

AFTER THE ROBBERY:



*CRISIS*  
TO  
RESOLUTION

PRODUCED BY:

UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE  
EASTERN DISTRICT OF WISCONSIN



WITH SUPPORT FROM: OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME  
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# AFTER THE ROBBERY:

## *CRISIS* TO RESOLUTION

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## I. INTRODUCTION

There are approximately 7,000 bank robberies in the United States each year. The level of violence that takes place during these robberies ranges from a note to a teller to the increasing number of “takeover” robberies in which everyone in a bank is threatened at gunpoint. Regardless of the means used, being robbed is terrifying to employees and customers because they know that there is always a potential for violence and they fear for their safety.

United States Attorneys’ Offices throughout the nation prosecute a substantial number of bank robberies. In prosecuting these cases there are two goals. First, we will do everything legally possible to convict the robber. Second, we are committed to assisting the victims’ recovery and supporting victims and witnesses throughout the criminal justice process.

In addition to prosecuting the offenders, it is essential to provide employees of financial institutions with the tools to survive the emotional trauma of these crimes. For this to occur, it is necessary to have immediate emotional support available to crime victims following the incident, counseling and referral services as needed, and ongoing support and follow-up throughout the court process.

The video, **“After the Robbery: Crisis to Resolution”** and this **Video Guidebook** reflect the commitment of United States Attorneys’ Offices throughout the country to serving the needs of crime victims by helping them to overcome the trauma of their victimization and return to normal life.

## II. OBJECTIVES

The video, **After the Robbery: Crisis to Resolution**, is designed to help victims of bank robberies cope with the emotional trauma associated with victimization, and to inform victims about the criminal justice process. The video is also intended to help managers, security personnel, and victims' families understand a victim's experience and help them to be supportive. Finally, the video may also assist in training law enforcement officers, prosecutors, victim advocates, and other criminal justice personnel who work with victims of workplace robberies.

The video introduces the concepts of a Crisis Response Program and Victim Teller Task Force. Reference to Crisis Response and its application is made directly in the video. The credits at the end of the video and this guidebook list the members of the Victim Teller Task Force in the Eastern District of Wisconsin which offered guidance and support throughout this project. The Task Force has played a key role in helping to develop and implement a wide range of programs designed to assist bank robbery victims. This guidebook explains how to replicate this model and makes practical suggestions for creating a Victim Teller Task Force.

Copies of this guidebook and the video are available from the Office for Victims of Crime Resource Center at 1-800-851-3420 or from your United States Attorney's Office. Additional information may also be obtained by contacting the Victim Witness Unit in the United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Wisconsin at 1-414-297-1700.

### **III. CREATING A VICTIM TELLER TASK FORCE**

Law enforcement and financial institutions share a concern for the physical and emotional well-being of employees and customers who are the victims of a robbery. A Victim Teller Task Force is a vehicle to take this shared concern and turn it into practical ways to provide help and support. Providing information and developing programs to help robbery victims can ease their emotional trauma and provide support after the robbery and throughout the criminal justice process.

#### **A. Victim Teller Task Force: Membership**

In developing a Victim Teller Task Force, it is important to bring together key representatives from both the financial and law enforcement communities. Support and participation by the directors in charge of security from a variety of financial institutions is essential. Representatives should be included from the largest financial institutions as well as from smaller banks, savings and loans, and credit unions. These might include security directors, personnel managers, human resource managers, employee assistance managers, or members of financial institution associations.

Law enforcement participants should also represent a variety of jurisdictions. For example, investigative agencies should include the Federal Bureau of Investigation as well as representatives of local police departments. In addition to the Victim Witness Coordinator (or Law Enforcement Coordinator) from the United States Attorney's Office, it is important to include victim witness advocates from local prosecutors' offices as well. Finally, it is essential to include the "victim's perspective." Representative victims of bank robberies should be invited to participate.

## **B. Victim Teller Task Force: Goals and Projects**

While many financial institutions are supportive of their employees in the aftermath of a robbery, a failure to understand the unique aspects of emotional trauma resulting from the robbery may result in a secondary victimization. The Task Force discusses current bank robbery trends and provides information, training, and support to financial institutions. At meetings every three or four months, members discuss and prepare materials for financial institutions and law enforcement personnel about the effects of victimization after a robbery.

The Task Force should be developed based on the specific needs of the district. In the Eastern District of Wisconsin the Task Force develops and provides information to help victims, plans workshops for victim tellers, plans workshops for managers and security officers of financial institutions, and assists in the development of crisis response and other programs for victims.

- 1) **Information for victims.** In the Eastern District of Wisconsin, the Task Force participated in developing a brochure for victims which discusses many of the same issues and responses described in the video. This video, **After The Robbery: Crisis To Resolution**, is another effort to help victims understand their emotional and physical responses, and to explain available support and services.
- 2) **Workshops for victim tellers.** Workshops for bank employees and customers provide help and support to robbery victims. Many of the people who appeared in this video have spoken at these sessions including the Assistant United States Attorney, the police detective, several of the victims, the Victim Witness Coordinator, and the bank security manager (who plays the judge in the video). Each

is able to speak directly with victims about their experiences. Workshop topics include:

- Robbery impact on the teller and his/her family,
- How to get back in control,
- The role of law enforcement and the investigation,
- The criminal justice process, and
- Services available for victims.

The frequency of these workshops depends on the number of bank robberies and victims in each area; however, it is difficult to conduct a meaningful workshop with more than 50 participants. It is especially important to give participants the opportunity to speak with each other in smaller breakout groups with a trained facilitator. Finally, it may be advantageous to schedule separate morning and afternoon workshops so that financial institutions can send their employees to different sessions without disrupting business.

**3) Workshops for managers and security officers.**

Workshops for security officers and managers provide information and training about the impact a robbery has on an employee or customer, the investigation and prosecution of a bank robbery, security measures, and available victim assistance services. Workshop topics include:

- Investigating a robbery,
- The financial institution's perspective,
- Addressing security concerns,
- Developing a Crisis Response program,
- The victim's perspective,
- Preparing for trial, and
- Available victim support services,

#### **IV. CREATING A CRISIS RESPONSE PROGRAM**

In response to violent bank robberies, more and more financial institutions and law enforcement agencies are calling on crisis response services to assist victim tellers and customers immediately after a traumatic occurrence. If services of this nature are lacking in your area, you should consider developing a program that will serve victims of violent crime in your district or in your financial institution.

*Crisis response* or *crisis intervention* refers to immediate in-person intervention occurring shortly after a violent crime. The purpose of crisis response is to stabilize the individual emotionally, and to offer support and information to help the victim cope with the emotional trauma of victimization. The intervention emphasizes the normal aspects of the reactions the victim is having to an abnormal situation.

Examples of intervention include debriefings; emotional support for the victim immediately after the incident; information about the criminal justice process; resources available to help the victim; and assistance with and/or escort to line-ups and court proceedings if necessary.

Developing Crisis Response programs ensures that victims receive appropriate assistance as quickly as possible. It allows the victims to begin dealing with the trauma right away, and it assists them in resuming normal life.

Crisis response programs enhance the ability to effectively catch and prosecute offenders, and victims are provided with vital assistance to aid in their recovery. Crisis response programs also give tellers and customers the message that the criminal justice system and their financial institution care about them as people and want to help.



## **A. Crisis Response Program: Benefits and Goals**

Research has demonstrated that people who have experienced a traumatic incident are most receptive to receiving assistance within the first 48 hours. After this time, individuals tend to rebuild their defenses, making it more difficult to reach them. After about a week, many victims want to move on and will refuse outside intervention. It is not unusual for these same people to fall apart emotionally months later because they have not adequately dealt with the trauma of the incident. Often victims or witnesses who break down emotionally do so at a critical time, such as during trial while on the witness stand. A crisis response program helps victims cope with the aftermath of their victimization and their increased well-being benefits everyone involved.

The first encounter a crime victim has with representatives of law enforcement affects not only his or her immediate and long term ability to deal emotionally with the event, but it also directly affects the witness' willingness to assist with prosecution of the perpetrator. By reaching out to the victim during this critical time period, the victim is immediately engaged in the criminal justice system.

Officers arriving at the scene of a robbery have two immediate concerns. First, they need to secure the scene, to be sure it is safe and to preserve evidence. Second, they need to get the facts and a description as quickly as possible in order to catch the robber. Although officers care about the victim, they must proceed quickly to accomplish these goals.

Law enforcement benefits directly from a Crisis Response Program. Crisis response specialists are often able to relieve officers from having to deal with a victim's emotional needs, thus allowing officers to narrow their focus to the investigation

at hand. In some cases, crime victims are so distraught that an interview by a law enforcement officer can take place only after a specialist has calmed the victim.

Crisis response specialists can also be valuable resources when it comes to background information about victims. For example, because they often stay in contact with victims, crisis response specialists may have current information about victims, such as addresses and telephone numbers which may have changed as a result of the crime. Often they have the best insight into a victim's state of mind, situation and attitudes towards the criminal justice system. By establishing a rapport and providing support and assistance to victims, a crisis response program can positively affect the victims' attitudes about the criminal justice system.

### **B. Crisis Response: Models**

There is no single way to implement a crisis response program. Each district should develop programs based on its own needs and available resources. In many districts a combination of approaches will be successful. For example, in Wisconsin a variety of models have been developed and are constantly being refined and updated in light of the ongoing experience of working with victims. Models include:

- 1) District Attorney's Office.** Some Victim Witness Units in District Attorneys' Offices have developed crisis response programs located in local law enforcement agencies. Crisis response specialists are dispatched to crime scenes by police detectives and commanding officers.

- 2) **Cooperative efforts between police departments and mental health agencies.** Existing cooperative efforts have been expanded to include Crisis Response Services for crime victims. For example, a community mental health organization, which already receives mental health referrals from local police departments, has expanded its services to include crisis response for crime victims.
- 3) **Volunteer services located in a law enforcement agency.** Supervised by a paid coordinator, volunteers are trained to provide basic crisis intervention to crime victims and to make referrals to community mental health agencies.
- 4) **Contract with mental health professionals.** The United States Attorney's Office in Eastern Wisconsin has contracted with mental health professionals to be on call to provide crisis response services to victims of violent federal offenses in a particular geographic area not covered by other crisis response programs. These providers are paid based on the services rendered.
- 5) **Employee Assistance Programs.** Individual financial institutions provide a variety of counseling services to employees. For example, they may contract for crisis intervention with specialized mental health professionals or an Employee Assistance Program. To be effective, EAP providers should be trained in crisis intervention and also ensure services to victims who are customers.
- 6) **United States Attorney's Office.** In addition to establishing a district-wide crisis response network, a victim witness specialist in the United States Attorney's Office may also be available to provide direct crisis response when necessary.

### **C. Crisis Response: Choosing a Model**

There are three key variables to consider when choosing a model:

- 1) Community needs.** Community needs can be determined in part by looking at crime rates. In rural areas where violent crime is less frequent, it may be financially feasible to contract with mental health professionals on a fee for service basis. A large urban or a high crime area may require a larger and more complex program structure, such as a volunteer program which can provide 24 hour coverage seven days a week.
- 2) Available Resources.** The community resources available to develop a crisis response program will directly affect the type of program offered. There may be existing programs, such as EAP's, able and willing to provide these services. Check to see if funds are available to contract with outside agencies. When looking at community resources, it is important to be creative and flexible. When looking at service agencies, it is not as important to focus on existing services as it is to determine what could be accomplished with the proper structure and resources.
- 3) Practical Considerations.** It is essential to work closely with local law enforcement officers, whose support is essential to establish a successful crisis intervention program. It may be necessary to focus on the local District Attorney's Office as a starting point for a program, as this office has a great deal of leverage when it comes to promoting initiatives with local law enforcement agencies. Equally important is the support of the financial institutions. Wherever you choose to seek support for your program it is important to forge relationships with key administrators as

well as workers on the front line. Knowledge of the successful experiences of existing programs is an important tool needed to implement a crisis response program.

#### **D. Crisis Response Program: Essential Ingredients**

- 1) Ensure that crisis intervention specialists are properly trained and possess the essential qualifications.
- 2) 24 hour availability of crisis intervention specialists to provide immediate counseling and support for victims of violent crime (and possibly their families).
- 3) Personnel who are familiar with resources in the community such as Crime Victim Compensation programs, counseling services, workers' compensation, and financial assistance.
- 4) Ongoing support and counseling throughout the criminal justice process. When a Crisis Response provider is not also the Victim Advocate during the court process, it is imperative that the Crisis Response Specialist communicate with the Victim Advocate in order to ensure that a continuity of services is provided to the victim. Where no arrest is made, services may still be required. If continued support services are not feasible, providers must be able to make referrals to local agencies.

## **E. Crisis Response Program: Development**

- 1) Determine the optimum administrative location of the program (police department, outside agency).
- 2) Determine the types of crimes that crisis response specialists will respond to and what procedures they will follow.
- 3) Determine who is authorized to make referrals and calls for service, e.g., police, bank security officers/managers, FBI agents, and self referral by the victim.
- 4) Determine training needs of crisis response providers.
- 5) Create and maintain standards of professional behavior toward clients and law enforcement.
- 6) In order to build trust and a close working relationship, ensure deference to the authority of a law enforcement officer on all decisions relating to a case.
- 7) Determine how to deal with statements of an evidentiary nature made by a victim to crisis response personnel in order to avoid later problems in court.
- 8) Address liability issues through insurance.
- 9) Create a protocol for media relations that is acceptable to law enforcement.
- 10) Create and maintain appropriate record keeping and program oversight.

## V. CONCLUSION

The video **After the Robbery: Crisis to Resolution** was developed as a resource for persons who have been victims of bank robbery. Victim tellers should be given an opportunity to view this video. They may also find it beneficial to take it home and share with family members. By helping tellers know what to expect of their own emotional reactions and the criminal justice system, they may be less anxious and more confident.

Although bank robbery victims are featured in this video, the reactions described by those involved are also shared by other victims of violence, especially workplace robberies. Other agencies or businesses can benefit by sharing this video with their employees who have been victims of violent crime.

This **Video Guidebook** has been written to assist: (1) Victim Witness Coordinators and other law enforcement professionals, and (2) managers and executives of financial institutions. By expanding on the concepts discussed in the video, we hope to encourage you to use the video and to support your efforts to develop programs to help victims of violent crime.

Even with these resources, we recognize that nothing is more effective than compassionate, skilled, and responsive professionals who can communicate, provide information and assistance, and who take advantage of every opportunity to make the criminal justice system responsive to victims of crime. By understanding the emotional responses to violent crime, and by providing information and assistance to victims, we can help speed their journey from crisis to resolution.

## VI. CREDITS

The United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Wisconsin and the Office for Victims of Crime, United States Department of Justice gratefully acknowledge the following people for their assistance and expertise in producing **After the Robbery: Crisis to Resolution**:

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