

## **ADVOCACY SERVICES**

### **HISTORY OF ADVOCACY**

Residents of Alaska benefit from the rich history of victim services and system response to victims. In 1972, when the legislation that established the State's crime victim compensation program was passed, victims' rights and services were virtually non-existent. In 1976, a group of concerned women established the Alaska Women's Resource Center in Anchorage and began efforts to obtain services for battered women. By 1978, limited services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault were available in Anchorage and eight other Alaskan communities.

In 1978, a statewide network of community-based non-profit groups incorporated and became the Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. Legislation effective in 1981, established the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (The Council). The purpose of The Council is to provide for crisis intervention and prevention programs. The Council funds programs for victims across the state. For a complete listing of funded programs see <http://www.state.ak.ud/Cdvsa>

The development of victim advocacy in Alaska is an example of a "grass roots" effort that led to the creation of a number of major statewide programs as well as a governmental funding agency, the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (Council). Locally-based programs provide a wide range of services to the surrounding communities, including victim advocacy.

Much of the development of victims' rights and services in Alaska has been the result of advocacy. Advocacy operates from the awareness that those victimized are responding normally to an abnormal event - crime victimization. Every individual responds differently to each incidence of victimization, depending upon a myriad of circumstances and life experiences. Many, perhaps most, rely on their own resources to recover from the impact of victimization. Another large number of victims are assisted by and recover through the services provided by community-based or system-based advocates. It is a much smaller group, then, that seeks and receives therapy. For many victims of crime, it is the partnership of services between advocacy and therapy that most effectively and quickly results in recovery from the impact of crime.

### **EMPOWERMENT**

Advocacy is based on the philosophical foundation of empowerment. The experience of victimization results in loss of control and a feeling of helplessness. Regardless of the specific crime and other individual factors, this loss of control of one's life and consequent helplessness is nearly a universal crime victim experience. To respond to victims in a manner that empowers, then, requires the

fundamental belief that people are capable and know what they need. Empowerment, amidst the throes of the crisis and chaos reaction of victimization, may seem incongruent. That is why advocacy is so vitally important.

## **CHOICE**

An advocate will intervene and provide services in such a way as to immediately begin to restore control and self-direction to the victim. The initial way an advocate empowers a victim is in the realm of choice. Whenever possible, an advocate will provide information upon which the victim can make an informed choice. An advocate is totally invested in carrying out the choices and assuring there are choices for the victim. Advocates and other system staff may not like the choices or think these choices are in the best interest of the victim-but advocacy is based on the right and power of the victim to make those choices for themselves.

## **VICTIM RIGHTS**

The next concept instrumental to advocacy is the protection of the statutory and human rights of the victim. From the immediate response to a crime through medical services, law enforcement investigation, criminal case proceedings, sentencing, offender confinement and release, and treatment services, victims have statutory rights. Those rights focus primarily on safety, protection, and participation of the victim through the various processes that come into play after a crime. There are some differences in how these services look or are delivered between community-based and system advocates.

### **1. ADVOCACY SERVICES**

Typical services provided by advocate include crisis intervention, information, referral, support, accompaniment, and assistance. Victims have the right to have an advocate present, for instance, during sexual assault examinations, and during all hearings, interviews, and processes involved in a criminal prosecution. An advocate typically explains the procedure or processes, informs the victim why some questions are asked or what purpose some procedures serve in a particular phase of a case. Advocates often interface with child protective services, schools, emergency services, employers, and faith communities on behalf of a victim, in order to assure or expedite the needs and wishes of a victim.

## **SYSTEM-BASED ADVOCACY**

Advocates in system-based programs, usually within prosecuting attorneys' offices but sometimes part of law enforcement agencies, typically have easy access to information about the status of cases in the justice system. They are in a good position to assist victims in getting access to those in the system who will be

making decisions about their cases-law enforcement officers, prosecutors, judges, and correction officers. They can assist and support victims in such practical matters as participating in the investigation and the judicial process, getting property returned, and obtaining restitution or crime victim compensation. Because of their position within criminal justice agencies, they can often be very effective in representing the needs, concerns, or perspectives of crime victims to others within the justice system, both in specific cases and in the development of policy.

## **COMMUNITY-BASED ADVOCACY**

Community-based organizations that serve and advocate for victims of crime usually specialize in serving victims of particular kinds of crimes, and tailor their services to meet the needs of their client populations. They are often the primary sources in their community for such services as emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence, counseling for victims of child abuse, or support groups for rape victims or family members of homicide victims. As a principal focus of their services, these agencies advocate for their clients, both in specific cases and as they seek changes in systems to make them more responsive to their clients' needs. As independent agencies outside the criminal justice system, they are free to advocate vigorously on behalf of their clients, even when those clients' interests or choices conflict with those of agencies within the system. These community-based programs generally adhere to a philosophy in which empowering the victim, making the victim's choices and safety the paramount consideration, guides the provision of all services.

## **SYSTEM AND COMMUNITY-BASED ADVOCACY IS COMPLIMENTARY**

Both types of victim advocacy service programs offer specific strengths in their ability to serve victims of crime. From a victim's standpoint, it is advantageous to have access to both, especially in cases where there is a criminal investigation or prosecution. For access to exist in a community, of course, active, viable victim service programs must be in place within and outside of the justice system. However, such access is ideally secured through close, well-defined partnerships among system-based and independent, community-based victim service programs. Such partnerships increase the probability that crime victims will be regularly linked with the services they need at the time they need them, and decrease the likelihood of "falling between the cracks" in community resources. These arrangements also leave the agencies involved free to focus their efforts on the things they do best, secure in the confidence that the other partners will fulfill their roles as well.

## 2. A TREATMENT PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN ADVOCACY AND THERAPY

The services of advocacy can compliment services of therapy. Advocates are available in some locations on a 24-hour and immediate basis, can offer skills and techniques to handle nightmares, flashbacks, until therapy can establish new coping and recovery skills.

Advocates contribute to the therapy by normalizing the victim's response to victimization and the consequent need for therapy. They approach crime victims from the philosophical position that they are responding normally to an abnormal event and that there are specialized services that can help them recover. Thus, much of the stigma, fear of diagnosis, and reluctance to seek therapy can be alleviated. Advocates can offer ongoing, supportive services to family members and the primary victim.

Advocates can help victims assess their needs and provide information about the process and potential benefits of therapy. Advocates can provide information to victims on how to choose and assess a therapist they are considering seeing. Advocates should know the therapists in their community and know the background, training, and specialty areas of each therapist, in order to make an informed and appropriate referral. **Please Note: The VCCB does not make referrals, but does maintain a database of providers awarded by the Board.**

### THERAPISTS AS ADVOCATES

Victim advocacy, as a service, is not limited to those who identify professionally as victim advocates. Others advocate for those they serve, including therapists. Advocacy by a therapist may be on behalf of an individual victim, in a particular circumstance (e.g., providing perspective to Child Protective Services on the therapeutic impact of moving a child to another foster home or coaching a teacher on how to appropriately respond to the behavior of a child who has been victimized). Another venue of therapists advocating is public policy or systems advocacy (e.g., contacts with insurance companies to secure additional treatment sessions, providing testimony at hearings on the impact of a proposed law, sitting on task forces and committees of public agencies that develop policy regarding how services will be delivered to victims of crime),

This, a community approach that values and supports the entire continuum of services needed by victims of crime is the ideal. Strong working partnerships between system and community-based advocates and the therapy community are an integral part of fulfilling the continuum of services in a community.

### 3. ALASKAN COMMUNITIES

Victims of crime in the State of Alaska can receive services in their own communities from a number of different sources. Though the availability and specific configuration of the services varies from one community to the next, there are certain types of victim service agencies that can be found in most areas of the state.

Every community in Alaska is within the service area of an identified sexual assault and/or domestic violence shelter program. Often, one shelter will provide both services in one location, but not always. Each such shelter in Alaska must meet standards of training, supervision, and service delivery. Funding for these community-based programs is channeled through the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA).

**Note: See our Website [Resource List and Links](#) for a listing of current CDVSA funded programs.**

The CDVSA web-site is located at <http://www.dps.state.ak.us/cdvsa>. The VCCB can be contacted nationwide at 800-764-3040 to obtain a hard copy of the CDVSA web-site.

The Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (ANDVSA) is a non-profit, membership corporation composed of 21 programs operating in Alaska that provide services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, offender services, and adult crisis intervention services. The ANDVSA web-site is located at <http://www.andvsa.org>. The VCCB can be contacted nationwide at 800-764-3040 to obtain a hard copy of the ANDVSA web-site.

**Note: See our Website [Resource List and Links](#) for a listing of current Alaska's Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault programs and the communities they serve.**

Most District Attorney's offices in the state have victim/witness programs. Advocates in these programs assist victims during their involvement in the criminal justice process, and also link them with other sources of help in the community. They often assist victims in completing VCCB applications, obtaining needed supporting documentation for their claims, and accessing required services. These system-based advocates serve victims of all types of crime.