



A table setting from Victim Services' display "SAVING A PLACE AT THE TABLE" presented during Victims' Rights Week April 2007

THE TABLE

Victim Services Program Vermont Department of Corrections

Ensuring that the Victim's Voice Always Has a Place at the DOC's Table

Volume 2, Issue 2

Spring 2008

VSS Contact Info

- Amy Holloway
(802) 241-2302
- Ellen Sklar
(802) 651-1747
- Kit Andrews
(802) 476-0144
- Anne Cosgrove
(802) 751-0463

Inside this issue:

Apology Letter Bank	2
Victim Offender	2
Dialogue Program update	
Automated Victim Notification Update	3
Caught Ya Doing Something Good	3
"I have a Question	4
Final Thoughts	5-6

From the Director

This issue of THE TABLE marks the first anniversary of its publication. The very first issue came out just over one year ago in honor of Victims' Rights week. Since then, six more issues have been published. A special thanks goes to Nikki Parker Van Idinstine who worked so hard in those "early days" to get it out and looking professional, and to that wonderful individual, who wishes to remain anonymous who has stepped in to provide me with much needed editing and proof-reading assistance now that Nikki's talents are needed elsewhere. Since the first issue, the look has evolved, my ability to actually use Publisher has improved, and loads of information about victims and victim services has been shared with DOC staff and our community partners. Each time I "put an issue to bed" (I sure hope that's the correct publishing lingo), I wonder if I will have enough material left to include in subsequent issues. Fortunately, there has been no shortage of material. This month's issue is no exception.

The inspiration for the publication of this newsletter and for its name, THE TABLE,

came from our Victims' Rights Week display, *Saving a Place at the Table* which was presented last year for the first time in Central Office that week. The display, a dining room table set with place settings and personal items from victims of different types of crime, serves as a powerful reminder that the Department of Corrections is committed to saving a place at our table for the voice of the victim. Since that first showing, *Saving a Place at the Table* has been displayed four additional times; once at the Victim Notification Summit in October, once for the Victim Impact Panel Training for Trainers in November and twice last month when it went "on the road" as part of statewide Victims' Rights Week activities. The latest displays, the first on April 22nd in the Cafeteria of the Legislature and the second on April 24th on Church Street in Burlington, gave a larger audience than just DOC staff the chance to experience the display's impact. Secretary LaWare and Governor Douglas both came to see it and experienced the "voices" of these Vermont crime victims who live on in this exhibit. There are cur-

Amy Holloway

rently fifteen permanent place settings which have been donated to the exhibit by surviving family members or victims themselves.

Over the year THE TABLE has been used as a way to communicate, educate, entertain and at the very least put victim services issues "on the DOC's Table". I appreciate all of the feedback you send me about this newsletter. It helps me know that at least someone is reading it and that all of my hard work isn't for naught. I have even ventured out a bit and have sent it out to my colleagues at Departments of Corrections all over the country. I guess now THE TABLE is a publication with a national readership!

So HAPPY ANNIVERSARY to THE TABLE and here's to many more years of reaching out to help the Vermont Department of Corrections provide compassionate services to victims of crime.



Apology Letter Bank Gets a Few “Deposits”

Victim Services has officially opened its “Apology Letter Bank”. Any offender who wishes to write an apology or clarification letter to the victim, as part of their case plan or treatment, may send it to the Victim Services Program to be “deposited” into the Apology Letter Bank.

Apology letters should NEVER, repeat NEVER be sent to the victim without the victim making a request in advance.

The offender’s letter will be kept on file and shared with the victim only if the victim has made a request to see the letter. So far, two letters have been shared with victims.

Victim Services makes contact with the victim in advance of sending out any apology or clarification letter to determine how the victim wishes to receive the letter and to provide support.

If you have an offender who is working on a letter or has one and wants it filed with Victim Services, pink mail it and it will get filed. It will be shared with the victim only at the victim’s request.



An offender’s apology letter or clarification document letter should go into the Apology Letter Bank and should not be sent to the victim without the victim’s permission.

Victim Offender Dialogue Update

It is always a pleasure to be in the presence of Jon Wilson, Victim Offender Dialogue Trainer extraordinaire, who spent two days in early April providing a refresher training to nine Victim Offender Dialogue facilitators from the Vermont Department of Corrections’ Victim Offender Dialogue Program. During the two days at Woodbury College, the group under Jon’s guidance reviewed cases, talked about individual and programmatic challenges, and generally worked on further developing Victim Offender Dialogue facilitation skills. Jon helped the group focus on the goals of the program and facilitators who had facilitated dialogues during the year each presented their case to the whole group.

Since January of 2007, when the program was formally

launched, sixteen (16) individuals have requested dialogues. Four (4) dialogues have actually been completed. Three (3) are in the process of preparation and nine (9) never went to dialogue because the victim withdrew the request (4), the cases were not appropriate (2), or there were issues with the offender’s participation (3). Of the dialogues that have been completed or are in process, most involved the death of a significant loved one. One involved a victim of a serious car crash.

Just a reminder: This process is victim initiated, which means no matter how eager an offender is to participate, if the victim does not request it, the dialogue will not happen. Questions? Call Victim Services at 241-2302



VOD Facilitators Training Participants. Front row, (left to right) Ellen Sklar, Amy Holloway, Derek Miodownik (kneeling) Jon Wilson, Yvonne Byrd. Back Row left to right :Ariel Brugger, Pat McIntosh, Chris Dinman, Kristin Prior, Anne Cosgrove.

VICTIM NOTIFICATION: UPDATE

May finds us one step closer to actualizing the dream of automating the Victim Notification process in Vermont.

The bid process is over and the vendor to provide the VAN SYSTEM (Vermont Automated Notification) is complete. The Appris Company, of Louisville Kentucky, will be working with us to design and launch the new automated notification system. Once the vendor's contract is signed, the staff of the project and the DOC Victim Notification Work Group will roll up our collective sleeves and get down to the nitty gritty of finalizing the design and testing it out to make sure the VAN System is easy to use and makes notifications at the proper time.

In the meantime, the victim services staff has been busy making connections with other states, collecting (i.e. stealing) brochures and system design ideas, and auditing offender files in all of our facilities.

The goal is to get the design finalized by mid to late summer, tested by mid September, and up and running by the end of December. This is a very ambitious timeline and one that will probably have to undergo many revisions before we are through. However, we are getting closer and closer to actually getting automated notification up and running. Look for re-

gional training opportunities coming your way in November.

Again, thanks to all of the hard work of the Notification Work Group, the Victim Services Program Staff, and our community partners without whom we would not be as far along as we are.



Caught Ya..... Doing Something Good!

Always do right. It will gratify some people and astonish the rest."

Mark Twain



Page 3

This "Caught Ya "was submitted by

John Cassarino, Volunteer Coordinator, Marble Valley

In my 13 years working at the Marble Valley Regional Correctional Facility (MVRCF) located in Rutland VT as the Volunteer Coordinator one thing I have always instilled in the residents at our facility is the importance of Restorative Justice. Restorative Justice recognizes that crime is wrong and should not occur, and also recognizes that after it does there are dangers and opportunities. The danger is that the community, victim(s) and /or the offenders emerge from the response further alienated, more damaged, disrespected, disempowered, feeling less safe and less cooperative with society. The oppor-

tunity is that injustice is recognized, the equity is restored (restitution and grace), and the future is clarified so the participants are safer, more respectful, and more empowered and cooperative with each other in society. One of the opportunities the residents at MVRCF have been able to do to make some amends to the community is by donating money out of their Recreation Fund to the many community organizations that assist victims. Since 2001 through the present date, the offenders at MVRCF have donated \$21,830 to various organizations in the community. Some of those organizations that assist victims have been The Child First Advocacy Center, The United Way of Rutland County, Rutland County Women's Network and Shelter, The Rutland County Area Pre-

vention Coalition, The Project Against Violent Encounters, Mother Against Drunk Drivers, Prevent Child Abuse VT, The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and the Rutland County Court Diversion and Restorative Justice Center. We understand this doesn't make up for the crimes that have been committed, but I hope it can give some victims some comfort knowing that there are steps in place to recognize the damage the offenders have done.

Thank you.



“I Have a Question...”

where your questions get answered

I don't understand the new Visitation Policy. When can a victim visit with the offender and when can't he or she visit?

According to Directive 327.01 Victim Services is responsible for granting permission to victims who wish to visit with the offender in their case. Most often a request to visit an offender comes from a victim of domestic violence. It is not always easy to know who the victim is in domestic violence cases and so caseworkers might have to do some

“detective work” to figure out who the victim is before approving the offender’s Visitors List. If the victim is on the list, then the caseworker should contact the victim and arrange to send them a Request to Visit Form. Once Victim Services has approved the visit, the victim can be put on the offender’s visitors list.

No visits are approved until after a case has been disposed of in court to avoid witness tampering and coercion so do not refer a victim to Victim Services or send the Request to Visit Form until after sentencing.

After sentencing, coercion

and court orders that that restrict contact are the only reasons a visitation request would be denied.

It is not the role of the DOC to determine if visits are in the best interest of the victim or to use visits or denial of visits as an offender’s reward/punishment. If either party abuses the right to visit (i.e. brings in contraband or is abusive during a visit) then further visits may be denied by the facility which Victim Services would not override.

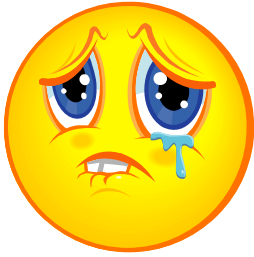
A victim does not have to cancel his/her Victim Notification request in order to visit an offender. Victim Notification and Victim Visitation have nothing to do with each other.

Visitation Approval/Denial Process

- Victim fills out and submits a Request to Visit Form to Victim Services (Copy of Form is on the J drive under Templates/Statewide)
- Call is made to the victim to confirm that he/she is not being coerced into visiting
- Copy of the Response to Victim Request to Visit Form is sent to the victim and faxed to the facility to be filed in the offender’s core file
- Victim Services will contact caseworker to confirm status of case (pre vs. post conviction) and to see if there are any No Contact Court Orders/RFA Orders.
- Victim Services either authorizes or denies the visitation request
- If a victim is denied visitation, because the request was made at the pre-sentencing phase, but is eligible to visit post sentencing, the victim should contact Victim Services to update the file.

Some Final Thoughts

Amy Holloway



It has been about a month since the full impact of our recent staff cuts has been felt. In that time, both Kristin Prior and Rachel Heasley have left their positions in Victim Services to assume other opportunities; Kristin, to assume the role of District Manager of the St. Alban's Probation and Parole Office and Rachel to a job in Syracuse, New

York. I and my fellow victim services staff wish both of them the best and thank them for what they each did for victims while working for Victim Services.

Kristin spent many years working with victims out of this office and did a wonderful job responding to victim requests, following up on complaints and concerns and gener-

ally keeping victim services going during the transition between Directors four years ago.

Rachel came to us more recently, but in a short time proved to be an outstanding advocate and an incredible resource to DOC staff. Both will be greatly missed.



Out of necessity I have had to fill in the gaps left by Kristin and Rachel's departures. As a result, I have found myself having direct contact with many more victims than I had previously when my job was more "administrative" in nature.

Other than realizing that no matter how hard you thought you were working before, you can always work harder, I have noticed two important things.

The first is that we have a wonderful group of people working for the DOC

who take their jobs very seriously and work very hard to make sure that offenders are held accountable and that victims' needs are met. In the last few weeks there has been no shortage of phone calls or emails from staff asking for help with a thorny victim issue or two or checking in to make sure they have gotten it right. Recently I have attended more than a few Victim Safety Wrap Around meetings where DOC casework staff have been present and engaged in offender release plan and victim safety planning discus-

sions.

The second thing I noticed is how easy it is to get caught up in the administrative side of what we do and to forget just who we are working for and why we do it. Having daily contact with victims of crime has re-reminded me of why I started doing this work in the first place and why Victim Services is so important to the mission of the DOC. While I may be feeling a tad overworked... it has certainly energized me!

Final Thoughts Continued

(Continued from page 5)

And finally—last Saturday I had the chance to meet again with the Homicide Survivors Support Group, which is the same group, plus a few new members, I wrote about in the last issue of THE TABLE. Twelve intrepid souls travelled to the Northeast Kingdom and spent a very rainy day making plaques to honor their

deceased loved ones; names on the front, personal messages on the back. Despite the rain, there was a great deal of laughing and sharing of stories, good food and companionship.

These plaques now hang as a memorial on a tree in my apple orchard. I purposely hung them on a tree close to the driveway so that I can see them each day as I leave

for work. They remind me for whom I do this work. I am including a picture of these plaques below so that you too might feel inspired by the courage and resiliency of their surviving family members and remember them each day as you do the difficult work required of all of us at the Department of Corrections



Plaques created by homicide victims' surviving family members

Hung in their memory in an apple orchard in Hardwick, Vermont