

VICTIM SERVICES

Victim Services Programs and Services

Purpose

Victim Services, of the Department of Justice was created in 1989 as a vehicle to reduce the effects of crime on the people in Nova Scotia.

Its purpose is

- to promote the rights of victims of crime and provide an avenue to address their needs
- to provide information and services to victims of crime and to raise community awareness on victims' issues
- to work within Government, the criminal justice system and the community to develop and implement policies and programs for victims of crime

Background

The Victim Services Unit has, as its roots, two pieces of legislation: Section 727.9 of the Criminal Code (1989) and the *Victims' Rights and Services Act* (1990). These pieces of legislation created a surcharge to be imposed on both federal and provincial offences, the revenue of which is placed in a Victims' Assistance Fund for research and services for victims of crime. The provincial Act also contains a victims' bill of rights.

The Unit has four Regional Offices and operates four core programs. The Unit also provides expertise and policy advice and develops special initiatives in response to the needs and concerns of victims of crime.

In order to ensure province-wide accessibility, Regional Offices outside of metro Halifax and our Head Office in Halifax, have toll-free telephone numbers. Locations and telephone numbers are listed at the end of this document.

The Provincial Victim Services Program

If you are a victim of crime, or the spouse or relative of a victim, the Provincial Victim Services Program can provide you with information, support and assistance as your case moves through the criminal justice system.

How can we help?

The program staff can help by:

- giving general information on the criminal justice system (police, courts, prosecution, corrections)
- getting information about your court case
- helping you contact police, the Crown attorney and the correctional system
- helping you prepare to testify in court
- explaining and helping you prepare a Victim Impact Statement
- helping you apply for restitution
- helping you apply for Criminal Injuries Counselling
- providing special help to child victims or witnesses of crime
- referring you to other agencies that may be helpful

We cannot give you legal advice or long term counselling, but we can assist you in contacting other helping agencies. There are no fees for our service. The services of the Provincial Program are available through Regional Victim Services Offices.

The Child Victim/Witness Program

Involvement in the criminal justice system can be a confusing and even frightening experience, particularly for a child. Children are often afraid of being asked questions in court and are worried about doing something wrong. Court hearings may be delayed resulting in long waiting periods which can be very frustrating. At this difficult time, children and the parents or adults who are helping them, can receive assistance and support from the *Child Victim/Witness Program*.

How can we help?

Our service can help a child victim or witness by:

- giving information and answering questions about the criminal justice system
- explaining the court process and everyone's role in it
- providing a tour of the courtroom and preparing a child for court
- arranging meetings with the Crown attorney
- going to court with the child
- helping to prepare Victim Impact Statements
- helping with an application for Criminal Injuries Counselling
- assist to contact other agencies that can be of help

Initial meetings with a child may take place in the child's home. To obtain the above services, you can contact your local Provincial Victim Services Office.

The Criminal Injuries Counselling Program

If you have been a victim of a violent crime committed in Nova Scotia, the Criminal Injuries Counselling Program may be able to pay for professional counselling services to help you deal with trauma resulting from the crime.

How can we help?

You may receive counselling if you have been a victim of a violent criminal offence such as physical assault, sexual assault or robbery. The immediate family of a person who has been murdered may also receive counselling. Counselling may also be awarded if you were personally injured while trying to stop someone from committing a crime. Counselling is provided by private counselling practitioners within the community who are approved counsellors with the program. Counsellors must apply to become approved counsellors and meet certain criteria.

What do you need to do?

You must report the crime to police. You must cooperate with police and other criminal justice officials in the investigation of the crime and the prosecution of the person responsible for the crime. After you report the crime to police you should contact the nearest Provincial Victim Services Office or the Criminal Injuries Counselling program at the Victim Services Head Office for an application. Our staff can help you fill out the application. Generally, you must apply within one year of the crime. This one-year filing requirement may be extended in certain circumstances.

Usually a decision will be made once the investigation of the crime is complete and program staff have received the police report. If your application for counselling is approved, you can choose from a list that will be sent to you of approved counsellors in your area. The counsellor will bill our program directly for the service provided.

Fees for counselling services vary by counsellor. When you call for your first appointment with a counsellor you should ask whether there will be a charge to you beyond the fee paid by our program.

The Victim Impact Statement Program

As a victim of crime you may feel left out of the criminal justice process. You may feel that everyone's story is being heard except yours. However, victims can have a voice in the process. Before the offender is sentenced, you may tell the court how the crime has affected you through a Victim Impact Statement.

What is a Victim Impact Statement?

A Victim Impact Statement is your opportunity to tell the court about the impact of the crime on your life. It is a statement, written in your own words, that is considered by the judge in deciding the sentence for the offender.

Who may complete a Victim Impact Statement?

A victim of any criminal offence may complete a statement. However, the statement is not considered by the court until after the accused person has been found guilty of the offence.

Who decides if a Victim Impact Statement is submitted to the court?

You do. Whether or not you provide a statement is entirely your decision. Once you submit the statement to the court, it cannot be withdrawn. Your statement may be submitted in writing only, or you may choose to read it in court.

What information can I give?

The statement should describe the harm or loss you have suffered as a result of the crime. Your statement should refer only to the specific crime for which the offender was found guilty. It should not contain opinions on the character of the offender or the punishment the person(s) should be given. If your statement contains information other than the impact the crime has had on you, the court may not consider your statement.

How will the information be used?

The information in your Victim Impact Statement is used by the judge in determining an appropriate sentence for the offender. It may also be used by correctional authorities when making decisions regarding the offender, such as, when considering the offender's application for release on parole.

Is the information confidential?

No. Once the accused is found guilty or has pled guilty a copy of your Victim Impact Statement is given to the judge, the Crown attorney and the offender or the offender's lawyer. The contents of the statement are presented in a court hearing which is open to the public. The written consent of the judge is necessary; however, before the court will make a copy available to the public or to the media.

Do I have to appear in court regarding my Victim Impact Statement?

It is usually not necessary for you to appear in court; however, you may have to testify in court if any of the information in your statement is questioned.

Where do I go if I want to submit a Victim Impact Statement?

Victim Impact Statement forms and guidelines are available from your local Provincial Victim Services Office. A Victim Services Officer will help you to complete the statement and will submit it to the court on your behalf.

How Can You Contact Us?

Dartmouth

Serving Halifax Regional Municipality
277 Pleasant Street, Suite 306
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia B2Y 4B7
Phone: (902) 424-3307

Kentville

Serving Annapolis, Kings, Hants, Lunenburg, Queens, Shelburne, Yarmouth & Digby Counties
49 Cornwallis Street, Suite 204
Kentville, Nova Scotia B4N 2E3
Phone (902) 679-6201 or toll free 1-800-565-1805

New Glasgow

Serving Pictou, Antigonish, Colchester & Cumberland Counties
115 MacLean Street, 2nd Floor
New Glasgow, Nova Scotia B2H 4M5
Phone (902) 755-7110 or toll free 1-800-565-7912

Sydney

Serving Cape Breton, Guysborough, Richmond, Inverness & Victoria Counties
136 Charlotte Street, 4th Floor, Suite 9
Sydney, Nova Scotia B1P 1C3
Phone (902) 563-3655 or toll free 1-800-565-0071

Victim Services Head Office

Phone: (902) 424-3309
Fax: (902) 424-2056
Toll Free 1-888-470-0773
Web site address: http://novascotia.ca/just/victim_Services/