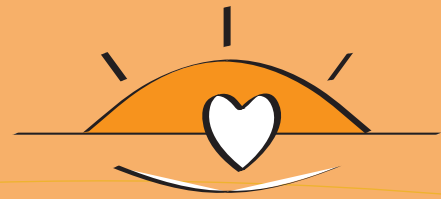


OVS BRIEF

ISSUE 4

OCTOBER 2023 - MARCH 2024



OFFICE OF VICTIM SERVICES

Focusing on a brighter future

OVS Welcomes New Deputy Director

By Mary Kozicki, Director

On January 12, 2024, Marc Pelka, former Undersecretary of the Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division (CJPPD) at the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management joined the Office of Victim Services (OVS) as Deputy Director.

For nearly five years, Marc served as the CJPPD Undersecretary leading the division in its statutory charge to determine the criminal justice system's long range needs and to recommend policies, programs, and legislation.



Photo by courtesy of Deputy Director Marc Pelka

Prior to this position, Marc spent a decade with The Council of State Governments Justice Center, a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, where he assisted policymakers across the country to make informed

decisions related to criminal justice initiatives.

He received his Bachelor of Arts with Honors from New York University and a master's in public policy from the Harvard Kennedy School. While an undergraduate, he was selected as a Harry S. Truman public service scholar representing Connecticut.

Marc also volunteered at his local sexual assault crisis center as a certified sexual assault counselor,

and in 2021 was the Connecticut recipient of the Visionary Voices award, recognizing his creativity and dedicated work to ending sexual violence.

I have had the pleasure to work with Marc on many committees and councils including the Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Advisory Council Victim Issues Subcommittee, the Domestic Violence Criminal Justice Response and Enhancement Advisory Council, and the Connecticut Advisory Council for Victims of Crime.

In 2021, Marc Pelka was the Connecticut recipient of the Visionary Voice Award.

Marc's experience, expertise, and passion for best practices across the criminal justice system will be a tremendous addition to the OVS team as well as an invaluable benefit to the victims of crime that we support and assist.

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OVS SAFE Program Manager Retires

By Brenda Keane, Court Planner II

Denise Covington who was instrumental in the development of the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners (SAFE) Program retired in January 2024 as its Program Manager.

Denise joined the Connecticut Judicial Branch, Office of Victims Services (OVS), where the SAFE Program is housed, in August 2010 as a grant-funded program coordinator to develop its infrastructure, to form alliances with local, state, and federal agencies, and to establish the Program's requirements and standards.

One of her proudest moments at OVS, Denise said, was the day the Program launched at six pilot hospital sites in the Hartford and Windham counties. The pilot sites were selected by the SAFE Advisory Committee, established in 2009 to advise on the SAFE Program implementation. Before accepting the program coordinator contract, Denise served on that Advisory Committee, representing the Connecticut International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN), where she served as president.

After the grant closed in 2013, Denise accepted a full-time position with the Judicial Branch as the SAFE Program Manager and began work on developing an in-house SAFE training program that was previously funded through a grant at Quinnipiac University.

In 2017, the state legislature extended the SAFE Training Program to non-SAFE Program health care professionals at non-participating health care facilities.

OVS Director Mary Kozicki said that Denise's commitment to the SAFE Program and her passion for a victim-centered response to victims of sexual assault have been truly inspirational.

"Denise worked tirelessly for more than a decade building the foundation for a SAFE response and training program in Connecticut," OVS Director Mary Kozicki said.

"Denise will be missed as a colleague and visionary in the area of sexual assault response, but her impact will continue to resonate through each of us that had the good fortune to work with her, and learn from her, and through each sexual assault patient whose experience with the trauma of sexual assault was improved through Denise's tireless efforts."

"It's been an honor and privilege to have been in this role, to be a part of changing the standard of care of sexual assault victims in Connecticut."

- Denise Covington

Denise plans to spend her retirement creating floral arrangements, cooking, crafting, and spending time with her family: husband Jim, sons Michael, David, and Nathan, and her granddaughter Lucy.

Denise has been a member of the IAFN since 1997, serving on their national chapter Board of Directors from 2019-2021 and as the Board president in 2020. In 2023, Denise renewed her board-certification as a sexual assault nurse examiner and has a background in emergency nursing.

Congratulations Denise on your retirement!

The SAFE Program is named after the late Gail Burns-Smith, a dedicated community and national advocate for victims of sexual assault.

The Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners (SAFE) Program provides compassionate, patient-centered sexual assault forensic examination services to patients, 13 years or older, who report sexual assault and who present at a participating health care facility within 120 hours of the assault.

The SAFE Program also provides specialized training and education to qualified health care providers to perform knowledgeable and skilled medical-forensic examinations.

For more information about the SAFE Program, call OVS at 1-800-822-8428 or visit the SAFE Program web page at <https://www.jud.ct.gov/crimevictim/safe.htm>

Victim Notification Web Application Launches

By Brenda Keane, Court Planner II

In November, the OVS Post-conviction Victim Notification (VN) Program Web application launched, replacing the desktop application that was created in 1997.

The Web application allows management to implement updates to notification letters in real time, as well as the ability to add and remove application users, create new or remove obsolete notification events, and to modify other application settings.

Another important feature of the Web application is accessibility. OVS Victim Services Advocates can access the application from any location with a Judicial Branch device having an internet connection. This was a significant limitation of the desktop application as advocates were required to access the Victim Notification application from their stationary desktop computer.

Judicial Branch Information Technology Analyst IV Adam Tommasi developed and designed the application, which features an intuitive, user-friendly design. He is working closely with management on advanced functionality such as automation of multiple notification methods.

OVS to Host NCVRW Training Event

By Tina Bouchard, Court Planner II



Since 1981, the last week in April has been devoted to recognizing the rights of crime victims and to redouble efforts to ensure the criminal justice system and victim service providers are responsive to their needs.

The Office for Victims of Crime, the federal agency responsible for identifying the theme to lead the nation in observing the annual National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW) has announced "a call-to-action for us all to create safe environments for crime victims to share what happened to them." OVC stated that by creating safe environments, victim service providers can offer support, options for life saving services, and most importantly, hope to the victims they serve.

In honor of this year's theme *How would you help? Options, services and hope for crime survivors*, OVS has collaborated with our contracted agencies and municipal, state, and federal victim service providers to provide one-hour, virtual training sessions during NCVRW (April 21-27, 2024). These training sessions will feature the many and varied services, programs, and other resources available to crime victims in Connecticut.

If you are interested in information about this week-long event, please email Tina.Bouchard@jud.ct.gov.

Victim Compensation Highlighted at CCADV Facebook Live Lunch and Learn

By Rachel McKnight, Program Manager

I was honored to be a guest speaker at the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) Facebook Live Lunch and Learn on January 10, 2024. CCADV Chief Executive Officer Megan Scanlon led the discussion titled *Understanding Connecticut's Victim Compensation Program*, which focused on information about victim compensation eligibility, the expenses may be considered for reimbursement, and how to apply for victim compensation.

Robyn Lee moderated the event fielding questions from the 18 live attendees. Questions included more information about the victim compensation time-filing requirement, financial assistance available to undocumented persons, and the application decision-making processes. The event is available for viewing on CCADV's Facebook.

The Victim Compensation Program offers financial help to crime victims, their family members, and other persons that have financial loss because of a violent crime. For more information about eligibility, the expenses covered, and the application process, call the Victim Compensation Program at 1-800-822-8428, email OVS@jud.ct.gov or visit the OVS website at www.jud.ct.gov/crimevictim/compensation.

OVS Collaborates with OVC TTAC

By Brenda Keane, Court Planner II

With the assistance of the Office for Victims of Crime, Training and Technical Assistance Center (OVC TTAC), OVS is seeking to create opportunities for critical conversation on expanding trauma-informed approaches and strengthening resiliency within its organization.

In June and September 2023, OVS staff were invited to complete, anonymously, five separate surveys related to the five pillars that comprise the OVC TTAC Vicarious Trauma—Organizational Readiness Guide (VT—ORG).

According to OVC TTAC, the VT—ORG is the starting point for organizations that want to increase responsiveness to the impacts of trauma on their organization. The VT—Org assists organizations as they assess their capacity to address employees' work-related exposure to trauma and prioritize organizational needs based on five pillars:

- Leadership and Mission,
- Management and Supervision,
- Employee Empowerment and Work Environment,
- Training and Professional Development, and
- Staff Health and Wellness.



Pictured above is OVS staff at Webb Deans Stevens Museum, Wethersfield on October 17, 2023.

Photo by courtesy of Director Mary Kozicki.

OVC TTAC staff presented its *Culture Strategies to Support Vicarious Trauma-Informed Approaches in Organizations*, along with the survey findings to OVS staff on October 17, 2023, at the Webb Deans Stevens Museum in Wethersfield.

OVS Director Mary Kozicki stated that the next step is “the creation of a workgroup to continue the development of priority areas, challenges with achieving optimal performance within the priority areas identified, and strategies to address these challenges.”

“We are invested in being an organization where our team can grow while feeling valued, heard, and supported, as we continually strive to ensure the victims we serve feel valued, heard, and supported,” OVS Director Mary Kozicki said.

OVC TTAC will facilitate the first workgroup meeting comprised of OVS staff volunteers on April 30, 2024.

“Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean.”

- Ryunosuke Satoro



Photo by courtesy of Director Mary Kozicki

MADD Honors OVS Victim Services Advocate Johanna Krebs

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) recognized Victim Services Advocate Johanna Krebs with its Victim Assistance Award.

The Victim Assistance Award is presented to individuals whose work aligns with MADD's mission to stop drunk driving, help fight drugged driving, support victims of these violent crimes, and prevent underage drinking.

Johanna joined OVS in 2018 and assists victims in the New London Geographical Area 10 court. She received the MADD award on September 15, 2023, at an event held at the Mohegan Sun Hotel & Casino in Uncasville, Connecticut.

Contractor Services Update

By James Morgan, Program Manager

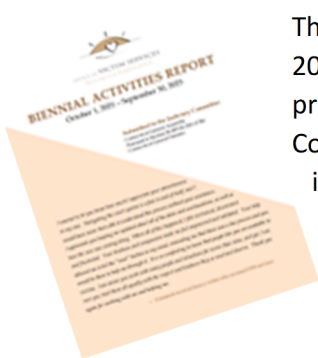
OVS receives state and federal funding for contracted services with nonprofit community-based agencies to provide information and services to victims of violent crimes and their families.

Through the funding of these organizations, crime victims and their family members receive criminal justice support and advocacy, crisis counseling, therapy, individual and group treatment and support, personal advocacy, referrals, and assistance with filing victim compensation applications.

For the federal fiscal year ending 09/30/23, OVS contractors and subcontractors provided services to over 105,000 victims of crime, with the three largest categories of victims receiving services being Domestic Violence: 67%; Child Abuse: 12%; and Adult Sexual Assault: 5%.

OVS is currently funding 72 contractors and subcontractors to provide services to crime victims.

OVS 2021-2023 Biennial Report Online



The Office of Victim Services' (OVS) 2021-2023 Biennial Report was presented to the Judiciary Committee in January. This report is a compilation of OVS's critical work in support of and assistance to Connecticut's crime victims. An electronic version of the OVS Biennial

Report can be accessed at

https://www.jud.ct.gov/crimevictim/vs020_Biennial2021_23.pdf. To order printed copies, please email OVSTraining@jud.ct.gov.

OVS staff attend the Connecticut Judicial Branch 10th Anniversary Diversity Week celebration titled *Closing the Gap: The Path Towards Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion* on October 27, 2023.



Left to right: Victim Services Advocate Adriana Venegas McCormick, Director Mary Kozicki, Court Planner II Alexandra Gittines, and Program Manager Jodi Chouinard.

Photo submitted by Victim Services Advocate Adriana Venegas McCormick

If you would like to submit an article or a favorite quote to print in this newsletter or would like to request a team star be awarded to an individual, organization, or agency for their collaborative work, please email Brenda.Keane@jud.ct.gov