

Victim Assistance

Mission

To assist victims and witnesses, and their family members, to treat them with dignity and respect, to keep them informed of adult and juvenile offenders release, or potential release, to ease the burden of crime victims, and to encourage their participation in the criminal justice process.

Summary of Activities

Each year the **Criminal Justice Institute** (CJI) awards millions of state and federal grant dollars to programs that provide services to crime victims. Federal and state victim assistance funds administered by the CJI are funded by fines



and fees collected from federal and state criminal defendants. Grants may be used by public agencies and not-for-profit organizations to provide direct assistance to crime victims. Services that are provided to crime victims include crisis intervention, shelter, counseling, victim notification and assistance through the court system.

Federal and state funds also provide financial assistance to violent crime victims and their families who have suffered financial losses associated with a crime and who have no other financial means with which to pay crime-related costs. Approximately 3,000 individuals and families received this assistance last year. Claims may be for a maximum of \$15,000, to assist crime victims and their families with crime-related costs such as funerals, hospital bills and lost wages.

Help Line
1 - 800 -
353-1484

The **Department of Correction** (DOC) Victim & Witness Services Program notifies victims and witnesses when the individual who committed the crime against them is: (1) scheduled to be discharged, (2) paroled both in and out of state or to go on probation, (3) scheduled for a parole or clemency hearing, (4) being considered for work release or a community transition program, (5) transferred to a minimum security level or a DOC transition unit, or (6) escapes or dies. The program also provides other services to crime victims, witnesses, and potential victims, such as crisis counseling, in-person and telephone

contact, providing post-sentencing reports, providing support and assistance in the filing of temporary restraining and other protective orders, and assisting crime victims in filing claims to obtaining compensation.

External Factors

Many crimes still carry a very deep-seated social stigma - especially crimes involving family violence and sexual assault. Victims of these crimes often are reluctant to come forward and take advantage of the services available. For victims of all types of crimes, services can be fragmented and in the most rural areas may not be available at all. Additionally, because money for both the assistance and compensation funds comes primarily from assessments against offenders, the level of funding can be extremely erratic. Federal grant funds are also variable, having changed from \$2 million to \$8.5 million to \$5 million in successive years. This instability makes victim service programs planning more difficult.

External factors affecting and influencing the DOC program include: (1) communication between County Probation Departments and DOC forwarding of victim information, (2) court decisions to modify sentences to time served, and (3) failure to notify DOC of an offender's release by county courts or jails.

Evaluation and Accomplishments

In 1999, approximately 4,700 victims and witnesses were enrolled in the DOC program, and approximately 1,722 victims and witnesses received official notification. There are no national or regional studies or research data available to show a correlation between notification and a decrease in the offender recidivism rate, or a decrease in re-victimization

of victims. However, based on DOC Victim & Witness Program data, less than one percent (1%) of victims enrolled in the DOC Victim Notification Program have reported re-victimization after the offender's release.

The CJI has been administering victim service programs since 1986. In that time there has been tremendous growth in the interest and commitment to victim services. The CJI believes that even with all the research, programs and legislation that now surround victim services, there is still lacking a solid assessment of whether the services provided for crime victims match the needs that crime victims have. In an attempt to answer this question for Indiana, CJI has contracted with **Indiana University** to conduct a statewide audit of victim services and assessment of victim needs.

Plans for the Biennium

The DOC Victim & Witness Services Program plans to expand services to include a Support Unit for victims and their family members. In addition, plans will be developed to expand the Victim-Offender Dialogue Program incorporating the restorative justice philosophy.

A recent telephone poll indicated that few Hoosiers are aware of the Victim Compensation Fund. In order to make the information more available; CJI has embarked on a sophisticated public awareness campaign. CJI will also continue administering victim assistance grant funds and providing training and technical assistance for victim service professionals throughout the state.

CJI is in the final stages of implementing a new data base management system for the state's victim compensation program. As that project becomes complete, CJI will conduct a business assessment of the program to find ways to continue streamlining the process of evaluating compensation claims and making payments to and on behalf of crime victims. With the development of the new database to administer this program, the CJI has worked closely with the Office of the **Auditor of State**, successfully connecting to their database that provides the most current identifying information for most service providers.

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