



Victim Assistance Newsletter

Victim Assistance in Peoria by Joseph Taussi

Assistance for crime victims in the United States has a very short history. Prior to 1965, advocacy was virtually non-existent.

In 1965, a Federal Crime Victims' Rights Amendment was proposed in the United States Congress. The first victim's compensation program was established in Maryland in 1972. Crime victims' rights and advocacy have slowly but steadily increased in subsequent years both at the state and federal levels.

In Arizona, a Victims' Rights Amendment ratified by the voters in 1990 provided much needed support and stronger legal standing to victims and their families to help overcome the often devastating effects of crimes. Arizona is one of 33 states with constitutional victims' rights amendments.

While victim advocacy has been a vital part of the Peoria Police Department for many years, it was not until 2007 that a program devoted exclusively to victim assistance was established.

At that time, the Victim Assistance Program (VAP) was formed. The VAP is under the direct supervision of Sgt. Kevin Moran of the Peoria Police Department's Special Victim's Unit. The VAP coordinator is Rita Coronado whose background made her the ideal candidate for the position. She worked directly for the public for many years in the California public school system as well as for several municipalities. She was instrumental in creating youth mentoring, crime prevention and substance abuse programs as well as being a catalyst in community outreach. She is fluent in Spanish and English which better meets the needs of the community.

Although Rita is currently the only full-time, permanent member of the VAP, she has, since its formation, been assisted by a number of talented and dedicated volunteers. Presently, there are five volunteers on her staff. These volunteers have experience in nursing, education, law enforcement and child protective services. One of

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Assessing Lethality by Joseph Taussi

In December 2010, Lt. Clark Collier, Sgt. Kevin Moran and the Victim Assistance Coordinator of the Peoria Police Department attended the Lethality Assessment Program for First Responders. The training was held in Tucson and was hosted by the Pima County Attorney's Office and AZPOST.

The Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) was developed by the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) and first implemented in 2005. The following information is taken directly from the MNADV website, www.mnadv.org:

What is it?

The LAP is a multi-pronged intervention program that identifies victims of domestic violence who are at risk of being seriously injured

or killed by their intimate partners and immediately connects them to the domestic violence provider in their area.

How does it work?

The process involves an 11-question lethality screening tool and an accompanying response and referral protocol. The LAP can be used by law enforcement officers and other first responders as well as by professionals in many disciplines. If a victim screens in at "high danger," the screener immediately makes a phone call to the local 24-hour domestic violence hotline to seek guidance and encourages the victim to speak with the hotline worker as well.

Why Use It?

The goal of the LAP is to prevent domestic violence homicides, serious injury, and

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the volunteers said that her reason for devoting her time to the VAP was “to serve those in my community touched by tragedy so I can be of service in their time of need and maybe make a difference in their lives.” This is the attitude reflected by all.

The mission of the VAP is to assist those individuals who have been victimized by crime within the city of Peoria. Assistance can come in the form of providing appropriate referrals to community and support services, educating victims on their statutory rights, providing information regarding victim compensation, or assisting with obtaining orders of protection. Other services such as accompaniment to court proceedings and case status updates can be provided as needed. Victims are contacted by telephone or in person and their needs are assessed on a case by case basis.

Assessing Lethality (continued from front)

re-assault by encouraging more victims to use the shelter, counseling, advocacy, and support services of domestic violence programs.

What are the results?

In Maryland, the incidence of domestic homicides has declined by an average of 13% over the past three years. The program also serves to educate victims and screeners, empowers victims to take positive actions for themselves and their children, and provides safety planning, information, and resources.

The following 11 questions make up the lethality assessment:

(Original form created by MNADV 08/2005)

1. Has he/she ever used a weapon against you or threatened you with a weapon?
2. Has he/she threatened to kill you or your children?
3. Do you think he/she might try to kill you?

In 2010, the VAP ride along program was introduced. A VAP member is “on call” from close of business Thursday until the following Monday. During this period, a VAP member rides one shift with a Peoria uniformed officer in an effort to be more directly accessible to the community. This year, the Victim Assistance newsletter was introduced. The newsletter’s purpose is to educate and inform the community about issues relating to victims and victim advocacy.

The Peoria Police Department’s Victim Assistance Program is constantly evolving and improving. Anyone needing assistance can contact the VAP at 623-773-5041, 623-773-7019 or by calling the Peoria Police Department’s non-emergency telephone number and asking for victim assistance.

4. Does he/she have a gun or can he/she get one easily?
5. Has he/she ever tried to choke you?
6. Is he/she violently or constantly jealous or does he/she control most of your daily activities?
7. Have you left him/her or separated after living together or being married?
8. Is he/she unemployed?
9. Has he/she ever tried to kill himself/herself?
10. Do you have a child that he/she knows is not his/hers?
11. Does he/she follow or spy on you or leave threatening messages?

If you answered yes to any of the first 3 questions or to four of questions 4-11, then perhaps it is time to seek help.