Community Corrections in Victims Services,” fact sheets in this series cover the following topics:

- Seeking Victim Input
- Victim Notification
- Restitution and Other Legal Financial Obligations
- Victim-Offender Programs
- Family Violence
- Workplace Violence
- Collaborations and Partnerships to Enhance Victim Service

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



**DOWNLOAD**

Many community corrections agencies, however, lack adequate resources to establish and maintain dedicated staff positions to provide victim services. 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 within a community corrections agency are aware of the agency's specific obligations to 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 how the victim can contact the supervising officer;
- Providing information about the submission of 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 victim 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 with restitution orders.

## **SPECIALIZED UNITS**

Increasingly, community corrections agencies have specialized units that focus on a specific type of convicted offender and crime, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, or drunk driving. Specialized units make good use of limited resources and feature crime-specific caseloads that allow supervising officers to focus on and manage one category of perpetrators. They also simplify victim access to supervising officers who oversee a specialized caseload.

## **TRAINING AND CROSS-TRAINING**

The critical role of community corrections in victim services can be enhanced by ongoing training. Because victims' rights laws, community corrections agency policies, insights from current research, and evidence-based practices change over time, community corrections agencies should offer initial and refresher training on an ongoing basis. The most effective training programs always feature victims speaking about their personal experiences, in the same way that the power of the personal story of survivors has been influential in starting and enhancing corrections-based victim services. A wide range of training topics can be considered by community corrections agencies. Examples include:

- Victims' constitutional and statutory rights, and the roles and responsibilities of community corrections in implementing them;
- The immediate-, short-, and long-term impact of crime on victims—psychological, physical, financial, spiritual, and social;

- Local, state, and national victim assistance services;
- Crime victim-specific topics that can improve assistance to specific categories of victims; and
- Evidence-based practices in victim services.

Similarly, victim assistance professionals can benefit from ongoing training from community corrections officials that addresses the following topics:

- How pretrial services, probation, and parole work, and the differences between these types of supervision;
- How risk and needs assessments are conducted for individual defendants/offenders, and how findings are utilized in case supervision and management;
- The range of programs that are offered to hold perpetrators accountable and prevent further criminal activity (and in what ways advocates and victims can be helpful to the operation of these programs); and
- Community corrections agency policies that are specific to victim assistance and victim safety.

## PARTNERSHIPS AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

The many needs of victims whose perpetrators are under some form of community supervision can best be identified and addressed through collaboration and partnerships. In many jurisdictions, victim advocates and community corrections professionals work together to accomplish these goals. Shared aims in working with victims can include:

- Explaining what the actual sentence or paroling authority decision is and what it means to victims, and any conditions of community supervision that are relevant to the victim;
- Providing victims with 24/7/365 contact information for their perpetrator's supervising officer or unit and guidelines about when and how to contact them;



# Training

Knowledge, competencies, and **professional development** are essential for the teaching of vocational or practical skills provides the

- On-the-job training provides the
- Off-the-job training provides the



- Ensuring that victim impact information is included in and addressed through the community supervision process and associated programming;
- Conducting initial safety planning for victims that identifies any safety or security concerns they may have and addresses these concerns through victim protection and case supervision strategies;
- Helping victims prepare for and attend probation and parole revocation hearings at which they will deliver victim impact statements; and
- Ensuring that victims are aware of local, state, and national victim assistance services that can assist them.

Partnerships between community corrections and victim assistance professionals also promote processes for ongoing communications and collaboration. Examples include:

- The development of agency guiding statements and goals that are victim-centered;
- The development of inter-agency policies and memoranda-of-understanding that clarify their respective roles in victim assistance and defendant/offender management;



## FIGURE #3

### JUSTICE SOLUTIONS RESOURCES ON VICTIM SERVICES IN CORRECTIONS

Justice Solutions is a national non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing rights, resources, and respect for victims and communities hurt by crime; enhancing governmental and societal responses to crime and its consequences on individuals and communities; and strengthening crime prevention initiatives in America. Comprised of some of the top crime victim advocates from across the country, Justice Solutions has developed a variety of training and technical assistance resources designed to assist victim services staff, justice system practitioners, and allied professionals in serving those victimized by crimes. Among the informative publications developed by Justice Solutions is a series of resources on victim services in corrections, which provide correctional professionals with a general understanding of the rights and needs of victims, as well as specific strategies for implementing victim rights in correctional environments. These resources are available on the Justice Solutions website at [http://www.justicesolutions.org/art\\_pub.htm](http://www.justicesolutions.org/art_pub.htm).

- The creation of victim advisory entities that provide guidance to community corrections agencies for improving and expanding their services for victims;
- The development of victim/offender programming that promotes offender accountability and victim and community safety, including victim awareness programs, victim impact panels, victim/offender dialogue opportunities, family group conferencing, and restorative community service; and
- The delivery of cross-training to promote best practices in policies and programming.

Partnerships help educate communities and allied professionals about victims' rights, needs, and services throughout all community corrections processes. They also raise awareness of collaborative efforts to enhance victim and community safety and offender accountability. Through victim outreach, traditional media and social media outreach, and dedicated awareness campaigns, community corrections agencies can better inform crime victims and communities of the critical role they play in providing services to support and assist crime victims.

## CONCLUSION

Probation and parole processes often are unclear or confusing to crime victims and survivors, however, victim and community safety and awareness are enhanced when probation and parole agencies actively sponsor and promote victim services. Agencies gain new opportunities to enhance accountability and reduce recidivism among supervisees when they commit to proactively considering victims as "clients" of community corrections. Collaborating with victim service and allied justice professionals to streamline victim assistance efforts also has the potential to improve overall justice services in the community—resulting in fewer victims.

## REFERENCES

Edmunds, C., and Seymour, A. (2006). *Victims' rights and laws in the United States*. National Victim Assistance Academy: participant text. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime.

Truman, J. L. (2011). *Criminal Victimization, 2010*. Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin, September 2011. Available at <http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=2224>