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PCVI News

Spring 2011



Welcome

The Policy Centre for Victim Issues within the Department of Justice is ready to launch the 6th annual National Victims of Crime Awareness Week from April 10 to 16, 2011. Events to mark the Week are planned in all provinces and in the North.

National Victims of Crime Awareness Week has grown in popularity each year since its inception in 2006. The Week is an opportunity to highlight the great work done by volunteers and professionals alike to support victims of crime across Canada. Activities planned for this Week in 2011 will reflect this year's theme of "Many Voices, Many Paths." Please visit the Web site (www.victimsworld.gc.ca) to get a list of available resources, to learn more about what is happening in your community and across the country, and to find out how you can participate in the Week.

To those of you who work tirelessly with victims of crime and to those who have contributed to the success of National Victims of Crime Awareness Week, year after year – thank you.

Beth Heinze

Acting Director, Policy Centre for Victim Issues

Victim Services at the Federal Level

The delivery of victim services in Canada is a shared responsibility among the federal government and the provinces and territories. Victim services have improved significantly over the last 30 years, with each level of government having enacted legislation related to victims of crime. In the case of the Government of Canada, this role is shared among a few key departments and agencies, including the Policy Centre for Victim Issues (PCVI) within the Department of Justice, the National Office for Victims within the Department of Public Safety, the Parole Board of Canada, the Correctional Service of Canada and the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime.

The PCVI is the lead office for the Federal Victims Strategy. Through its work in criminal law reform, consultation, policy development, research and project funding, the PCVI strives to meet the objective of the Strategy to give victims a more effective voice in the criminal justice and federal corrections systems. One important role that the PCVI plays in the delivery of victim services across the country is through administering the Victims Fund. This Fund is a grants and

contributions program that supports a wide range of projects and activities designed to improve the experience of victims in the criminal justice system.

The National Office for Victims, established in November 2005, is part of the Department of Public Safety Canada's Community Safety and Partnerships Branch. Among its various roles, the Office provides general information to victims and the public, and makes referrals to the Correctional Service of Canada and the Parole Board of Canada for specific enquiries. The office operates a toll-free line (1-866-525-0554) that victims may call from anywhere in Canada or the United States.

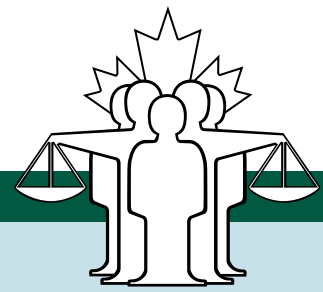
The Parole Board of Canada is committed to ensuring that the voices of victims of crime are heard in the conditional release system. As such, it welcomes information that victims may provide to assist the Board in its review of an offender's case, either through presenting victim impact statements at parole hearings or by attending these hearings as an observer. The PCVI Victims Fund also provides financial assistance for victims to attend the parole hearings of the offender who harmed them. Victims may

seek assistance by calling the toll-free line at 1-866-789-INFO.

The Correctional Service of Canada is responsible for administering sentences for offenders serving a term of two years or more. In 2007, it implemented the National Victim Services Program in order to provide victims of federal offenders with timely information about the offender who harmed them. Victims can register with the Service and receive information on an offender, as well as offer information that can be used to help make decisions, such as an offender's institutional security level. Victim Services can be reached toll-free at 1-866-806-2275.

In April 2007, the Government of Canada announced the creation of the Office of Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. This office was established to assist in meeting the needs of victims of crime in matters of federal jurisdiction. Victims of crime who feel unfairly treated by a federal department or agency should contact the Office once all other avenues for resolving a complaint have been taken. The Office will provide a thorough, impartial, independent review of complaints and can be contacted at 1-866-481-8429.





Canadian Statement of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime

In 2003, federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for justice endorsed a new Canadian Statement of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime. This endorsement served as a renewal of the 1988 Canadian Statement of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime. The basic principles below provide a strong foundation for the development of policies, programs and legislation related to victims of crime at both the provincial and federal levels of government.

1. Victims of crime should be treated with courtesy, compassion and respect.
2. The privacy of victims should be considered and respected to the greatest extent possible.
3. All reasonable measures should be taken to minimize inconvenience to victims.
4. The safety and security of victims should be considered at all stages of the criminal justice process and appropriate measures should be taken when necessary to protect victims from intimidation and retaliation.
5. Information should be provided to victims about the criminal justice system, the victim's role and the opportunities to participate in criminal justice processes.
6. Victims should be given information, in accordance with the prevailing law, policies, and procedures, about the status of the investigation; the scheduling, progress and final outcome of the proceedings; and the status of the offender in the correctional system.
7. Information should be provided to victims about available victim assistance services, other programs and assistance available to them, and means of obtaining financial reparation.
8. The views, concerns and representations of victims are an important consideration in criminal justice processes and should be considered in accordance with the prevailing law, policies and procedures.
9. The needs, concerns and diversity of victims should be considered in the development and delivery of programs and services, and in related education and training.
10. Information should be provided to victims about the available options to raise their concerns when they believe that these principles have not been followed

Interview Beverley Potter Public Prosecution Service of Canada

Beverley Potter is the Northern Victim Services Coordinator at the Public Prosecution Service of Canada. She coordinates services for the Crown Witness Coordinators (CWC) located in the three territories.

Q What are Crown Witness Coordinators?

A The CWC program is unique to Canada's three northern territories – Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut (total population of 108,973 in 76 communities). Currently there are 12 coordinators (of a total of 14 positions) who work closely with approximately 45 Crown prosecutors in the three northern Public Prosecution Service of Canada offices.

Q What are the typical responsibilities for a CWC?

A CWCs typically liaise and share information with Crown prosecutors, and locate victims and witnesses involved in court cases. They assess the risk factors inherent in each case and identify other issues that might impact the involvement of the victim or witness in the criminal justice system. They prepare victims and witnesses for court, explaining the

criminal justice system and the rights of victims under the Criminal Code. These rights include a victim's right to present a victim impact statement and the right to request the use of testimonial aids as necessary.

CWCs also support and accompany victims and witnesses during their court process and, when appropriate, refer them to supportive community services where those services exist. However, because many communities in the Territories do not have victim services, the Coordinator may be the victim's sole support. After the court case, coordinators continue to share information with victims and witnesses regarding the status of their case. They work with the resident courts in Whitehorse, Yellowknife and Iqaluit and travel with the circuit court to 57 communities (13 in Yukon, 21 in the Northwest Territories and 23 in Nunavut).

The CWCs assist with cases involving charges of murder, sexual assault and spousal assault. The victims and witnesses that the CWCs serve can be adults, youth or children.

Q What other agencies do CWCs work with?

A CWCs arrange referrals to other services that offer support to victims, where they exist. They sometimes liaise with the territorial governments' victim services

offices and non-governmental victim services organizations, as well with as the RCMP.

Q What value do CWCs bring to those involved in the justice system in the North?

A In the course of their work, they and other criminal justice system professionals must deal with challenges and circumstances specific to northern Canada – the highest rates of violent crime in Canada; chronically traumatized victims and witnesses; extensive travel to small isolated communities in difficult weather (and in some areas, such as Nunavut, there are no road systems, so the communities are fly-in only); a heavy workload with court-imposed deadlines; a variety of cultural traditions, beliefs and languages; a lack of community-based victim assistance resources; and a widespread lack of understanding and wariness of the criminal justice system. However, the program is increasing the awareness and participation of victims and witnesses in the criminal justice system. More victims and witnesses, including those who are vulnerable and unilingual, are being located, attending court and testifying. There appears to be an increasing use of testimonial aids and victim impact statements, as well as an increase in guilty pleas.