



OVC Fact Sheet

SEPTEMBER 2001

DENVER VICTIM SERVICES 2000 COMMUNITY ADVOCATE PROGRAM

Victim Services 2000 (VS2000) is a multiyear demonstration project sponsored and funded by the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC). The goal of the VS2000 grant program is to improve the range, quality, and accessibility of services for all types of crime victims, whether in rural or urban locations. OVC has two active demonstration sites: the State of Vermont and the greater Denver, Colorado, area. This fact sheet focuses on Denver's Community Advocate Program and is one publication in a series on the Denver VS2000 demonstration project.

In 1997, OVC funded Denver as the urban VS2000 demonstration site. The project was guided by the VS2000 vision: to create a model network of resources in the community that provides innovative, seamless, and integrated victim services. The grant directed that emphasis be placed on how to effectively reach underserved and unserved populations, including victims from diverse cultures and victims with disabilities.

The Denver VS2000 project began with a needs assessment to highlight gaps in

victim services. Input was gathered from agency and client satisfaction surveys and from focus groups that included victims who are traditionally underserved or unserved by victim services. The victims were asked what services they needed and how those services should be delivered. Victims stated overwhelmingly that they wanted services located in their own communities. At the same time, victims in underserved communities expressed a high degree of mistrust for both systems-based and community-based (nonprofit) service agencies and were, for the most part, unaware of services—even those targeted to them. This input provided the impetus for creating the Community Advocate Program.

What Is a Community Advocate?

Community advocates (CAs) are part of an outreach initiative of the Denver VS2000 demonstration project (referred to hereafter as VS2000). These individuals are known, respected, and involved

members of underserved and unserved communities, and they provide crisis intervention for crime victims in these communities and serve as trusted links to agencies providing victim services. As community members, CAs effectively connect victims with needed services. In their unique position, CAs can establish trust within a community and build bridges between underserved or unserved victims and victim service providers.

At Work in the Community

In Denver, victims often learn about CAs through word of mouth. CAs also publicize their services at community meetings and other gatherings at which they can distribute business cards and fliers. Because CAs participate in community activities and meetings, they become known and trusted by community members. As a result, victims feel safe and comfortable asking CAs for help.

When contacted by a victim, the CA provides crisis intervention as well as ongoing followup and case management to ensure that victims' needs are fully met. CAs help crime victims overcome barriers to service, such as language differences and mistrust of the system. Laptop computers give CAs in the field access to the Denver VS2000 online case management system and online resource directory, which help CAs provide better ongoing case management services to victims.

CAs and Victim Service Providers

As part of the VS2000 network of service providers, CAs have a ready forum for networking, collaborating, making and receiving referrals, and consulting with other victim service providers. Their knowledge about service gaps and issues for underserved and unserved victims can inform the development of a model victim service network. Denver CAs provide quarterly cross-training sessions to educate other victim service providers about their program and about the cultural issues central to working with victims in their communities. They also recruit and work to maintain community representation on Denver VS2000 teams.

Crimes Addressed by CAs

Victimization can be caused by violent and nonviolent crimes against people and property. Effective CAs must be aware of all types of crime that can victimize members of the community and be prepared to address every victim's needs and concerns, through direct services and referrals.

Crimes against people include a range of violent and nonviolent criminal activity—murder, domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, robbery, elder abuse, and hate and identity crimes. Personal crimes can result in physical, mental, psychological, and financial victimization. Crimes against property (real, personal, and public, among others) also can victimize individuals and entire communities. Victims of property crime suffer financial losses and emotional distress in addition to losing a sense of security and comfort within their communities. Increases in property crime can compromise a community's ability to function and meet members' needs. Ultimately, damage from property crime can destroy a community as frustrated members abandon it.

Developing the CA Program

In establishing the CA Program, VS2000 staff decided to use a grant application process that would ensure that funded projects were community driven. Development was based on the premise that all neighborhoods and communities have strengths and assets to build on and that the community would be more likely to buy in with a community-led planning team. The goal was to place funding for the CA Program in competent community hands.

VS2000 staff sent notices of funding availability to more than 800 neighborhood groups, homeowners associations, religious organizations, business-owner groups, and community leaders. VS2000 staff, community leaders, and agency representatives hosted a series of local community television shows to advertise the availability of funding. Public service announcements were sent to radio stations, and press releases were sent to neighborhood and city papers. Information about the funding opportunity

also was presented at numerous community meetings.

Successful applications—

- Identified communities in which ideas were generated by the community and not by one person or agency.
- Reflected diverse representation from the community.
- Targeted an underserved or unserved population.
- Identified a gap in services for victims of violent crime.
- Presented a plan for improving services.
- Clearly defined other gaps in services.
- Created relevant goals and objectives for addressing the gap(s).

Technical Assistance

The application process was explained by VS2000 staff to interested community groups at workshops in various Denver locations, particularly in areas with large underserved or unserved populations. In addition to background information on the VS2000 project and the CA Program, workshops offered instruction and technical assistance on—

- Application completion.
- Development of goals and objectives for the CA Program.
- Budget development.
- Awardee's fiscal responsibilities to the VS2000 project.

Pilot Project Selections

VS2000 staff chose three communities to pilot the CA Program: the predominantly Latino

community in northwest Denver, several neighborhoods in northeast Denver with a mostly African-American population, and the local Muslim community, which is geographically dispersed throughout Denver.

Neighborhood Planning Groups

The organizations chosen to receive CA Program grants had all formed strong neighborhood planning groups (NPGs) to develop goals and objectives for the project. NPGs identified the most compelling victim service needs in their communities and formulated plans for addressing those needs. An NPG is constantly involved in the CA grant because it recruits, hires, and supervises each CA. CAs also serve on the NPG. NPG members assist CAs in their work with victims by meeting regularly to discuss issues and barriers, participating in strategic planning, and providing guidance. NPG members also attend VS2000 steering committee meetings and help with community projects, cross-training, and outreach efforts.

Conclusion

A comprehensive OVC bulletin that addresses all aspects of the CA Program is in development. Topics of discussion will include—

- Gaps in service to underserved and unserved populations.
- Development and supervision of a community outreach program.
- Lessons learned from implementing, supervising, and evaluating the program.
- Technology that facilitates provision of service to underserved and unserved populations and provides an online case management system.

For More Information

For more information or technical assistance regarding the Community Advocate Program, contact

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For copies of this fact sheet, other OVC publications, or information on additional victim-related resources, please contact:

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