

Empower!

GIVING VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES A VOICE



A Publication of the Metropolitan Police Department's Victim Services Branch

Summer 2008 | Volume 1, Issue 2

Message from Tyria Fields



Tyria Fields

During a recent meeting with a family member at the Next-of-Kin Activity in April 2008, I spoke about the services that the Victim Services Branch provides. It was at that interaction that a mother asked me, "What can you do for me?" This edition of *Empower* is dedicated to the families who have been impacted by homicide and hopefully answers the question of what we can do for you.

The mission of the Family Liaison Specialists and Major Case Victims Unit is a very basic one: we support families affected by homicide. What that support may look like may vary depending on the family's individual situation. While one family may need help accessing the Crime Victim Compensation Program, another may

need help obtaining their loved one's property. While one family may have children who are now without the support of a mother or father and may require assistance explaining other financial entitlements, another family may require help in making funeral plans. Yet, another family may require education understanding how to navigate the criminal justice process. Still, another family may inform us about the emotional impact the loss has had on their lives and may seek help with those feelings. For those families, we discuss ways of coping with the loss and discuss the signs and symptoms of trauma. Further, we may encourage families to consider seeking some form of counseling to help with the situation. If asked, we also will provide referrals to community-based organizations.

While the services that we can provide are not limitless, we will support families as they go through a very difficult time in their lives. We will call families on a regular basis, and educate you on the status of your case. The most important thing to know is that the family is in control of our interactions. So, to that mother and all the other survivors of homicide who wonder what can the Victim Services Branch do for you, we have an answer: You let us know what your needs are. Let us know how much or little you would like us to be involved. We will follow your lead. And we will be responsive to your needs.

Sincerely,

Tyria Fields,
Manager

Upcoming Events and Activities

Thursday, September 18 DC City-Wide Commemorative Event
6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Matthews Memorial Baptist Church
2616 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20020
RSVP to (202) 624-0010 no later than noon on September 5, 2008

The DC Homicide Coalition will sponsor the DC City-wide Homicide Commemorative event to remember the victims of homicide and honor their loved ones. The event will remind everyone in attendance that every life is a unique gift and that it is important to commemorate

the lives of homicide victims and support those who are grieving their loss.

The DC Homicide Coalition is a collaboration of non-profit agencies, government organizations and community groups that work together to improve the services available to individuals and families affected by homicide.

These organizations meet regularly to identify the gaps in homicide services and work on ways to improve them; to facilitate the access to services and increase their use; and to share information on available resources and publicize these services to the affected communities and individuals.

Recap of Recent Next of Kin Meetings

NEXT OF KIN

Families of homicide victims participated in the Metropolitan Police Department's seventh Next of Kin (NOK) meeting, held on April 30, 2008. Families had the opportunity to meet one-on-one with the assigned detective to discuss the merits of their loved one's homicide case. The families also had the option to participate in an open dialogue on the stages of grief, common grief reactions in children, and self care. The discussion was led

by a licensed social worker — Madonna Green, and Tyria Fields, manager of the Victim Services Branch.

Staff from the Crime Victim Compensation Program and various community-based organizations provided literature addressing trauma in the aftermath of homicides and informed survivors about the programs available in the Washington Metropolitan Area.

Similarly, the Major Case Victims Unit (MCVU) hosted its first NOK event

on July 9, 2008. The meeting provided the immediate family members of homicide victims in unsolved homicides from 2005 and prior years an opportunity to have one-on-one sessions with detectives to discuss the status of their investigations.

Both Next of Kin meetings were held at the Metropolitan Police Academy on Blue Plains Drive, SW.

Frequently Asked Questions About Crime Victims

Crime Victim Compensation Information

Crime Victims Compensation Program (CVCP)

515 5th Street NW Room 109
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 879-4216
www.dccourts.gov

Q: What happens to my loved one's property?

A: When a homicide occurs, evidence is collected to be tested for clues to help ultimately determine the killer. Any item may be considered evidence as determined by the homicide detective and evidence technician. There is generally no distinction in the collection of items if the homicide scene is indoors or outdoors. Every attempt is made to collect all usable items. Often a decedent's or uninvolved citizen's personal property is collected to be determined if it can be used as evidence.

Q: Will the property be returned?

A: If collected property has no value as evidence, it will be returned to the owner or next of kin. That determination is made by the assigned prosecutor in the US Attorney's Office or Office of the Attorney General with input from the lead detective. Approval must be given prior to the release of any property.

If the victim of a crime

has been approved by the Crime Victims Compensation Program (CVCP), the Program will cover the cost of their clothing being held as evidence for up to \$100. The NOK will not receive reimbursement for homicide victims' clothing. CVCP will also reimburse approved persons for car rental while a vehicle is held as evidence up to \$2,000.

Q: Where is the property held?

A: Collected property is held at the patrol district station where the homicide occurred for 90 days. Once property has been ordered released, you may retrieve it at the district station. Occasionally, space limitations at the district may cause property to be moved before 90 days. After 90 days, released property may be retrieved from the Metropolitan Police Department's Property Division at 2235 Shannon Place, SE.

Released automobiles must be retrieved from the Blue Plains Impound Lot at

5001 Shepherd Parkway, SW.

Many people inquiring about property are uncertain of what property was retrieved. Occasionally, the NOK may be informed of specific recovered property, but often the complete list of all recovered property is not releasable. All questions regarding property should be directed to the assigned detective or the Family Liaison Specialists Unit.

Q: Who is a victim of crime?

A: A victim is a person who suffered personal injury or death in the District of Columbia, or is a resident who was injured as a result of terrorism outside of the United States. The crimes covered by the Crime Victim Compensation Program are homicide, assault, arson, cruelty to children, sexual abuse, kidnapping, carjacking, stalking, burglary, unlawful use of an explosive, driving under the influence, and hit and run. The claim processing time varies depending

CONTINUES ON PAGE 3 »

Loved Ones of Homicide Coping with Grief and Loss

Loss is natural. Some losses are more painful than others, but the loss of a loved one to homicide has proven to be more challenging. Loss brings with it another natural and human response — grief. Grief is your body's natural response to loss. There is no right or wrong way to grieve.

Grieving can be difficult and emotionally exhausting. You may feel that it is best to put your loss behind you as quickly as possible, to be strong, and get on with your life. But suppressing grief doesn't make you stronger. Unresolved grief can lead to serious emotional or physical problems. If left unresolved, grief can lead to depression, anxiety, sickness, and alcohol or other drug dependency.

Grieving takes place over time — often more time than we might think. The process of grieving can last a year or longer, depending upon you and the circumstances of the loss. There are no rules to grieving but if there were, the number one rule would be to grieve

as long as it takes. More than likely, you were given information about the stages of grief when you lost your loved one. Grieving can take you through a number of different stages. If you have experienced a severe loss, such as the death of a loved one, you may experience the following stages:

- » Shock — You may experience disbelief, denial or numbness. It may seem as if your world has fallen apart. You may be transported back to the moment you found out your loved one became a victim of homicide.
- » Flood of emotions — Crying, screaming, and other emotional releases are normal. Crying is a natural healer and stress reducer that should not be held back.
- » Anger — Anger is also a common reaction. Feeling anger toward the person/persons responsible for the homicide and anger at the system for taking so long are not uncommon emotions to feel.

- » Depression — You may feel that you will never recover, never be happy again. You may panic, thinking about life without your loved one. But you will recover with time. If you allow yourself to grieve, you will eventually regain your happiness.
- » Guilt — Often people feel guilt for continuing to live their life. This is also a very normal emotion. Openly sharing these feelings is very helpful in resolving guilt.
- » Acceptance or realization — You may, as you work through your feelings, experience hope that your case will close and the guilty person(s) will be brought to justice.

Some stages may take longer than others to work through, or something you thought was resolved may reappear. Be easy on yourself, give yourself time to heal and stay as active as you can — exercise, take a vacation, stay in contact with the world outside.

Local Domestic Violence Resources

Break the Cycle

Break the Cycle – Washington, DC provides preventive education in schools and youth groups on teen dating violence, peer leadership opportunities, and free legal services to young people in the District, ages 12 to 22, who are in an abusive relationship. (202) 824-0707

House of Ruth

Offers a 24-hour hotline, shelter, and counseling for battered women and their children. (202) 667-7001

My Sister's Place

24-hour hotline, shelter, and counseling for battered women and their children. (202) 529-5991

For more information, please contact Dawn M. Christie at 727-7139 or dawnm.christie@dc.gov with outreach requests for the Major Case Victims Unit.

FROM PAGE 2

upon the complexity of the claim and whether supporting documents are submitted. The average time is between 60-150 days. To the extent possible, claims for funeral expenses and moving expenses are expedited. A secondary victim is a close family or household member of the victim.

In order to submit an application, a police report must be filed within seven days of the crime. In case of sexual assault, an exam is sufficient. In cases of domestic violence,

obtaining a Civil Protection Order is sufficient and in cases of cruelty to children, the filing of a neglect petition will satisfy the reporting requirement. Other information requested to support claims are medical bills, mental health counseling bills, and verification of employment.

Download a copy of the application at www.dccourts.gov/dccourts/docs/ApplicationForCrimeVictimsCompensationProgram2006.pdf

About the Major Case Victims Unit

The Major Case Victims Unit (MCVU) was established in March 2008 and is designed to provide support and education about available services to the families of the victims of unsolved homicide cases. The MCVU provides survivors with information concerning their rights, support, case updates, and referrals to other resources. Currently, the MCVU is composed of a program manager, a senior victim specialist, and two victim specialists.

Letters

Share your story

Send a letter detailing your experiences — positive or negative — to victim.services@dc.gov or send via US Mail to:

Victim Services Branch
Family Liaison Specialists Unit
3244 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20020

Ms. Washington, Thanks to you again for your courtesy and politeness during our brief conversation over the phone in March. Your expertise has clarified the unanswered questions that were not clear to me. Your explanation has made it a lot easier, especially at a time like this when it

is very difficult and painful for me to do. I just wanted to take the time out to let you and Ms. Bridgett Jones Smith know that it is people like you two who make things a little easier for people like me who are going through a tough time in their lives due to such a senseless act. Again I say thank you.

—Mrs. L.P.

Departures

Bridgett Jones Smith, who had been a family liaison specialist with the Family Liaison Specialists Unit for nearly five years, left the unit in June 2008. She will be greatly missed and the Department wishes her well in her future endeavors.

How May We Assist You?

Victim Services Branch

Tyria Fields Manager 724-4339 tyria.fields@dc.gov

Family Liaison Specialists Unit

Carla Okonkwo Supervisor 645-9629 carla.okonkwo@dc.gov
Marlene James Family Liaison Specialist 645-9631 marlene.james@dc.gov

The Family Liaison Specialists Unit (FLSU) provides support services to homicide victims and survivors throughout the investigative process.

Victim Specialists Unit

Helen Hall Victim Specialist 727-6007 helen.hall@dc.gov
Kayce Simmons Victim Specialist 724-2215 kayce.simmons@dc.gov
Esther U. Thomas Victim Specialist 727-6006 estheru.thomas@dc.gov

The Victim Specialists Unit (VSU) provides support, information, and referrals to victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Major Case Victims Unit

Dawn M. Christie Senior Victim Specialist 727-7139 dawnm.christie@dc.gov
Laverne Harley Victim Specialist 727-5391 laverne.harley@dc.gov
Jennifer Murphy Victim Specialist 727-6181 jennifer.murphy@dc.gov

The Major Case Victims Unit (MCVU) supports and educates survivors of homicide victims during the reinvestigation of unsolved homicide cases.

Please Note: All numbers are area code (202).



Metropolitan Police Department
Victim Services Branch/Family Liaison Specialists Unit
3244 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20020

