

SAULT STE. MARIE TRIBE OF CHIPPEWA INDIANS



Sault Ste. Marie Tribe Victim Services Program Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan

Founded:	1989
Service area:	7 counties at the extreme eastern end of the Michigan Peninsula near the Canadian border
Population:	20,632
Source of funding:	federal, state
Contact:	Lori Jump, Director 2428 Shunk Road Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783 906-635-7705 Web site: www.saulttribe.org/directory/page44.htm

Program Description

The Victim Services Program of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians has a very proactive approach to providing services to victims of crime. The program provides comprehensive services to victims of crime using a multidisciplinary and culturally specific approach. The program works toward lessening the impact of victimization, identifying the needs of victims and their families, and assisting in meeting the identified needs.

The Victim Services Program covers a large, seven-county area in northern Michigan, including Chippewa, Mackinac, Alger, Luce, Delta, Schoolcraft, and Marquette Counties. The program provides services to all Native Americans living in the seven-county area and any non-Native American who is a victim of a crime on the Sault Ste. Marie Reservation. With a staff of eight, including the program manager, three advocates, one assistant advocate, an attorney, an MSW counselor, and a secretary, the Victim Services Program works to address the needs of victims. The team approach to providing safety

and support to victims of crime has been instrumental in the success of the program.

Services Offered

The program offers myriad services for its clients, including

- ◆ Short-term counseling.
- ◆ Ongoing counseling.
- ◆ Assistance with the state crime victim compensation application.
- ◆ Safety planning.
- ◆ Court accompaniment.

Legal Assistance

The program also provides emotional support and personal advocacy that may include contacts with other service providers including law enforcement, prosecutors, social workers, substance abuse counselors, and mental health counselors. Emergency legal assistance is available to victims

who need assistance in filing for Personal Protection Orders (PPOs). Domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking victims are eligible for free legal assistance with civil matters from a licensed attorney to help with child custody, divorce, landlord/tenant issues, and other problems. The program ensures that clients can attend meetings and court hearings by providing free transportation to court, medical treatment, counseling sessions, and other appointments.

Cultural Relevance

Maintaining and teaching the Chippewa culture is also an important element of the program's services. Women victims of crime can attend a women's talking circle, an educational group for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. Native American teachings are incorporated into the group process. No victim is mandated to participate in ceremonies—however, the program expects all participants in the talking circles to show respect for traditional beliefs and practices. Other cultural activities include arts and crafts, sweat lodge ceremonies, and seasonal women's ceremonies. These activities are essential to the healing process because they help victims stay connected with their identity and community. Often, non-Native American programs cannot provide cultural services due to lack of funding or knowledge. Because of the connections that the Sault Ste. Marie Victim Services Program has in the community, the important needs of victims can be immediately addressed in a culturally competent manner. By using the traditional Chippewa culture, the program deals with the aftereffects of violence and works to help crime victims reintegrate into society.

Ensuring Victim Safety

Sault Ste. Marie's Victim Services Program places high priority on helping victims of domestic violence find ways to find and maintain safety. Because many victims of domestic violence are vulnerable to continuing violence during child custody exchanges, the program provides a safe place for child exchange for victims who have children with abusive partners. This

custody exchange project prevents revictimization of the parent and child by offering a safe, neutral environment for exchange of children.

Without the help of Sault Ste. Marie's Victim Services Program, victims face a difficult "maze" trying to work with seven counties, the tribal government, and the federal system. The Victim Services Program has experience navigating through this jurisdictional maze successfully and works hard to maintain good working relationships with all local jurisdictions, including the seven counties, state, and tribe, and various law enforcement agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). To further strengthen these relationships, a coalition of tribal, state, and federal representatives was recently established to address jurisdictional issues such as protection orders. Members of the coalition are committed to helping victims and meet quarterly to address recognition of cross-jurisdictional orders.

The victim services program credits its staff for their hard work in accomplishing the difficult task of successfully prosecuting child sexual abuse offenders. Recently, two federal cases resulted in sending one offender to prison for 11 years and another for 17 years. The advocacy services provided by the victim services program played a significant role in these convictions. Advocates do not pressure victims to follow through with the criminal justice system, but they do provide support and access to all options, including prosecution. In addition, advocates assist victims during interviews with law enforcement, keep the victim informed of the status of court cases, and serve as a liaison with prosecutors during tense times. Without the advocates, many victims would likely feel unable to participate in a confusing judicial system. Everyone plays an important role in the process, but the victim-witness advocates are a large reason for the success of the two federal convictions. In recognition of their instrumental role in the criminal justice process, two victim services program advocates recently received Distinguished Service Awards from the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan.

The victim services program at the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe always keeps the focus on the victims of crime. Victims set their own goals, and the program helps them reach those goals. Success is measured by the ability of each victim to find safety and security in his or her own way.

Keys to Success

- ◆ Use culture as a resource. Using cultural resources vastly improves outcomes for Native American victims of crime.
- ◆ Create partnerships. It is vital to link with nontribal entities such as courts and law enforcement for victims of violence who need protection no matter where they travel. To implement the full faith and credit of tribal court judgments, cross-jurisdictional collaboration is key.

Listen to the needs of the victims. Victim services programs can offer a number of different options to survivors of violence without pressuring them to take one particular course of action.

Quotes

Our advocates are good at helping victims identify what their options are, and what resources there are for them. That's probably the best service we offer—helping them determine what their options are. When you're in crisis, your mind is going in a hundred different directions. We're there 100 percent for the victim. And that's a new experience for them. There really hasn't ever been anyone who has been just for the victims' needs. That's probably the best thing about any victim services program. This is something just for them.

—Lori Jump
Program Manager

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I would strongly encourage all tribes to apply for funding for the development and implementation of a victim services program. Victim services is the one program that is dedicated to offering support to victims of crimes and assistance navigating through what can be a confusing system. Oftentimes the difference between a successful prosecution (justice!) and a lost case is having someone available to support the victim. By offering support, I am referring to all of the services that we can offer to victims: information and referral, emergency legal advocacy, court support, transportation, ongoing contact, case updates, and personal advocacy.

—Lori Jump
Program Manager

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