

A COORDINATED RESPONSE TO VICTIMS OF CRIME

Streamlining Service Between Regional Victims' Services and RCMP Community Assistance

Regional Victims' Services and RCMP Community Assistance have developed a model of integrated services provided to victims of crime. The objective is to ensure victims receive services responsive to their needs in a timely manner through a simplified process.

Victim needs both inside and outside the criminal justice system are broad and often quite diverse. Nevertheless, it would appear that most victims want information on their case and assistance in navigating the criminal justice process. Outside of the criminal justice system, victim needs cover a wide spectrum of services which may or may not be directly related to the individual's experience as a victim of crime, i.e., social services, housing, educational training programs.

The partnership between Victims' Services and Community Assistance is a key component of an active response to the needs of victims of crime in Nova Scotia.

Program Descriptions of Partners

RCMP Community Assistance

In 1991, responding to the needs of victims of crime, accident and circumstance the RCMP implemented a Victim Assistance program. By 1998 this service was available in 33 Detachments across the province. A review of Victim Assistance in March 1999, identified that while the existing service was valuable, it was limited in focus and did not address the need of the majority of victims.

In response to the review's recommendations to provide all victims within RCMP jurisdictions a quality service of information, support and referral, Community Assistance was developed and is available in Detachments across Nova Scotia. The program is overseen by the Community Policing Section. Coordination at each Detachment is handled by a designated member and a volunteer Coordinator. Community Assistance is an early intervention response provided by security cleared and trained volunteers in a manner that ensures the integrity of service as well as the safety of volunteers.

Regional Victims' Services

The Victims' Services Division was established in 1989. It is separate and independent from other criminal justice branches, such as police, Public Prosecution Services and the courts. The Division's Head office is situated in Halifax but direct services to victims are delivered through four regional offices located in Dartmouth, Kentville, New Glasgow and Sydney. Each office outside of Halifax has a toll-free number to ensure programs are accessible province-wide.

All programs, with the exception of Criminal Injuries Counselling, are operated through the regional offices. Specific services provided by regional staff include liaison and advocacy on the victim's behalf with all components of the system (police, Crown, courts, corrections); direct assistance to victims as their case progresses through the criminal justice process; short term counselling; referrals to other services; court preparation for victims who are called to testify; assistance in applying for Criminal Injuries Counselling and help in preparing Victim Impact Statements. The regional staff also provides information, training and a referral source for victim issues to other divisions within justice and community agencies.

NEED FOR COORDINATION OF SERVICES

Services across Canada are provided through a number of different agencies, including police, justice departments and community groups, however neither coverage nor types of services are standardized. Some communities have access to a broad range of services, while others have but a single service. Duplication and gaps in service are a common problem.

Research Findings

In September 1996 a six-month evaluation of the Victims' Services Division and its services was completed by external consultants. The report recommended improvement in the coordination and integration of services to victims of crime:

Many of the individual pieces of the service continuum for victims of crime are already in place. The Victims' Services Division has done an excellent job in developing services and programs around system-based dedicated pieces of this continuum. As well, the RCMP has in place volunteer programs in parts of the province to meet victim needs immediately after the point of contact (i.e., early intervention). Community-based organizations provide other pieces of the service continuum (emotional support, assistance with housing, employment counseling). What remains to be put into place is an integration of the several pieces to provide victims of crime in Nova Scotia with a seamless or integrated service. [Collins Management Consulting & Research Ltd., An Evaluation of the Victims' Services Division: Executive Summary, Department of Justice .1996. p.ii]

This observation is reinforced in a review of the family violence victim support projects. The Gardner Pinfold evaluation included the following recommendation:

Recommendation 3

In an effort to avoid duplication and promote effective delivery, there should be a careful review of the service boundaries of all partners, i.e., the projects, transition houses, Victims' Services, Victim Assistance worker program, etc. This review should also carefully consider the role of project coordinators, volunteers and advocates to ensure the types and levels of service are consistent with the project mandate and qualifications of the service provider. (A Review of the Victim Support Service Program of the Framework For Action Against Family Violence, N.S. Department of Justice, December 1997. P.28)

In addition, a national review of victim issues by the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime also focused on the need to improve coordination of services to victims:

Recommendation:

1. All provinces review their victim service programs to ensure that the needs of victims of crime are being met and that a seamless delivery of service is being provided.

(Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, Balancing the Scales: The State of Victims' Rights in Canada, 1998, p.58)

SUMMARY

Adoption of a coordinated Province-wide victims' services support system will provide easier access to services and reduce the confusion frequently experienced by victims of crime.

The partnership between Regional Victims' Services and RCMP Community Assistance will address the needs of victims and their families in a comprehensive manner beginning with an early intervention response including information, support, crime prevention strategies and referral provided by RCMP Community Assistance. Upon entering the Criminal Justice System, and particularly once a charge has been laid, RCMP Community Assistance will make a referral to Regional Victims' Services for the provision of general and case specific information, liaison and advocacy with all components of the criminal justice system, assistance with Criminal Injuries Counselling applications as well as all Victim Impact Statements and court orientation/preparation services. In instances where court accompaniment will be provided by an RCMP Community Assistance volunteer, the volunteer is encouraged to attend the court preparation session provided by Regional Victims' Services. Regional Victims' Services will also provide specialized services through the Child Victim/Witness Program to assist child victims and their families.