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Denver Victim Services 2000 Needs Assessment

by Erin Stark

Introduction

Denver Victim Services 2000 (VS2000), funded by a discretionary grant from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), is a 5-year demonstration project to create a comprehensive, coordinated, seamless service delivery system for victims of crime. In 1997, OVC selected Denver, Colorado, as the urban site for the development and implementation of the VS2000 model. Today, representatives from more than 50 Denver-area victim service agencies and programs are participating in the Denver VS2000 project. Participants include community and criminal justice-based victim service programs and allied professionals. The State of Vermont has also been selected as a VS2000 site. Each site is developing a unique victim services model tailored to its community.

This Bulletin, the first in a series, describes the creation of the Denver VS2000 model service network. It summarizes the efforts and highlights the results of the three-pronged victim services needs assessment conducted by Denver VS2000 in 1997 and 1998. The Bulletin describes the development of an assessment strategy and the creation of measurement tools. Subsequent Bulletins will address other aspects of the model, including collaboration and planning, technology, training and education, and community advocates.

Participants in the Denver VS2000 project designed and implemented the Denver needs assessment. First, it was clear that an assessment of the current state of victim services and victims' needs in that area was necessary for developing a seamless model victim services network. Although adept in the field of victim services, the participants had little or no experience in, or knowledge of, scientific methods of data collection. Since the grant budget did not provide for consultation with expert researchers, it became the responsibility of project participants to develop measurement tools and implement an assessment that could, as quickly as possible, inform the process of creating the victim service model. Thanks to the wealth of expertise, experience, and dedication in the Denver

Message From the Director

Although the field has made great strides in working more collaboratively on behalf of crime victims, services still are often fragmented. All too often victims must struggle to discover their rights, determine the services and resources available to them, and find out how to access them. Sometimes even service providers are not aware of the availability of services and resources and how to access them.

To support the development of integrated services delivery systems that could serve as models for other communities, OVC funded Victim Services 2000 (VS 2000) demonstration sites. The goal of each VS 2000 demonstration site is to improve the range, quality, and accessibility of services for all types of crime victims and to provide technical assistance to other communities. In 1997, OVC awarded a VS 2000 grant to Denver, Colorado; in 1998, OVC grants went to Medina County, Ohio, and the State of Vermont. Both urban and rural communities were chosen as sites to determine what differences, if any, emerged.

Over the course of the 5-year grant, each project was asked to write a Bulletin about its needs assessment process and the resulting initiatives. This documentation may help other communities increase the range, quality, and accessibility of services to all crime victims. This Bulletin, from the Denver VS 2000 project, is the first in that series. These Bulletins will either contain or direct readers to tools to aid implementation, sources for technical assistance and related resources.

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Director

victim services community, the project participants were able to develop the needs assessment from their own applied, practical research without using strictly scientific social research methods.

Developing the assessment involved three tasks: identifying the most relevant types of services and victim information, researching available material on related types of needs assessments, and creating working committees to design instruments and methods of implementation. From a dynamic process of brainstorming, discussion, prioritization, and ongoing refinement of content and format came three distinct assessment instruments—the Agency Inventory of Services (the Agency Survey), the Client Satisfaction Survey, and focus groups for underserved crime victims. In addition, by working together toward a common goal, the participants achieved other, perhaps equally important, goals—increased knowledge, understanding, and trust in one another.

The first major task undertaken by the Denver VS2000 participants was the development of the needs assessment. This provided victim service providers from a broad range of agencies a wonderful opportunity to share ideas, perceptions, and concerns on topics such as interagency communication and referrals, why certain victims do or do not report or use services, perceived needs and service gaps, and differing philosophies and methods of service provision. In fact, the needs assessment generated information that contributed to the creation of several critical components of the model victim services network, including a shared case management system, an interagency cross-training plan, standardized service evaluation, cultural competency training, and advocates from the community.

History of Denver VS2000

In 1996, the Denver Victim Assistance and Law Enforcement (VALE) Board convened a planning committee of more than 50 community and criminal justice-based victim service providers and allied professionals. The purpose of the meeting was to plan the components and structure of a Victim Services 2000 model for the city of Denver. The creation of a seamless, integrated victim service delivery system seemed a logical next step for Denver's victim service community. Its past efforts on behalf of crime victims includes one of the first prosecution-based victim advocates in the United States, passage of a Victims' Rights Constitutional Amendment and enabling legislation, numerous interdisciplinary victim-centered protocols, and the establishment of a centralized victim service center.

An extensive network of more than 50 nonprofit and government agencies plays a critical role in the delivery of services to crime victims in Denver. Representatives of these agencies were on the planning committee and the steering committee, which were formed after Denver was selected as a VS2000 site. Services are available for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, robbery, and assault, as well as survivors of victims of violent death. Also available are services specifically designed for traditionally underserved victims, including African-American, Latino, and Asian victims; victims of hate crimes; victims with disabilities; and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered victims. Many agencies are involved in public education and awareness and conduct client satisfaction surveys, which help them determine strategies for refinement and expansion of services.

The VS2000 Planning Committee documented Denver's gaps and areas of greatest need in its existing services using data from a 1990 victim services assessment by the Denver Victims Service Center and a 1992 assessment by the Denver Children's Network. These efforts surveyed both service providers and clients, focusing on identifying underserved client populations that have experienced obstacles in obtaining victim assistance in Denver. The areas identified for possible enhancement were services for child sexual assault victims; long-term services, including case management; services for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered clients; services for disabled clients; services for ethnic minorities; resources for victims of unreported crimes; victim sensitivity training for professionals in the justice, medical, social services, legal, and religious systems; and public education about victims of crime. In addition, anecdotal sources within the victim services community indicated a significant underreporting of sexual assault, domestic violence, and crimes against the elderly, especially within ethnic and new immigrant communities.

Data from 1990 and 1992 provided the underpinnings of the 5-year VS2000 project. However, the planning committee felt that sole reliance on "old" data, anecdotal information, and conventional wisdom would prove insufficient for building an effective victim service network. The committee believed that this concerted effort to enhance coordination, accessibility, and service delivery needed to be driven by a thorough assessment of current services to reveal weaknesses and gaps. Thus, the Needs Assessment Team was formed to accomplish this task.

Denver VS2000 Needs Assessment

The Needs Assessment Team first met in May 1997 and reviewed the available materials on victim services needs assessments. The team found that needs assessments and attitudinal surveys had been undertaken vigorously over the past 50 years covering topics such as the state of the nation's health, the public's preferences in consumer products, and attitudes on political issues. However, the team found very few studies on the needs, attitudes, and experiences of crime victims. This may be in part because victim service agencies have been faced historically with a lack of resources. Needs assessments and ongoing service evaluation have not been considered a priority equal to direct services.

VS2000 found the 1996 Nebraska Crime Commission's statewide needs assessment a particularly useful guide. The Nebraska project developed and tested three assessment instruments to evaluate the state of services for victims across Nebraska. VS2000 was fortunate to have access to the Nebraska tools, survey results, comments, and recommendations on the assessment process written by professional researchers.

After a review of these materials, a three-pronged approach to needs assessment was developed by the Needs Assessment Team to generate information on current services:

- Client satisfaction with services.
- Unmet needs and gaps in service as perceived by service providers.
- Unmet needs and gaps in service as perceived by clients and unserved and underserved victims of crime.

The Needs Assessment Team met twice and organized into three committees: the Agency Survey Committee, the Client Satisfaction Survey Committee, and the Focus Group Committee. These groups met monthly for 5 months to design the measurement tools and implementation methods for each component of the needs assessment. VS2000 staff attended each meeting and drafted the tools according to the recommendations of committee members, printed and mailed the surveys, coordinated the focus groups, and analyzed the results of the assessment efforts. Descriptions of the efforts in each of the three areas follow.

The Agency Survey

In defining the goals and desired outcomes for the Agency Inventory of Services (Agency Survey), the committee addressed several questions. Should the survey be a comprehensive assessment of specific victim service agencies, including what they are providing, to what degree, and to what type of victim? To determine service trends and gaps, should the survey provide a general picture of what is available to victims of crime in the city of Denver? What is the sample group? Should all or only a few representative agencies be studied? If a few, how will those agencies be selected? Most important, what accomplishments were hoped for with these service data?

The Agency Survey Committee took its direction from the goals and objectives of the Denver VS2000 project. In this case, the goal was to establish a seamless, interdisciplinary system of service delivery for victims of crime, including victims from previously underserved or unserved populations. The assessment objective for this goal was to evaluate the current delivery system for gaps, the quality of service delivery, linkages between agencies, and service to underserved groups. Ideally, the resulting data would inform the development of the essential components of a victim service model, recommendations for new program development, and recommendations for realignment of existing services. As such, the committee determined that the assessment should not be an evaluation of each distinct victim service agency. Rather, the assessment should provide a general picture or snapshot of Denver's victim services environment, highlighting gaps in services that could be prioritized and addressed by the model victim services network.

The decision to focus on general service trends rather than individual agency performance was important for another reason. Some victim services providers receiving the results of this research would also determine the changes to be made in the victim service delivery system based on the research they designed and implemented. Some victim service providers were also subjects of the survey. The committee asked service providers to participate in this project, which would take substantial time and attention away from their jobs of providing direct services for an unforeseen length of time. With limited resources available to them, victim service providers often work in relative isolation from one another and may be in a position of competing for funds. In the light of these factors, the Agency Survey Committee decided that a survey that seemed to be scrutinizing the performance of individual agencies would be counterproductive to an environment of mutual trust, collaboration, and commitment to the goals of the project.

The committee determined the survey's target population to be the agencies and programs providing victim services in Denver. To get a clear picture of service gaps and understand who was using services, the committee decided to gather

information from as many programs as possible, including criminal justice-based programs and allied professional agencies with victim service components, such as hospitals.

Another parameter of the Agency Survey was that it include both objective and subjective data. Objective data included such items as services provided, number of clients served, client demographics, and number of staff. Alone, these data do not reveal unmet needs or gaps in services until compared with a list of predetermined needs. To obtain information about service gaps, the survey asked service providers where they believed the gaps to be. The survey asked what services were needed but not provided, not just for the victims at their agencies, but for any crime victim in Denver. These subjective data relied on the perceptions and beliefs of service providers. Though the committee knew such information was potentially biased, it included it in the survey to harvest the wealth of anecdotal and firsthand information that service providers have about victims and the services available to them.

When designing the survey, the committee considered factors that would affect its return rate. These factors included the length and complexity of the survey, its importance to the respondent, the respondent's motivation for completing and returning it, and the respondent's perception of an obligation to complete and return it. The Denver VS2000 Agency Inventory of Services is a lengthy 10-page document with a fairly complex format. It includes check boxes, grids, scales, and space for written comments. The survey designers tried to balance the need for comprehensive information with ease of completion.

Although the survey's primary objective was to reveal gaps in service and weaknesses in interagency linkages, it also included questions on other types of information such as agency mission, distribution of staff and board, service fees, hours, funding sources, reporting rates, and client demographics. The design was based on an assumption that service providers are people who often deal with paperwork and data gathering and would not be daunted by a complex, lengthy survey. Further, the motivation to complete the survey was assumed to be high because it was targeted primarily to participants in the VS2000 project, who had collectively identified the necessity of a needs assessment.

Categories of Information in the Agency Survey

The Agency Survey collected information in four categories: agency information, client information, service information, and agency linkages.

Agency Information

Agency information collected in the survey included date of inception, mission, involvement in interagency protocols, funding sources, number and ethnic distribution of the staff and board of directors, service area, accessibility, service fees, and marketing of services. The survey asked questions that inventoried the characteristics of the agencies that were providing victim services in Denver. These questions were included with the thought that the information might prove valuable at some point during this 5-year project. The committee designed the survey with the assumption that having as much information as possible about existing services would be helpful when developing a model service network. This portion of the survey did not address service gaps.

Client Information

The survey asked for client information including gender, racial, and ethnic distribution; age; disability; and income level. The survey also asked respondents what percentage of clients reported the crime to police and what the respondents thought were the primary reasons for nonreporting. The survey designers tried to make the survey easy to complete and easy to analyze. Wherever possible, the survey provides a choice of answers with boxes to check or lists of characteristics with spaces to fill in numbers or percentages. These documents made the survey easier to analyze, reduced the amount of writing required of the respondent, and increased the likelihood that each question would be answered.

Service Information

The section of the survey on service information was formatted into a table or grid. This design captured relevant information about each type of service available to victims of crime, such as how many victims are using it, who is the target population, and what services are needed but not provided. The survey designers developed a comprehensive list of 55 different services available to crime victims. The table format allowed the survey to collect a range of information on each distinct service offered by an agency or program, while keeping the survey a reasonable length.

Agency Linkages

The Agency Linkages Chart is another important part of the survey. Sometimes victims "fall through the cracks" of a service network due to weaknesses in communication and collaboration among victim service agencies. The Agency Linkage Chart was designed to reveal the general interagency environment. In the survey, "linkage" is defined as "a high or appropriate level of communication,

resource, and information sharing between agencies; a clear knowledge of each other's services; a referral mechanism; and trust that referred clients will be treated appropriately and have relatively easy access to quality services." The Agency Linkage Chart contains a list of 80 victim service programs and allied professional and community groups. Respondents were asked to measure the level of their agency's linkage with each group or agency.

Implementation of the Agency Survey

The Agency Inventory of Services and a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey were mailed to 99 victim service programs and allied professionals. Respondents were given 1 month to complete the survey and return it to VS2000 staff. VS2000 staff placed reminder calls to each of the agencies to remind them of the deadline and ask if they had any questions about the survey. Of the 99 programs, approximately 20 told VS2000 that the survey did not apply to them because they did not provide direct services to victims. Of the remainder, 47 surveys (59 percent) were completed and returned to VS2000. Data were computed using EpiInfo statistical software.

Results of the Agency Survey

Analysis and summary of the data collected by the survey focused on areas considered most relevant to the VS2000 project. These areas were client and staff demographics, reporting rates for different types of victims, agency linkages, and service gaps. For the most part, the survey results were not surprising and were in accord with anecdotal information and findings of previous surveys. However, some of the survey findings were interesting. Client and staff demographics indicated that overall services reached a broad range of victim types. By contrast, racially and ethnically diverse clients, staff, and board members fell into the 0–25 percentile range, which is lower than the percentage in the general population. The survey also revealed that, compared with other types of crime victims, reporting rates were shown to be significantly lower (10–26 percent) for adult survivors of sexual abuse, women with disabilities, domestic violence victims, sexual assault victims, non-English-speaking victims, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered victims.

Analysis of agency linkages found that the top 10 agencies and groups requiring the most linkage were those serving American Indians, new immigrants, and non-English-speaking victims, as well as the Department of Social Services, hospitals, the faith community, and community leaders. Surprisingly, most clients selected information and referral as a needed but unavailable service, whereas most agencies responded that they provided this service. Discussion with service providers on the VS2000 working teams revealed that they felt information and referral were not being done as well as expected. Specifically, interagency knowledge was lacking and referrals were often not appropriate. Other service gaps identified by survey included emergency shelter, case management, on-scene crisis intervention, legal assistance, and 24-hour hotlines for deaf and non-English-speaking victims.

Evaluation: Suggested Changes to Agency Survey Content and Method

After analyzing the survey results and obtaining feedback about the process from service providers, VS2000 staff determined that some changes in survey content and method could have resulted in a better return rate with more concise, meaningful information.

Several survey respondents felt the survey was too long, and the tables and charts were intimidating and hard to understand. Although many respondents did not share this opinion, the VS2000 staff felt it was safe to assume that respondents would more likely complete a shorter survey. The survey information on agency characteristics was not summarized and has not been used by the VS2000 project during its 5 years of existence. Considering that the primary goal of the survey was to measure services and reveal service gaps, the agency information was extraneous and should have been omitted.

One of the tables, the Service Information Table, measured the services provided by a particular agency and the general gaps in services for all victims by all agencies, from the providers' perspective. Some respondents thought they were to indicate only the gaps they thought existed within their own agency or only for the types of victims they served. They were reluctant to list gaps because they thought it might reflect poorly on their agency or it might result in an increased expectation for their agency—to expand or to change services in ways that would be unrealistic or outside the agency's mission. The staff realized that including some simple, open-ended questions would have been a good idea, even though they would have complicated the analysis process. Simple questions such as "How do you think services for victims of crime could be improved?" would have generated valuable information and avoided confusion about how a question should be answered.

Another chart that measured linkages between victim service programs indicated which programs had excellent or sufficient linkage with the network of

agencies and which did not. This information was helpful in illustrating which agencies might need to do more outreach, networking, and cross-training. Respondents also began requesting analyses that would show how each agency rated itself. Although this would be valuable information for each agency to have, providing the information would violate the confidentiality of the responders. If a statement of consent had been included in this section of the survey, sharing this information with the requesting agency could have been allowed.

The Client Satisfaction Survey

As you will recall from the last section, the Agency Survey looked at Denver's victim service network from the service provider's perspective. This section discusses the Client Satisfaction Survey, which looked at Denver's victim service network from the client's perspective. The Client Satisfaction Survey regarded crime victims as service consumers and tried to determine what their needs were and how well those needs were met.

Prior to VS2000, several client satisfaction survey instruments were already in use in Denver, including both written and telephone interview formats. Surveys from the Denver Police Department's Victim Assistance Unit, the Denver District Attorney's Victim Advocacy Program, the Denver Victims Service Center, and other community-based programs were reviewed by the Client Satisfaction Survey Committee. The committee also reviewed client satisfaction surveys from victim service agencies in other states, including those developed for the Nebraska Crime Commission's statewide needs assessment.

The committee resolved that the client survey should capture both quantitative and qualitative information on services, the accessibility of those services, the response of the criminal justice system, if applicable, and interagency responses. Service information would include what services were received, satisfaction with those services, and services that were needed but not received. Accessibility of the services would be determined by questions about affordability, language appropriateness, and ease of use. The criminal justice response would be measured by questions about reporting, prosecution, and the victims' satisfaction level with their interactions with the police and district attorney. Finally, survey questions about referrals that had been given and used would shed light on the appropriateness of interagency response.

Before the survey could be designed, the committee had to resolve several key questions. Should the survey measure the victims' satisfaction with all the services they had received as a result of their victimization? Or, should the survey measure the victims' satisfaction only with services obtained from the agency that provided the survey to the victim? Should the survey form capture information about the services provided to victims within a given timeframe? How could the survey be disseminated to ensure maximum response? How should the survey address the wide variation in victim service programs in terms of types of victims served, types of services provided, amount of client activity, and the ways services are delivered? In other words, should a survey be tailored specifically to each separate agency? Or, could a common survey be adequate? Finally, how could the survey format and method of implementation make victims comfortable and motivated to complete the survey?

One goal of the survey was to collect information that would be used to inform the creation of a seamless network of services for all victims of crime. Having decided that the purpose of the client survey was not to evaluate satisfaction with a specific agency, but with distinct types of services within a network of services, the committee decided that the survey should elicit satisfaction levels of all Denver-area services that the victim received within a 12-month period.

The population sample for the distribution of the Client Satisfaction Survey was composed of victims who were currently receiving services at Denver victim service agencies. The committee chose this option instead of a random population survey for several reasons. Although any population will include victims of crime, a random sample of a population would also include many nonvictims, who were not being targeted by this survey. In addition, surveys mailed to random population groups are known to have a low return rate. To obtain enough returns, the survey would have to be mailed to a very large number of people, and this would be too costly. So, the decision was made to direct the surveys to victims currently receiving services at Denver victim service agencies.

Agencies were given several options for survey dissemination. The surveys could be given to victims by service providers as part of the exit evaluation process, or as a mid-service evaluation, or at any time a provider felt it was appropriate. The committee assumed that because almost all the Denver-area service programs were involved in the VS2000 project, they would be invested in the success of the survey assessment, ensuring that completed surveys were returned. This method allowed the clients to complete

the surveys inhouse. Committee members reported that surveys taken home by clients for completion usually were not returned. Although clients were not required to complete the surveys, it seemed more likely that this method would result in more returns and would be less intrusive.

The survey designers tried to make the survey user friendly by keeping it short (a little over three pages) and the language plain and simple, avoiding the kind of terminology and jargon service providers understand, but victims often do not.

The survey was organized into four sections. The first section asked questions about the crime (or crimes) the respondent was a victim of, including type of crime, year of the crime, city in which the crime occurred, the first agency or group contacted for help, and whether the crime was reported and prosecuted. The second section addressed overall victim satisfaction with criminal justice and victim service agencies and service referrals. The third section contained a Service Information Table, much like the one in the Agency Survey, which measures satisfaction level, service gaps, and accessibility. The fourth section requested demographic information.

The survey measured a victim's satisfaction with the justice system and service agencies by asking the question, "Do you feel you were treated with dignity and respect by the police? By the district attorney's office? By the agencies that provided services for you?" This question was phrased specifically to determine the victims' feelings about how they were treated, avoiding undue negative (or positive) answers based on case outcome.

The Service Information Table listed 47 services. For each service victims received, they were asked their satisfaction level: Were services provided in their language? Were services affordable? Were services easy to get to or use? Similar to the Agency Survey, this table allowed the survey to ask several questions about each type of service in a relatively concise format.

Implementation of the Client Satisfaction Survey

The Client Satisfaction Survey was sent to 70 Denver victim service agencies. Depending on their size, most agencies were asked to return between 5 and 15 surveys within a 2-month period. This deadline was extended for several months because of the low return rate.

The survey included a cover letter stating the survey was confidential and did not contain the victim's name. It also explained the purpose of the assessment, who was conducting it, who would see the results, and how they would be used. To ensure confidentiality for the victim, envelopes addressed to VS2000 were provided with the surveys. After completing the survey, the respondent could seal the survey in the envelope and the service agency would mail it. For victims who could not read, the agency could offer to read it to them, conducting the survey as an oral interview provided the victim did not object to the lack of anonymity. Surveys were also available in Spanish and in Vietnamese, which is the largest Asian population in Denver. Eleven agencies returned 80 completed surveys. VS2000 staff disseminated additional surveys to community groups. In total, 127 surveys from 11 victim service agencies and 11 community groups were returned to VS2000 for analysis. Because of the slow return rate, survey results were computed by hand.

Results of the Client Satisfaction Survey

Survey analysis revealed that client satisfaction with services was high. Overwhelmingly, the survey responses revealed that services were language appropriate, affordable, and easily accessible. The primary unmet service needs were crisis intervention at the crime scene; victim assistance at the crime scene; emergency financial assistance, victims' rights information, and protection and safety services; and updates on the status of one's case. Among other things, the survey revealed that 46 percent of respondents felt they were treated with dignity and respect by the police, 33 percent by the prosecutor (51 percent were "not applicable"), and 61 percent by service agencies (21 percent were "not applicable").

The results of the survey are colored somewhat by the low return rate and the fact that only 11 agencies were represented. Also, some agencies were overrepresented, even when taking into account size considerations. For instance, 1 agency returned 20 surveys, which was appropriate for the number of clients it served. Yet, other programs with an equally large client base returned only one or two surveys.

During and after the implementation of the Client Satisfaction Survey, it became clear that the low return rate was due not to victims' reluctance, but to resistance by service providers. The survey was an inconvenience to service providers, requiring more paperwork, more coordination effort, and more time. In agencies and programs that did not already conduct periodic evaluations or assessments as part of their routine procedures, it was difficult for the service providers to conduct the survey. Another and perhaps primary cause of the service providers' resistance to the survey was that the providers felt the survey represented another layer of intrusion and stress for their clients. However, it is interesting to note that in later focus groups conducted

with victims, victims stated unequivocally that they wanted to be asked about their opinions, experiences, needs, and suggestions.

In the final analysis, the results from the Client Satisfaction Survey were not as valuable as those from the Agency Survey and the Victim Focus Groups because of the low return rate and the fact that the responses were not really representative of the crime victims receiving services in Denver. As a result, the results of the Client Satisfaction Survey had less impact than the Agency Survey or the Victim Focus Groups on the development of the model.

Evaluation: Suggested Changes to the Content and Method of the Client Satisfaction Survey

In retrospect, the committee decided that changing the implementation of the Client Satisfaction Survey might result in a higher return rate and more meaningful data. Steps were taken to "mentor" service providers throughout the survey process. Committee members were assigned agencies to call periodically to ask how the implementation was proceeding, answer questions, and suggest possible methods for conducting the survey. These mentors were usually told that everything was fine and proceeding on course, yet completed surveys were not forthcoming. It became clear that communication by telephone was too removed and impersonal. The survey effort may have been more effective if VS2000 staff and committee members met with agency staff personally to explain the survey and help with the implementation process.

During the process of totaling and analyzing the client surveys, problems with survey format were discovered. The most obvious problem was with the service table. It was too complicated for many respondents to understand. This resulted in respondents providing contradictory information. Many surveys had to be discarded because the contradictory responses made it impossible to determine what the respondents meant. Perhaps asking the question, "How could services be made better?" and providing a blank space for the respondent's answer would have generated more valuable information. However, returned surveys revealed that respondents, for the most part, failed to complete other spaces provided for comment on the survey.

Although the results of the Client Satisfaction Survey were disappointing, the assessment process did highlight the need for a systematic means to obtain ongoing client feedback.

Victim Focus Groups

Focus groups were the final component of the VS2000 Victim Services Needs Assessment. These groups were formed to obtain information from Denver's unserved and underserved victims of crime. Focus groups were used because they are able to elicit more precise and indepth information about the experiences and opinions of hard-to-reach populations than surveys. Underserved populations in Denver include American Indians, African-Americans, Asians, Latinos, new immigrants, non-English-speaking individuals, the disabled, the elderly, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered victims.

The focus groups tried to elicit information about the types of crime that most affect underserved populations and how comfortable and knowledgeable they were about available services and the criminal justice system. Furthermore, the focus groups tried to find out what the underserved populations thought would make positive changes occur. Focus group questions were formulated to specifically find out certain information, including the reasons why these groups do not access services, what would need to change for them to access services, and what were the gaps in services and possible avenues of outreach to these communities.

For a focus group model, VS2000 relied on Richard A. Krueger's excellent book *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. This book provided valuable advice on effective group facilitation, development of questions, group makeup and dynamics, and data analysis.

Recruitment of Focus Group Participants

The Focus Group Committee and VS2000 staff assumed that lack of trust, prior negative experience, and language and cultural barriers contributed to the underuse of services. It was also assumed that these factors would make the identification of potential focus group participants difficult. To transcend these barriers, focus group participants were recruited via community "gatekeepers."

Gatekeepers are individuals who are part of or have access to a particular group, but who are also involved in the broader community beyond that group. They are trusted, respected, and are often sought out by community members needing aid and advice. Gatekeepers can include community leaders, members of faith communities, business owners, community police officers, and service providers. The Focus Group Committee identified and contacted these gatekeepers and asked them to recruit focus group participants.

VS2000 staff drafted a letter explaining Denver VS2000, the purpose of the focus groups, and what participants could expect when attending a session.

Gatekeepers were given this letter to help them recruit, since many of them were not familiar with the project. When gatekeepers found a potential participant, they explained the purpose and procedure of the focus groups and obtained the recruit's permission to be contacted by VS2000 staff. If still interested after an introductory telephone call, the recruits were sent a letter listing available dates and locations of groups to choose from. Additional recruitment efforts consisted of placing ads in neighborhood newspapers, newsletters, and bulletins. Incentives to encourage participation included the provision of childcare, transportation, refreshments, and a $20 stipend for each group member.

Each recruit received two letters—one for selecting which session they would attend and one to confirm their choice. In addition, each received at least two phone calls—one was an introduction and a screening interview and one reconfirmed their attendance the day before the session. Of the approximately 50 individuals initially contacted, 35 agreed to participate, while only 24 actually attended the focus group sessions. The attendees came from the following diverse populations: African American, American Indian, Asian American, the elderly, Latino, monolingual Spanish-speaking, the disabled, African immigrant, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and the indigent.

Implementation of Focus Groups

Four focus groups, each with four to eight participants, were conducted. Spanish-speaking victims were in a separate group, as they required Spanish-speaking facilitators. The other groups were racially and culturally mixed. Their bond was that they were all victims of crime.

Focus groups were held at neutral and easily accessed locations, such as libraries, museums, and community centers. Efforts were made to make the meeting space as appealing and comfortable as possible. Participants were seated around a tablecloth-covered table. The table provided a place to lean and a means of cover so the participants would not feel physically exposed as they might if only seated in chairs. Name tents were placed in front of each participant, and food and drink were provided.

A moderator and assistant moderator facilitated each group and a scribe took notes. The moderator had experience facilitating discussion groups and knew how to establish conversational ground rules, use conversational probes, handle overbearing participants, encourage information from shier participants, and keep the group on track by focusing the discussion. The moderator had to maintain an atmosphere of open, casual interchange. The assistant moderator helped facilitate the group and took notes on responses, attitudes, and trends. The scribe recorded the verbatim responses to the questions. In VS2000's groups, the scribe wrote the responses on large pieces of paper taped to the walls so participants could view them and ask for corrections if what they meant was something different from what was written. Each 2-hour session was tape recorded with the permission of participants.

The same individuals who facilitated the focus groups also analyzed the data for each group to ensure consistency in analysis. The assistant moderator's notes, the information recorded by the scribe, and the audiotape were studied and summarized.

Results of Focus Groups

The information from the focus groups proved to be some of the most interesting, enlightening, and helpful of any that was generated by the VS2000 Needs Assessment. The main themes arising from the focus groups were that victims did not trust that services would meet their needs even when the services had been designed for their demographics; that victims would not usually access services outside their community even when they had knowledge of those services; and that victims wanted service providers to bring services to them and ask them what they needed rather than just tell them what is available.

Focus group participants wanted victim services to be

- Holistic and humanistic, recognizing and addressing the multiple layers of obstacles to getting needs met and offering counseling for victims beyond what victim compensation or Medicaid provide.
- Community-based, located in their neighborhood and provided by individuals who are members of their community or neighborhood.
- Respectful, valuing the diversity of victims, offering services in the victim's language and in a culturally competent manner, and acknowledging the unique barriers to accessing services experienced by many ethnic and culturally diverse communities.
- Accessible, applying flexible criteria for access to services, serving people where they are, offering an array of services and allowing victims to choose what they need, and not requiring that forms be filled out each time services are accessed.
- Restorative in nature, holding offenders accountable to victims,

seeking restitution that benefits the victim, and involving the community and its members.

Outcomes

The information captured by the Victim Services 2000 Needs Assessment was essential to the development of the components of the Denver VS2000 model. However, the needs assessment was not alone in this work. While the Needs Assessment Team was developing instruments and surveying agencies and victims, the Model Network Development, Training, and Education and Technology Teams and subcommittees were meeting each month to discuss and brainstorm a common vision and structure for an integrated, model service network. Though the needs assessment informed the development of the model, the collaborative efforts of the teams were very important in identifying its critical components.

The collective work of the teams and the information from the focus groups provided the foundation for Denver VS2000's guiding philosophy that there should be "no wrong door" through which victims can access services. The focus groups also highlighted the need for advocates who are part of the community they serve and the need for cultural competency training for service providers. Of the gaps identified by the Agency Survey, a shared case management system was prioritized by the teams as the best way to address myriad needs, including more effective information and referral, better communication between providers, and better service provision in general. Development of an online Resource Directory and an interagency Cross-Training Plan would address the need for appropriate referrals by providing easy access to information about resources and a vehicle for increasing knowledge and trust among agencies.

The following are elements of the Denver VS2000 model victim service network that were developed as a result of the data gathered during the needs assessment:

Community Advocates

Three underserved communities were selected as sites for VS2000 Community Advocates (CAs). CAs are members or residents of the community or neighborhood they serve and are known, respected, and involved in their communities. CAs are able to inform the VS2000 Steering Committee and teams about the needs and barriers to service experienced by the victims in their communities and are responsible for linking victims with available services.

Case Management

Denver VS2000 is developing a Case Management System that will be shared over a secure, private network. This system will enable service providers to assist victims in navigating multiple agencies and to provide followup and support. It will allow service providers to track clients through the network of services to ensure they are getting the help they need and to communicate with colleagues about shared clients. As a result, victims will not have to retell their story and fill out forms each time they access services at a new agency.

Online Resource Directory

Denver VS2000 has developed an Internet-based Resource Directory that is shared among agencies and continually updated. The online Resource Directory solves several problems that have long been a source of frustration for victim service providers: incorrect or out-of-date information due to lack of staff to keep resources current; directories that are large, cumbersome, and too expensive to print more than once or twice a year; and directories that are difficult to use because criteria cannot be easily cross-referenced. Service providers and the public can access the Denver VS2000 Resource Directory through the VS2000 Web site. Users can search for resources using any combination of categories such as services provided, agency name, type of victims served, languages spoken, geographic area, and ethnicity served. Once a search is completed, a report of the search results can be created. An information specialist manages and updates the records and administers the resource directory.

Systematized Evaluation

The Client Satisfaction Survey is being redesigned into an online service evaluation instrument that will be routinely used by each victim service agency to ensure ongoing and consistent client feedback about Denver's victim service network.

Cultural Competency

Denver VS2000 hosted the National Multicultural Institute's pilot training for trainers on their Cultural Considerations in Assisting Crime Victims curriculum. The participants from this training formed MOSAIC—a group of victim service and criminal justice professionals that has worked together to develop a plan for addressing the need for cultural competency in services to victims of crime. This plan includes providing training to agencies and victim service providers on cultural competency, creating access to resources and networking for traditionally underserved communities, and creating a culture that values and promotes the diversity of victim service professionals through development of culturally competent recruitment, hiring, and retention strategies.

Cross-Training

Denver VS2000 has created a citywide cross-training plan to improve resource referrals, interagency information, knowledge, and trust. The plan calls for each victim service program to host regular trainings onsite at its agency. These trainings are posted and registered with the Online Training Center, a feature of Denver VS2000's Web site.

For Further Information

For more information about the Denver Victim Services 2000 project and related products, contact Denver VS2000 or OVC.

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Fax: 202–514–6383
World Wide Web: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/

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Denver Victim Services 2000 Steering Committee

AMEND

Asian Pacific Development Center

AT&T Wireless Services

City Attorney's Office, Domestic Violence Unit

Colorado Association of Black Nurses

Colorado Attorney General's Office

Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Colorado Council of Churches

Colorado District Attorney's Council

Colorado Division of Criminal Justice

Colorado Oklahoma Resource Council

Colorado Organization for Victim Assistance

Colorado Outward Bound School

Colorado State Judicial Probation Services

Community-at-Large

Denver Child Advocacy Center

Denver Community Corrections

Denver County Court Probation

Denver Crime Victim Compensation Program

Denver Department of Human Services

Denver District Attorney's Office

Denver Health Medical Center

Denver Indian Health and Family Services

Denver Police Department

Denver Sheriff's Department

Denver VALE Board

Denver Victims Service Center

Domestic Violence Initiative for Women with Disabilities

Equality Colorado

Federal Bureau of Investigation

HECHO

Justice Information Center

Kempe Child Protection Team

KWGN–TV Denver

Muslim Women's Society

Project Safeguard

Promoting Alternative to Violence through Education

Rape Assistance and Awareness Program

SafeHouse Denver

Servicios de la Raza

Sexual Assault Interagency Council

The Spiritual Dimension in Victim Services

Urban Peak

U.S. Attorney's Office

Victim Offender Reconciliation Program

WINGS Foundation

Additional Resources

Needs Assessment Instruments

Find the following VS2000 needs assessment materials on the VS2000 World Wide Web. (www.vs2000.org).

- Agency Inventory of Services—Assessment Instrument
- Agency Inventory of Services—Summary of Results
- Victim Focus Groups—Format of Groups
- Victim Focus Groups—Summary of Results
- Crime Victim (Client Satisfaction) Survey—Assessment Instrument

Nebraska Crime Commission

Statewide Crime Victim Needs Assessment

Nebraska Crime Commission
P.O. Box 94946
Lincoln, NE 68509–4946
Phone: 402–471–2194
World Wide Web: www.nol.org/home/crimecom/

Book

Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research, by Richard A. Krueger.
Published by Sage Publications, Inc. (1994).
E-mail orders: order@sagepub.com

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