

INTRODUCTION

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks resulted in the largest mass victimization in American history, with approximately 3,000 deceased,¹ thousands injured, and scores of survivors of the deceased. The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), which had experience working with communities that responded to five previous incidents of terrorism and mass violence, was identified to administer funds and programs to assist victims of the September 11 attacks.

Within days of the tragic events, OVC allocated funds from its Antiterrorism Emergency Reserve to assist victims in the three states where the crimes occurred, ultimately awarding about \$3.1 million in victim assistance funding and \$13.5 million in victim compensation funding to the State of New York and the Commonwealths of Virginia and Pennsylvania. The governor-appointed victim assistance and/or compensation agency in each jurisdiction received OVC funding to coordinate with state and federal agencies in assessing immediate needs and assisting victims through crisis counseling and other direct services and to offset out-of-pocket expenses incurred by victims and their family members for medical and mental health services, funeral and burial costs, and lost wages.

In addition to the 120-day crisis response grants, the Department of Defense Appropriations Act of 2002 (Pub. L. No. 107-117) authorized \$68.1 million to address immediate and long-term needs of the September 11 victims. Congress specifically directed OVC to award grants for counseling programs to assist victims, family members of victims, and crisis responders.

Because funds could be used to support community-based victim service programs that provided crisis counseling, crisis intervention, mental health counseling, and peer support, funds were awarded to five state victim assistance agencies that administer victim assistance formula grants awarded annually by OVC. OVC awarded grants to two state crime victim compensation programs, also the recipients of annual formula grant awards. Nine grants were awarded directly from OVC to nongovernmental, nonprofit organizations that did not receive funding from any other federal source. In total, 6 states and 55 nonprofit organizations received funding from OVC to assist victims of the terrorist attacks.

As of May 2003, nearly 22,000 victims, crisis responders, and family members had been assisted by state agencies and local programs using OVC funds. Approximately 37,000 victims were assisted through OVC's 24-hour, toll free call center with referrals for financial, housing, and counseling assistance. In addition, 1,800 victims and family members traveling to funerals and memorial services received support via OVC's Victim and Family Travel Assistance Center.

From December 7–8, 2003, OVC convened a meeting attended by representatives of state Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) administrator agencies that were involved in managing OVC grants to provide assistance and compensation services to victims of the September 11 attacks. State representatives from California, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia participated in the meeting, which was held in Baltimore, Maryland. Representatives from Massachusetts were unable to attend because of severe weather.

¹ According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's *Crime in the United States 2001*.

The meeting of state VOCA administrators was designed as an opportunity for grantees and OVC to strengthen the partnership they established with the initial 120-day crisis response grants from OVC's Antiterrorism Emergency Reserve and the subsequent \$68.1 million in funding from the Defense Appropriations Act of 2002.

Background

Before September 11, 2001, the grantee states had well-established resources, tools, and relationships for providing services to victims of crime. However, the magnitude of the terrorist attacks and the resulting mass victimization forced them to adapt existing systems rapidly on an unprecedented scale. The following is a brief description of the structure of each state's victim service program:

- ◆ California's Victim Compensation Program (VCP) is the largest in the Nation. Since its inception in 1965, the program has paid out more than \$1 billion to victims of violence and their families. VCP provides help for California residents regardless of where the crime occurred and for nonresidents who become victims of violent crime within the state. The program also assists the victim's spouse, domestic partner, child, parent, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, or household member. While victim advocates are not connected to VCP through funding or administration, they are the ambassadors of the compensation program at the local level. Crime victims in California's 58 counties and the City of Los Angeles turn to advocates in victim assistance centers to gain information about victim compensation. In addition to helping victims navigate the criminal justice system and access community resources, advocates help victims apply for compensation and act as representatives to the program on behalf of the victim or claimant. The Office of Emergency Services funds the victim assistance centers.
- ◆ The Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance administers the federal VOCA victim assistance program, providing funding for state and community-based organizations to offer free mental health counseling and a range of other specialized services for crime victims. Each year, more than \$7 million in VOCA funds are distributed to more than 100 programs across Massachusetts to help survivors of homicide victims, children who witness violence, and victims of child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, drunk driving, hate crimes, elder abuse, and political torture.
- ◆ New Jersey's Victims of Crime Compensation Board, established in 1971 as an independent executive branch agency, covers nonreimbursable medical expenses or loss of earnings due to crime-related injuries, as well as funeral expenses or loss of support from a deceased victim. The board provides secondary coverage for New Jersey residents injured by acts of crime outside the state. The board works closely with the state's Office of Victim-Witness Advocacy, Office of the Attorney General, which maintains victim-witness units in 21 county prosecutors' offices. The victim-witness units are staffed with trained professionals who accompany victims through every step of the criminal justice system from the initial phases of arrest and prosecution to the final outcome of a case, including the parole process. They also help victims obtain other assistance services.
- ◆ The New York State Crime Victims Board provides emergency awards and regular compensation to victims across the state. The board also supports grants to almost 200 programs in community-based organizations statewide that offer victim assistance services, including the YWCA and grassroots groups as well as local government, state, and national programs. The board funds 80 programs in New York City's five boroughs, including homicide counseling programs, victim/witness programs within prosecutors' offices, and hospital-based programs that provide counseling services.

- ◆ In Pennsylvania, the Office of Victims' Services is a component of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency and promotes victims' rights and services. The office administers the Victims Compensation Assistance Program, which originated in 1976 and handles VOCA assistance grants for Pennsylvania. The Office of Victims' Services also provides statewide education to victim service professionals and outreach to the public as well as support for the Victims Services Advisory Committee and its numerous subcommittees.
- ◆ The Virginia Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund (CICF) was created by the Virginia General Assembly in 1977 to pay unreimbursed expenses of victims who suffer personal physical injury or death as a result of a crime. CICF is administered by the Virginia Workers' Compensation Commission and is funded by court fees, assessments on offenders, and restitution; it also receives federal funds. Since its inception, the fund has processed more than 25,000 claims from Virginians who have been victims of violent crime. CICF receives about 1,800 claims and awards approximately \$3 million annually to assist victims with medical costs, lost wages, funeral expenses, and counseling costs that are not covered by any other source. Virginia administers victim assistance through its Department of Criminal Justice Services, which oversees victim assistance program development, management, and monitoring, a victim resource center, training and mentoring for victim service providers, and a toll free statewide crime victim assistance information line.

Purpose of This Report

This report documents the lessons learned from state efforts to respond to the diverse needs of September 11 victims. It presents a summary of promising practices, challenges, and lessons learned from select state VOCA administrator agencies whose firsthand experiences in addressing victims' needs may assist others in their strategic planning. The report also describes the

scope and impact of victim services offered and underscores their importance to victims. It details post-September 11 patterns for organizing, identifying audiences for, developing timetables for, and implementing a comprehensive response to victims' needs while pinpointing best practices. The report can provide useful information for state VOCA administrator agencies nationwide, OVC leadership, and other federal, state, and local organizations as they plan and launch collaborative actions to respond to future mass criminal victimization.

Sources Consulted

This report is based on a review of a written summary of the December 2003 meeting of state VOCA administrator agencies, indepth interviews with VOCA administrators from the six states, and content analysis of a variety of internal and external documents from the September 11 state VOCA grantees.

Before the state VOCA administrators' meeting, participants were encouraged to prepare responses to a set of focused questions designed to prompt open discussion at the plenary and group sessions. Attendees were asked to consider details about the resources, tools, relationships, and other key variables that had an impact on victim services in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Highlights of the topics discussed in those sessions were presented in the *Meeting Summary Report of the September 11th Grantees Meeting for State VOCA Administrators*.

To continue the dialogue between grantees and OVC that took place during the state VOCA administrators meeting, a series of 10 indepth telephone interviews were conducted within 2 months of the meeting. VOCA representatives from each of the six states were interviewed to further explore the lessons learned from their perspectives.

Additionally, interviewees from California, Massachusetts, and Virginia supplied sample written documentation including memos, activity reports, performance reports, resource guides, letters, press

releases, advertisements, and program agendas developed or distributed by agencies that contributed staff and resources to September 11 victim assistance or compensation services. The documents supplemented the comments of meeting participants and interviewees and supported the key points they had made.

While the information obtained through these methods is substantive and informative, it reflects the experiences of only a limited number of states. Nevertheless, their experiences shed significant light on the current and emerging mass criminal victimization issues confronting state VOCA administrator agencies across the country and offer direction for planning, implementation, and evaluation.