

Ensuring every victim always has a place at our table.

Department of Corrections, Victim Services Program

Volume 1, Issue 5



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

Greetings From the Director

This issue of THE TABLE will be highlighting Victim Notification. We are doing this because not only is it near and dear to Victim Services' hearts and the hearts of the victims who we are dedicated to serve, but also we have been spending a good deal of time thinking, talking to people, and visioning how we can create a Victim Notification System design that works for our staff and victims alike.

In this issue you will find an article about the Victim Notification Summit which took place on October 9th in Stowe. A big "Thank You" goes out to all of the DOC staff and representatives from our community partners who participated and worked so hard to come up with new and innovative ideas about how to provide effective notification. Over the next few months you will see many of the suggestions made during the Summit, integrated into the new Notification System's design.

You will also find an article that explains how an automated victim notification system works. As usual there are some answers to frequently asked questions in the "I HAVE A QUESTION" section.

On a personal note, it feels like I have spent most of my time since April, when Vermont was awarded \$400,000, in a constant state of worry. Beyond the obvious worry that somehow the money would get misspent, the reports to the feds would get lost in the internet ether, and I would end up in federal prison, I have been worried about how this project would get from its theoretical to an operational state. I spent August and September worrying about the Victim Notification Summit. I was not so worried about the logistics, the tables set up, or the appeal of the lunch selections. I was more worried that we wouldn't get the right people in the room and that if we got the right people in no one would talk and then if no one talked I worried that we would squander the opportunity to capture the collective wisdom and expertise of those in the room.

I was worried that we wouldn't get the right

applicants for the grant staff positions and I worried that no one other than Victim Services would care about improving the victim notification system and that we would be out there on our own trying to make it happen. It turns out, as usual. I worried for no good reason whatsoever.

The Summit was a tremendous success. The tables were set up just fine, the food was great, but most of all the participants were outstanding. Fifty people, representing the DOC and not only Victim Services, but Central Office, Policy Development, Information Technology, and most of our field and jail facilities, along with representatives from the Courts the State's Attorneys, The Network Against Sexual and Domestic Violence programs, The Parole Board, law enforcement and the Legislature, gave up a day to learn about the issue and share their wisdom with us.

Many of the DOC participants have agreed to join a DOC Victim Notification Work Group to help us finalize the system design, rewrite our directive and develop a training unit for DOC staff.

And finally, I was able to hire two extraordinarily committed individuals, Jill Ryan and Ashley Fisk, to take on the job of staffing this project.

Are my worries over? Well hardly.

But I can say that I do feel less alone in this endeavor and less anxious about whether we will get it right. I have a few more gray hairs, but a great deal of gratitude towards the wonderful people who will be working alongside me as we make it easier for victims to be informed.

Amy Holloway

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PROCESS TO CREATE AN AUTOMATED VICTIM NOTIFICATION SYSTEM IN

VERMONT

- April 2007 : A \$400,000 Grant from BJA to create an Statewide Automated Victim Notification (SAVIN) system is received
- August 2007; Received final approval from the Legislature to accept the BJA funding
- September 2007: Started the hiring process to fill two Project Staff positions to manage the project.
- October 2007: Convened a statewide Victim Notification Summit to launch the project and to solicit input from DOC staff and statewide stakeholders on the new system's design
- November 2007 First Meeting of the DOC's Internal Victim Notification Work Group to finalize the project design that will go to the Advisory Group for approval.
- December 2007: Quarterly meeting of the Victim Notification Advisory Group to approve the design.

Victim Notification Summit a Huge Success

On October 9th, fifty representatives from the Department of Corrections, including Central Office staff and caseworkers, the Courts, The Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, law enforcement, the States' Attorneys Office, the Parole Board and the Legislature participated in a Victim Notification Summit in Stowe. Anne Seymour, a nationally recognized Victims Advocate and consultant, and Mike Davis, the Victim Notification Program Coordinator for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, served as keynote speakers. Anne and Mike talked to the group about trends in automating victim notification systems around the country and the rights that victims have to good notification. Mike described the process of setting up an automated notification in

Ohio and shared stories about their successes and challenges along the way.

A panel of three survivors of crime shared their experiences with both successful and not so successful notification through the Vermont Department of Corrections' current system. They pointed out the importance of providing accurate and timely notification especially when victims need to make plans for safety or to have other family and friends appear with them at a parole hearing. When asked about their feelings about the potential for an automated victim notification system appearing impersonal, they each responded that they didn't care how they were notified as long as it got to them on time.

The afternoon was spent with

participants working in small groups, sharing their collective wisdom to come up with recommendations around the design and to identify potential challenges to creating a new system in Vermont.

It was a successful day, which not only gave participants the chance to learn about the automated notification option, but to share ideas and suggestions for how the Department of Corrections can incorporate these ideas into new notification system design.

As a result of this day, a core group of fifteen DOC staff has agreed to be part of an Internal Victim Notification Work Group that will help Victim Services with the system design, the transition plan, the directive rewrite, and training.

For a complete copy of the Final Report contact Amy Holloway at amyh@doc.state.vt.us.



Victim Services Program Hires Staff Project Staff



After months of waiting for the "go ahead" to start spending the Federal Victim Notification Grant, we are pleased to announce that Jill Ryan and Ashley Fisk have been hired to fill the two grant funded positions. Jill and Ashley will be responsible for making sure that all of the requirements of the grant are fulfilled.

After attending the Summit on October 9th, Jill and Ashley began the process of auditing all offender files to match victim notification request information from the core files with

victim contact information in the offender database. After the audit is complete, a vendor is selected for the notification system and a timeline set for the "launch" of the new system, letters will be sent to victims, informing them of the change and letting them know how they can register into the new system. "We are so pleased to have them on board and can finally get going on this project." Amy Holloway, Victim Services Director said with relief.

Jill brings with her not only Victim Services experience, having worked several years as

the Victim Service Specialist in the Rutland Probation and Parole Office, but experience working in facilities (Woodstock and Windsor) and with the Quality Management office. We are glad to be welcoming her back to Victim Services.

Ashley spent the last two years as the Admin in HRD and is looking forward to this new challenge. We are so happy to have them working on this project and know that under their able leadership the system will be up and running in no time.

Caught Ya..... Doing Something Good!

This is where we highlight those in the Department who go "above and beyond" on behalf of victims of crime

This month the Victim Services Program would like to thank the following DOC staff members who participated in the Victim Notification Summit on October 9th. It was very helpful to have that many DOC employees with that much experience and perspective sitting together in one room. We in Victim Services realize that it can be difficult for some staff to leave their regular jobs and do one more thing, no matter how important it is. We appreciate all those who did just that. As result of the hard work we have been able to convene an internal DOC Victim Notification Work Group that is helping us re-design the victim notification system to include all of the positive aspects of our current system with none of the bad. Thank you again.



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

Mark Twain

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|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Andy Pallito | Deputy Commissioner |
| David Peebles | Community and Restorative Justice |
| Jackie Kotkin | Probation and Parole |
| Lisa Menard | Policy Development Unit |
| Kristin Prior | Victim Services |
| Ellen Sklar | Victim Services |
| Rachel Heasley | Victim Services |
| Alice Grow | Victim Services |
| Anne Cosgrove | Victim Services |
| Marshall Rich | Northern State |
| Suzanne Bedard | St Albans P&P |
| Tara Clark | Victim Services |
| Lisa Wilson | Chittenden |
| Phil Fernandez | Marble Valley |
| Jill Ryan | Project Manger |
| Ashly Fisk | Project Technician |
| Ellen McWard | Southern State |
| Phil Damone | Brattleboro &P |
| Sue Ransom Kelly | Southern State |
| Carl Davis | Newport P&P |
| Mike Carlisle | Barre P&P |
| Mary Trudell | Morrisville P&P |

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|----------------|-------------------|
| Bob Smith | HRD |
| Jennifer Zuber | IT |
| Pat Macintosh | IT |
| Jason Kennedy | Out of State Unit |
| Kevin Oddy | Out of State Unit |
| Rae Hirst | Springfield P&P |
| Leslie Briere | Rutland P&P |
| Dave Jankowski | Bennington P&P |
| Trevor Roy | St. Johnsbury P&P |

“I Have a Question...”

where your questions get answered



“I am curious. Are we supposed to send every victim notification letter by registered mail, return receipt requested? Doesn’t that get very expensive?” A concerned Supervisor

Based on our current Victim Notification Directive (502.01) letters to victims are required to be sent registered, return receipt requested. Copies of notification letters that you are send-

ing to a State’s Attorneys Victim Advocate, which is also required by the Directive, may be sent by regular mail or by email. Once the new Notification System is up and running, caseworkers will not be required to send any letters, but in the meantime, continue to send the letters by registered mail until you are told otherwise.

“Are we supposed to send every victim notification letter by certified mail, return receipt requested ?”

We have been hearing a lot about this new automated notification system SAVIN. What exactly is it, where does it come from, how will it work, will it be better than the system we have now and when will it be in place?

WHAT IS SAVIN

SAVIN stands for Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification . It is an automated victim notification system developed and managed by the Appriss Company in Louisville Kentucky. After the tragic 1997 murder in Louisville of Mary Byron , who despite her notification request was not informed when her boyfriend made bail and was murdered by him, the Appriss Company, along with Mary’s family, friends and concerned community members worked together to create an automated victim notification system for Louisville and eventually the entire state of Kentucky.

The automated notification system provided quick and accurate notification information to victims of crime through a computer generated phone call. Since then thirty-nine states have implemented some form of an automated victim notification system somewhere in their states’ system (court or jail) . Nineteen states have implemented a statewide system which includes all jail, court and prison notifications. Twenty-seven Departments of Correction have contracts with Appriss to provide their automated victim notification services.

Currently Appriss is the only company that offers a comprehensive automated notification system.

HOW IT WORKS

The SAVIN system works through a computer interface that is established between the Appriss computers in Kentucky and the DOC’s computer system in Vermont. Since Appriss is a 24 hour operation, victims can register anytime with them by phone or through the internet. Victims can register directly through the Victim Services Program during regular work hours. The SAVIN system then searches the DOC’s database every fifteen minutes and collects “notification event” information relevant to registered victims. The pending event triggers a telephone call to the registered victim. The calls continue to the victim until

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the victim confirms the receipt of the call by entering a personalized pin number.

Information about the offender is gathered in “real time” so notifications of bail releases and escapes can be done in a timely manner. All victim data is confidential and will be shared only with the Victim Services Program who will serve as the Program Administrator. Daily reports go to the Victim Services Program office to confirm who has been called and who did not receive notification. Victim Services will follow up in cases where the victim did not receive the call when immediate notification is required.

The current “notification events” for which victims in Vermont receive notification are defined by State statute and include notice of a parole hearing and any change of an offender’s status such as furlough, release, escape, recapture and death (Title 13 chapter 165 section 5305). With an automated system, the Department will be able to add additional notification events that have been identified by victims and advocates, such as transfers from facility to facility (both in state and out of state) and re-incarcerations and releases due to graduated sanctions, without much effort.

The system can be customized to fit the needs of the Vermont

Department of Corrections. The messages that the victim hears when the automated notification is done can be tailored and can include different types of information such as who to contact in the Department if they have questions, what local services are available, and reminders to keep their contact information current.

The system is designed to be totally open, allowing local officials, law enforcement, judges and community groups to register to be informed when a particular offender is slated to return to the community.

The automated system will serve as an augmentation and not a replacement of our current system of sending letters in advance of statutorily required notification events.

As part of the new Victim Notification System design, all Department-wide notification responsibilities will be centralized under Victim Services. The Victim Services Program, will take responsibility for registering victims and mailing all notification letters to them.

Victim Services will take the responsibility to put victim contact information into the offender database in a safe and confidential way so that case workers, despite not being required to do the actual notification, will be able to contact victims to involve them in the

case planning and release process.

BENEFITS

Utilizing an automated system such as SAVIN would have several clear benefits for both victims requesting notification and the Vermont Department of Corrections.

It helps the Department be in compliance with state statutes and provide victims with immediate notification, especially at the time when the offender makes bail or is released from custody.

It will allow the Department to provide information to victims about more notification events, such as the status and whereabouts of the offender without added work to DOC staff.

Because victim notification will be centralized, the Victim Services Program will be able to provide information and services to victims on a more consistent basis.

In the meantime, Victim Services is working with an Internal DOC Victim Notification Workgroup and an External Advisory Group to ensure that the design for the DOC’s new notification system suits the needs of crime victims in Vermont.

As the Implementation Plan is formulated and launched, DOC staff will be receiving frequent updates and training .



