

# The Michigan Crime Victim Services Commission VOCA Council of Advocates, November 1, 2001

## Meeting Report

### Historical Background

In each year since 1999, the Michigan Crime Victim Services Commission (CVSC) and the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI) have hosted a day-long meeting with a small group of crime victim advocates in Michigan. Each participating advocate is an employee of a Michigan agency that receives Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) funds administered by the CVSC. Additionally, each advocate represents an agency specializing in services to one or more diverse victim populations, such as child abuse, domestic violence, drunk driving crashes, sexual assault, crime victims in American Indian communities, those accessing hospital-based services and victims working with prosecuting attorneys.

These annual meetings serve several purposes. The CVSC is required to receive feedback from VOCA Grantees with respect to prospective changes to the grant administration process. Of equal importance, these meetings serve to enhance the sharing of valuable information concerning crime victim services in Michigan and allow the participants to network with each other and the respective staff members of the CVSC and MPHI. Following is a summary of the Annual VOCA Council of Advocates for Fiscal Year 2002.

### I. Welcome/Participant Introductions

The 2002 Annual VOCA Council of Advocates meeting was attended by:

Michael Fullwood	Crime Victim Services Commission, Lansing
Kimberly Greenfelder	Macomb County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, Mt. Clemens
Judy Hoeffler	Child Abuse & Neglect Council, Pontiac
Valerie Hoffman	Underground Railroad, Saginaw
Lori Jump	Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Sault Ste. Marie
Kim Lamphere	Michigan Public Health Institute, Okemos
Thomas Nelson	Michigan Public Health Institute, Okemos
Ruth Oja	Hannahville Indian Community, Wilson
Leslie O'Reilly	Crime Victim Services Commission, Lansing
Shari Murgittroyd	Michigan Public Health Institute, Okemos
Jennifer Sykes McLaughlin	Michigan Public Health Institute, Okemos
Katherine Tucker	Detroit Receiving Hospital, Detroit
Donna Wilson	MADD, Lansing

### II. Remarks from the CVSC-Open Discussion/Q & A

The following are the CVSC's responses to questions posed to the Crime Victim Services Commission in advance of and during the meeting.

- 1. How do you handle people in VOCA-supported positions who go on extended leave (e.g., maternity leave) and do not want to come back full time?*

The CVSC does not set policy on this type of personnel matter, yet we realize these are difficult issues for program directors. Our perspective is that we have an agreement with the agency to provide a level of service with a specific staffing component and that the agency will maintain that level of service. VOCA does allow you to replace an existing full time position with two part time positions with prior approval. However, our policy is to encourage full time positions for VOCA funded projects as it is easier administratively for both your agency and our office.

2. *What are some techniques agencies have used to recruit/fill positions?* [Question posed by the CVSC to the participants]

[Responses from participants] The hiring process can be problematic. It can be incredibly expensive to advertise position openings, and it often takes a long time to find a qualified employee once you receive approval to hire for another position. While newspaper advertisements may receive a larger response, they are also costly. Consider recruiting online, in professional journals, and also in career newsletters at universities (which are usually free). If you anticipate difficulties in hiring which would wreak havoc with timing, one suggestion might be to budget for 9 months to give yourself 3 months to find the new employee.

3. *Is it acceptable to move employees already hired into VOCA positions that become vacant?*

What really isn't allowable under the VOCA grant is to charge existing positions for vacant time. If you have someone that can fill in on a temporary basis that is not already in a full time position and you increase the hours for that employee, that's allowable with prior approval. We have tried to discourage as much as possible charging a pre-existing staff member to the grant. The CVSC apologizes for the additional difficulties and burdens this creates for you. This goes back to Michigan's responsibility with respect to our agreement with the federal agency. We have just made a firm decision to avoid appearing creative in that aspect because then when an audit occurs, this is an item that doesn't become an issue.

4. *Are there any specific things the CVSC should know about when it comes to practices under tribal council when you're hiring?* [Question posed by the CVSC to the participants]

[Responses from participants] Our tribal council has an HR department that does everything for us. We write the job position, but they do everything else. We have no say in the salary. They also do all job postings for us. We tell them we have an open position, and they'll set up the interviews. We do the interviewing, but they take care of everything else.

5. *Can more advanced, clinically based trainings be approved for VOCA-supported staff? Would approval be more likely if the participant were to provide her/his own transportation?*

Certain trainings are pre-approved in the grant, such as those offered by the Prosecuting Attorneys Association, the Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, and the National Children's Advocacy Center. If you are interested in attending a more clinically based training not offered in Michigan, but still in the Midwest region, you should submit a copy of the brochure and a request for consideration. The training is approved on its merits, so providing your own transportation would not affect our decisions. If we approve the training, we usually also approve the costs of travel.

6. *Is it possible to send non-VOCA funded staff to the National Organization for Victim Assistance Nation Conference if they are doing the same type of work as employees in the funded positions?*

While we cannot provide conference fees for non-VOCA funded employees, VOCA grants can pay for the cost of the shared car and lodging if several staff members are driving together and sharing a room.

7. *What was the rationale for the change from the multi-year grant cycle back to the one-year grant cycle, and will there be a return to multi-year grant cycles in the future?*

The change from the multi-year grant cycle to the one-year grant cycle was predicated by two factors. First, we had concerns that the new online system would not be developed and tested to accommodate a multi-year grant. We did not want to find ourselves in the middle of a three-year cycle and find ourselves experiencing technical problems. Second, while there was encouragement from the department to move to three-year grant cycle, we did not find any significant reduction of internal tasks or paperwork for either the CVSC or the agencies receiving VOCA grants. We believe that multi-year grants do create certainties of a stable level of funding, but we believe we can make most if not all of those certainties available administratively. To that end, we did include project continuation dates in Attachment E of the grant agreement that mirrors multi-year funding cycles. This is our way of informally providing assurances to you that we will do everything in our power to continue funding.

8. *Is there a possibility that gathering and providing letters of recommendation to the CVSC for grant applications can still be done every three years despite returning to one-year grant cycles?*

The short answer is yes. It is not only possible to submit letters of recommendation only once every three years, it's all we're going to require. We are trying to make this transition as seamless as possible.

9. *Should the final year-end VOCA report use last year's electronic format (previously provided on diskette)? If not, what format should be used?*

The correct format was on the diskette you received for FY00-01.

10. *How do we file amendments now that we're doing online applications?*

Our new online system that houses your application should soon enable easier filing of agreement amendments. We already have the online grant system where we hold your application. It resides in our database exactly as it was approved. We're working to change the database so that for agreement amendments you will be able to easily revisit your application and make online amendments. It will go through the same approval process that the application went through, and once approved, the amendment will go on the permanent database. We will maintain a copy of the original. This process also allows us to do the final end year report because we will have an electronic copy of the original approved application and a copy of any approved amendments, which in essence becomes your final agreement.

Unfortunately, we are still working with the database developers, and the online amendments will not be available until sometime in the spring of 2002. Until we can get the online version available to you, agreement amendment requests will have to be submitted in writing. Your award packets will have directions about this process.

11. *I understand there is no crime scene clean-up money available. Will that ever be available for emergency funding?*

That's a good question. We have actually developed language for an amendment to the compensation program that would permit up to \$500 for crime scene clean-up if the crime occurred in the victim's or the claimant's household and if the services were commercially purchased. I don't know what our chances are of having that enacted. Also, Senator Van Regenmorter currently has a bill to increase the burial benefit from \$2,000 to \$2,500 which we support wholeheartedly in concept, and which we supported entirely prior to the acknowledgement that the state has to reexamine its entire fiscal situation for the coming year. Under the current fiscal circumstances the administration is not supporting any expansion of programs or any increase in spending. One of my goals in the next year is to see if we can get crime scene clean-up added into that bill.

If you would like to see crime scene clean-up funds made available I would also suggest writing a letter to your Senator's or Representative's office since they tend to consider matters important to constituents quite seriously.

### **III. Victim Services Response to Mass Casualty Incidents and Terrorism**

The group engaged in a discussion of mass casualty incidents and terrorism. The discussion began with a review of September 11 and a circulation of an information news release highlighting recovery tips and resource information. The discussion of the national response to the September 11 tragedies, including the September 11 Compensation Fund, led to more specific questions concerning crime victim services in Michigan.

1. *First, what can be done for existing crime victims in Michigan who are already suffering from PTSD and are experiencing elevated levels of trauma as a result of September 11?*

One participant described the recent national tragedy as striking a chord with nearly anyone who has experienced a personal trauma. Several participants echoed her sentiments, sharing anecdotes of how crime victims served within their agencies had felt particularly affected.

2. *Second, how prepared is Michigan should the unthinkable happen here?*

Many emphasized the need to work with the excellent network already established and to make additional resources available. Federal funds would likely be solicited and a portion of the state reserve would be allocated in such an emergency. The State has disaster preparedness institutions, the most obvious ones headed by the state police. Although the CVSC does not have formal representation within that body, the department does include Dr. Dave Johnson, MD, the chief medical officer at the Michigan Department of Community Health. He is currently dealing with pertinent matters such as Bioport and Anthrax and would be the person to notify of victims concerns.

The CVSC would work to gather resources and would quickly be in contact with the crime victims service providers. When considering mass violence threats or school shooting issues, for example, the CVSC continues to stress the importance of community action and the response of community leaders in an emergency. The goal is to ensure victim service leaders

are significantly involved in any formal response process so that victims receive excellent service.

#### **IV. Discussion of VOCA Online Application and Reporting Processes**

Quarterly reports required by the CVSC remain in the revision process. During recent training sessions on the online application, it became apparent that there is confusion over certain aspects of the report, including how and what should be reported. Concerns were also raised about specific reporting categories. Based on this input, many categories have been eliminated and much effort has been taken to clarify screen instructions for the reports. Highlights of the most recent version of the quarterly report are included below:

- ◆ No changes were made to the narrative section of the report.
- ◆ The distinction between primary and secondary designations for victims has been eliminated. The report should now reflect the total number of victims served by type of victimization served by VOCA-funded staff and/or volunteers during the reporting period.
- ◆ Non-discrimination data (such as race, sex, age and disability) likewise will be collected only once, and will not make any distinction between primary and secondary victims. The “specialized service to victims” section has been eliminated to reduce duplication.
- ◆ The report no longer requires a differentiation between types of disability. Now the question simply inquires “is there a disability” and expects an answer of either *yes*, *no*, or *unknown*. The ADA does not require visual confirmation of the disability, and it may be possible for agencies to incorporate questions of possible disability into their intake process. There may be cases where the information is *unknown*, which is wholly acceptable and should be reflected in the report. There is little guidance over what constitutes a *disability*, so the question is left to individual agencies. Some states, for example, consider a person disabled only if they qualify for SSI. Federal law requires information on disability, but individual agencies in Michigan can decide how best to collect that information.
- ◆ The report asks that agencies record the number of people accessing each service type. Agencies should therefore count someone once per service type received regardless of how many times the agency sees that person during the year. For example, a person who receives Service A should be counted only once for that service, regardless if they receive that service once or many times. If, however, that same person accesses a different service (Service B) on another date, then the agency should be listing that person in another service as well. Agencies will not be judged on how well they are doing based on this type of information, as it is understood that a person counted once may be receiving very intensive service.
- ◆ The report now contains a reference that contractor agencies are required to notify the CVSC in writing of changes in staff, contract officials and agency address using the agreement amendment request form.
- ◆ The information provided in the report should reflect only VOCA-funded activities, not the overall agency activities. Statistical data must be unduplicated to comply with federal and state reporting requirements.

- ◆ If the client is a victim of more than one type of crime, count them only under the most serious or most pertinent crime type. Very few clients should be counted under the “other/unknown” category.

## **V. Program Evaluation & Training Process**

MPHI continues to work with community-based organizations to fulfill evaluation requirements often required by funding sources. Evaluation is not only a requirement for most agencies, it can also drive improvements to services. To that end, MPHI has hosted five trainings for VOCA-funded agency staff—three Level One trainings and two Level Two trainings. Feedback from the trainings has been positive. COA participants made additional comments below:

- ◆ The trainings were highly useful in clarifying goals, which proved especially useful when writing the initial grant.
- ◆ The Level One training workshop was very strong; Level Two seemed to be somewhat repetitious for some participants.
- ◆ Agencies may find it easier to adapt existing tools than invent their own. The trainings could include more sample evaluation tools and examples for agencies to adapt.
- ◆ The evaluation process allows some agencies to see where improvements can be made to service delivery. One participant reported that by using program evaluation she was able to pinpoint more effective service delivery processes.
- ◆ Agencies with different funders may find it difficult to juggle differing program evaluation demands. It may be important for agencies to have strong program-driven evaluation which meets the needs of all funders rather than simply allowing their evaluation be driven by the demands of funders.
- ◆ Trainings could be made more applicable to all crime victim services, including children’s advocacy services.
- ◆ Especially for those who are not familiar with program evaluation, the recommended reading material suggested in advance of the trainings was very helpful. It allowed time to develop a survey in the community before bringing it to the training for feedback.

## **VI. Grant Compliance and Needs Assessment Update**

During the last three years, the grant compliance and needs assessment process has gone very smoothly. Participants at the meeting requested that the time period for agencies to send an optional written response to the reports generated from these reviews be extended from 14 to 30 days. The CVSC and MPHI readily agreed to this request.

Fiscal Year 2002 (Oct. 1, 2001 – Sept. 30, 2002) is the last year of the first round of grant compliance and needs assessment site reviews. Despite some significant changes in VOCA Grant processes in the last three years, data-collection for the site reviews will remain generally consistent during this final year of the first round. However, there has proven a need to modify the process somewhat by eliminating some questions that seemed redundant while adding others pertinent to the recent changes in grant administration. Some of the changes to the review process include the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of your agency's VOCA-funded project?
  - a) Have the purpose or goals of your VOCA-funded project changed? If yes, how?
  - b) Do you anticipate change in the near future?
2. Based upon your experiences thus far, are you considering improvements to your VOCA-funded services?
3. Have any of your VOCA-supported position descriptions changed, including tasks and/or qualifications, in the last year?
4. What are your primary needs, challenges or barriers to recruiting, training and retaining volunteers?
5. Would your agency support Congressional action to allow VOCA to provide coverage for administrative costs?
6. Including the CVSC, what are the basic issues funding agencies need to be aware of in addressing data collection, reporting and the like?
7. What are the primary challenges in successfully completing the VOCA Applications and reporting forms? Please be specific.
  - a) Based upon your experience with the new online grant application system, can you suggest:
    - 1) Improvements?
    - 2) What should be done differently?
    - 3) Where additional instruction or explanation is needed?
    - 4) Additional operational qualities/functions not already in place?
8. How would you assess prior evaluation trainings sponsored by the CVSC, others? How do these differ?
9. Many funding agencies require program evaluation. What do they need to understand concerning your evaluation needs or challenges?
10. Are there any areas of training or technical assistance, including crime victim compensation or crime victims' rights that the Michigan Crime Victim Services Commission can provide to your agency or staff?
11. Are you aware of the Michigan Crime Victim Notification Network (VINE) and how to access it/use it for your clients? Would you like to receive training on the VINE system?

## **VII. *The Michigan Advocate* VOCA Newsletter**

Time constraints called for an abbreviated discussion of *The Michigan Advocate*—a twice-yearly publication generated by the CVSC, MPHI and VOCA Grantee guest authors to help share information matters relating to victim services in Michigan. The participants briefly discussed article topics from the previous year and suggestions for upcoming issues. The CVSC and MPHI extended an invitation to meeting participants to submit topic ideas, nominate authors, and/or author an article.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

Council members from all agencies, the CVSC representatives and the Michigan Public Health Institute were each thanked for their participation and feedback on the process of improving VOCA grant management throughout Michigan. Council members representing VOCA-funded agencies voiced their strong desire to return for next year's Council of Advocates Meeting, with the addition of possibly 4-6 additional agency representatives. Many felt that the small-group interaction facilitates strong discussion, but that there is room for a few more participants. Several Council Members thanked the CVSC for hosting an event dedicated to an open dialogue which both valued the work crime victim service agencies perform and allowed the agencies a strong voice in the VOCA Grant process.