

*Michigan Department
of Community Health*



The Michigan Crime Victim Services Commission

Sixth Annual VOCA Council of Advocates December 03, 2003 Report Summary

**Prepared by:
The Michigan Public Health Institute
Center for Collaborative Research in Health Outcomes & Policy**



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Meeting Summary

Historical Background

Each year the Michigan Crime Victim Services Commission (CVSC) and the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI) host a day-long meeting with a small group of crime victim advocates in Michigan—the VOCA Council of Advocates. These meetings have occurred annually since 1999 and largely take the form of a focus group and roundtable discussion. Every 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.

The annual gathering of the VOCA Council of Advocates serves 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 Sixth Annual VOCA Council of Advocates held during fiscal year 2004 at the Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center in East Lansing, Michigan.

I. Welcome/Participant Introductions

The FY2004 Annual VOCA Council of Advocates meeting was attended by:

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|----------------------|---|
| Mike Fullwood | Crime Victim Services Commission, Lansing |
| Leslie O'Reilly | Crime Victim Services Commission, Lansing |
| Amy Muempfer | Bay County Children's Advocacy, Bay City |
| Rhonda Baxter Todd | Kalamazoo County Prosecutor's Office, Kalamazoo |
| Julie Boggs | Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, Detroit |
| Phyllis VanOrder | Battle Creek Health System, Battle Creek |
| Larmender Davis | Women's Justice Center, Detroit |
| Suzanne Coats | Turning Point, Inc., Mt. Clemens |
| Victoria Reese | SAFE Place, Battle Creek |
| Valerie Hoffman | Underground Railroad, Saginaw |
| Jo Bullis | Women's Resource Center, Traverse City |
| Colette Salgat | City of Flint Victim Advocacy, Flint |
| Dr. Katherine Tucker | Detroit Receiving Hospital, Detroit |
| Tom Nelson | Michigan Public Health Institute, Okemos |
| Shari Murgittroyd | Michigan Public Health Institute, Okemos |
| Tammy Soule | Michigan Public Health Institute, Okemos |

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. *What is the state of VOCA funding at the federal level? What can VOCA programs do to help resolve funding issues and advocate that more funds be released?*

The status of VOCA funding at the federal level is still in the appropriations process. The Conference Report to-date states the President's budget recommendation is \$625 million of the VOCA Crime Victims Fund; if this amount withstands the remaining budgetary process we will not see a significant decrease in funding for our 2004 grant cycle, which began October 1, 2003. [Since the COA meeting, the budget recommendation of \$625 million did pass through the appropriations process].

The long-term outlook is obviously a concern to the CVSC and all VOCA grantees. The level of deposits this year was lower than the set appropriations cap (The Federal Crime Victims Fund is supported by the deposits of federal fines and forfeitures). As a result, money will be drawn down from the Crime Victims Fund to supplement the difference. At this level of drawdowns the funds will be depleted in a year or two. From our perspective, that means one of two things: 1) We accept, as a victim service community, the formula distribution of those dollars, which means we will get a percentage of the dollars deposited into the Crime Victims Fund from the previous fiscal year; or 2) we can look at enhancing the fund by asking congress to allocate funds above and beyond what the deposits are through the budget appropriations process. Essentially we are talking about the general expenditure dollars from the federal government. Over the last several years the fund deposits have been decreasing at an approximate rate of 200 million dollars a year. As a result, in the future we might anticipate seeing a grant at half of what we have now. Discussions between congressional staff and national associations representing VOCA administrators and victim compensation administrators have already begun building a case that such a loss of funding would have a significant impact, not just on Michigan, but across the entire country. In order to receive the \$625 million that we hope for, we would be using up about half of the reserve. That fund can build up again over the year in 2005 if collections continue like they are. However, it is also a possibility that the reserve will be entirely depleted if collections are scarce.

[Question from participants: *Why are the collections down? What is happening?*]

Beginning in the late 1990s there was a series of very large settlements collected and deposited into the Crime Victims Fund. In some of these particular cases people who were in violation of federal laws and regulations agreed to pay very large fines. One of the first was the Michael Milken security fraud case. In that instance, the fine was about \$100 million. The most recent and largest one was the vitamin price fixing case. The BASF AG Company and other large pharmaceutical corporations paid more than \$700 million in fines in order to settle its case. We are not aware of any pending cases where similar fines may be incurred. There have been many cases involving retirement funds, as well as the Enron situation. But, those cases have been prosecuted essentially as civil situations where any money received from those settlements have gone back as restitution directly to shareholders and the victims. Those cases were not tried as federal criminal cases, and to the extent that they are tried as federal criminal cases, the courts always have the option of ordering restitution in lieu of fines. So, it is never a given that the VOCA fund will receive fines in such cases.

The National Association of VOCA Administrators is currently conducting a study on the Crime Victims Fund including the types and amounts of fines that are deposited into fund. The study will identify the trends and fluctuating nature of the federal fines and can help clarify discussions at the national level to provide some better direction for the future.

2. *Could the CVSC provide guidance on how VOCA-funded project staff (and supporters) could become more politically active on behalf of clients and communities? It seems this should happen on a regular basis, in a proactive fashion, rather than as a reaction when funding is threatened. Political leaders need to understand the safety net that VOCA projects afford communities.*

Officially, the CVSC is not in a position to provide you with recommendations on political action—that is not part of our charge from the state. It is certainly a responsibility that we all, as individuals and program professionals, have. We will indicate that the advocacy groups that you all (and we in some instances) belong to and participate in have been established for those particular purposes. We recommend that you all stay involved with those groups and it is hoped that within those collaborations you will arrive at a shared consensus that can be voiced very loudly to policy makers, i.e. state senators and members of Congress. We belong to national associations whose purpose is to provide education and information to Congress and the Department of Justice about the kinds of things that we are all doing and their importance. And, to the extent that we can all work through such groups to form a shared message that inundates the halls of Congress, perhaps that would have some bearing and would be helpful.

The CVSC can provide agencies with general information like our Question and Answer Discussion sheet on the Victims of Crime Act, what the VOCA Fund supports, what the programs have looked like over the years, how much Michigan has received, how much your agency has received, etc. We can provide you with educational material so you can familiarize yourself and use that information when you communicate with your local officials about funding issues.

[Related question from participants: *Is there a possibility of getting a chronological history of VOCA as well? It would be useful to have a fact sheet in an electronic format to share with board members and include in agency newsletters, etc.*]

That is a great idea and the CVSC will work on making that available to you.

3. *Will VOCA consider funding the forensic interviewer position?*

This is a Department of Justice guideline issue. Currently this is not a position allowed under the federal guidelines. In general, the forensic interviewer has been viewed as an investigative, law-enforcement-type position, and that is something that historically has never been supported by VOCA. A revision of the guidelines has been underway off and on for years and there is a possibility that the forensic interviewer could be an added position to be funded in the future.

4. *How many of the VOCA dollars are used for victims of terrorism? Are victims of terrorism getting the “lion’s share” of these dollars?*

The Office for Victims of Crime administers the Emergency Reserve Funds to support victims of terrorist acts. The Office for Victims of Crime also has a Terrorism Unit that deals with international cases. We do not have those numbers on hand, but if you think it is important to get

the dollar amount, we can do that for you. In general, there is money for terrorism through the emergency funds, and if there is a mass casualty even in the state of Michigan we could access those resources just for victim services.

5. *Is there any money available from VOCA for the Michigan Chapter of the National Children's Alliance to conduct trainings?*

The CVSC does have a small amount of our federal grant available for training activities. In the past we have supported training activities that have a statewide impact such as the Michigan Victim Assistance Academy and training court personnel on the Crime Victim's Rights Act. We have also utilized training funds to produce the Crime Victim's Rights Manual (you all should have received copies of these manuals). We will consider supporting trainings that typically have a statewide impact and there is a separate training grant application that can be submitted directly to Leslie O'Reilly at the CVSC. The proposal will be considered if there are funds available. This year, we are developing the online training grant application. Because it is currently a paper process, we would prefer to wait to do any training until the online application is finalized later this fiscal year. We will make an announcement when it has been completed. We can also mention that the members of the Michigan Chapter of the National Children's Alliance who are VOCA grantees can include costs for those trainings within their applications under staff development, but generally not to support the complete costs of a statewide training.

6. *Does first aid and CPR training count toward the required training for VOCA staff? If so, how do grantees document that within VOCA's reporting website?*

First aid and CPR seem reasonable and that can certainly apply to the 24-hour annual training requirement. [Participants raised concern that the online report will not accept certain types of training.] There may be some glitches with the particular browser being used and the CVSC will have their technical support specialist, Walter Pelowski, check that out.

With respect to the topic of training, through the course of reviewing the reports generated from the Grant Compliance Review and Needs Assessments, the CVSC has noticed a fairly general consensus that most agencies would like more information on Crime Victim Compensation and the Crime Victim Notification Network (VINE). We have had preliminary discussions with the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan (PAAM) to plan some regional trainings, as well as one or two basic trainings this year. The Crime Victim Compensation and the VINE system are always a part of those venues. PAAM has indicated it could extend those trainings an additional half-day to include a morning or afternoon session to provide an opportunity for VOCA-funded staff who might be in that region to attend those trainings as well. This would be covered under your VOCA grant too. Whenever we hold a local training, we make every effort to be sure all service agencies in that jurisdiction are notified; trainings are not limited to VOCA-funded agencies only. The trainings hosted at the county jails are probably more apt for most agencies because that is where we get into notification of offender releases, escapes, and those kinds of issues. It is hoped that VINE will eventually be operating in every county. If interested, you may contact the CVSC to request a listing of what counties are currently utilizing VINE.

7. *Other states allow for some program administration costs, but Michigan does not. Are there any plans to revise the allowance in covering administrative costs?*

According to the federal guidelines, "Examples of allowable operating costs include supplies, equipment usage (when supported by usage laws), printing, photocopying, postage, brochures that describe available services, and books and other victim-related materials. VOCA funds may

support administrative time to complete VOCA-required time and attendance sheets (that is the funded staff person filling out their time sheet), programmatic documentation, report statistics, keeping track of the services they are providing, administrative to maintain crime victims' records (documenting in a crime victim's record), and a pro-rated share of audit costs.”

[Question from participant: *It talks about filling out forms, typical record-keeping, those kinds of things...on other grants we have that same language, and it does allow for 5% costs to pay for the clerical and administrative support that is responsible for that work. Would that be allowable?*]

This is an accountability and tracking issue. If you had someone who devoted 5% of their time to your VOCA project, they are going to have to maintain their time and effort and be able to document that as well. Our funding priorities have been direct service provision and the costs associated with those provisions. The federal guidelines may allow for certain limited costs, but the Department of Community Health does not allow for any administrative charge on the grant. A second issue is that however it may be structured, a flat percentage may be considered an indirect cost, and we would have to monitor that. So, it is a resource issue as well. We have not looked at expanding to that area yet. Once the federal guidelines are amended to allow a flat percentage, then we will determine how to proceed. We fully support some kind of recognition for the time and effort it takes to administer any program.

8. *Funding for SANE programs is an ongoing concern. Can the CVSC comment on this issue?*

Funding victim services in general is always a challenge. SANE programs, whether they are serving adults, children, or both, are a relatively new type of service and we have supported some of the activities of the SANE programs. Certainly, as with any VOCA-funded project, VOCA should not be considered the only funding source, but a percentage of the overall operation of a SANE program. These are incredibly expensive programs to operate, so we do what we can in these projects. The Crime Victim Compensation program does cover the cost of forensic medical exams if a police report has been filed.

[Response from participants: *Traditionally, VOCA-funded SANE programs like Turning Point, Inc., HAVEN, and those in Grand Rapids and Battle Creek, are independently supported and not attached to a hospital or medical facility. Forensic exams within hospitals or medical settings are covered by victim compensation, but the agencies specializing in sexual assault services that are providing quality services are not afforded adequate resources from insurance companies, FIA and Crime Victim Compensation.*]

This is something that we will have to continue discussions on within our department and with the Department of Community Health. The state does have a new administration with new people, and we will continue to hold discussions with them. There is proposed legislation that would provide additional resources for sexual assault forensic exams. However, it placed health care providers in front of crime victims in receipt of compensation funds. This is a complicated issue and victim advocates are invited to address the Commission and educate them on some of the issues surrounding SANE programs, the concern of limited resources, and how this affects quality services for sexual assault victims. The Commission is scheduled to meet once a month. Interested advocates can contact the CVSC for further details.

9. *When there is a staff change of a VOCA-funded employee, should grantees complete a formal amendment online? Could the CVSC clarify which amendments need to be submitted by letter and which need to be submitted online?*

A formal amendment must be completed online for updates in staff and project officials. A separate notification is not required. A formal written amendment is required if a change falls in the category of requesting more money, reducing your grant, or adding a budget line. The written amendment process will take a little longer; we will approve it internally and then you will see approval through Project Director. Then, we just have to wait for your signatures to officially complete the process.

10. *Is there a limit to the number of amendments grantees can submit? What happens when a second amendment needs to be submitted before a previously submitted amendment has been approved? It seems like the amendment approval process takes quite some time and proves to be challenging with respect to program administration.*

There is no limit to the number of agreement amendments a grantee can submit. However, you can only have one pending amendment at any given time. If you have an amendment pending and you then experience an additional change that requires an amendment, send Leslie O'Reilly an email indicating so and she will un-submit the initial amendment and you can then add those changes to the amendment. You are allowed to address several different changes in one amendment request. We are now approving amendments on a monthly basis. The process will take considerably less time if the amendment is submitted with all the required information the first time.

11. *Is it possible to send more than one staff member to the VOCA Program Evaluation Trainings?*

We are combining Levels I and II this year and will hold two separate trainings with space for 50 participants to attend each training. With 86 VOCA grantees and 100 open slots, there will be an opportunity for *some* agencies to send more than one person. Those particular agencies that could benefit will be identified by the CVSC and will be invited to send more than one staff person.

12. *Who should grantees contact when the VOCA Program Specialist is not available?*

If Leslie O'Reilly is not available and you have questions regarding financial fees, payments or types of payments, or audit-related concerns, you can contact Linda Snyder in our office. You can usually get in touch with Leslie O'Reilly through email or voicemail and she will try to respond as promptly as possible. If there is an extreme situation or rare emergency where it is important that you speak to someone right away, then you should contact Mike Fullwood.

III. VOCA Online Application & Reporting Processes

The CVSC continues to make upgrades to the online application and reporting processes. If VOCA grantees have technical questions or are experiencing difficulties or quirks in the system, please notify the helpdesk. It has been the CVSC's experience that anytime they generate an upgrade to improve the system or correct problems, new issues will surface. The CVSC strives to implement online changes and upgrades at the beginning of the grant cycle in order to create seamless transitions by avoiding midyear changes. Participants were given the opportunity to share ideas for improving the online system. Discussion topics involving the VOCA online processes included the following:

- The CVSC shared the idea of updating the quarterly report to capture the training information on a quarterly basis as opposed to having to recall all the trainings for the final year-end report. Participants responded very favorably to this idea and stated this would be a tremendous help.
- In the future, the CVSC will also be working on management reports that will utilize preexisting information in the system to create specialized reports.
- Participants inquired whether the online system was capable of performing spell-check. The CVSC states that although technologically there was a way to include a spell-check feature through the web page application, this was not considered a high priority at the time of development. The CVSC places little weight in the misspelling of words on applications and reports.
- The CVSC stated that they are aware of the predicament with the quarterly reports and no mechanism of showing adjustments or changes from a previous quarter. Currently they are not in a position to implement the necessary upgrade to address this concern, as several changes will need to be incorporated. For the time being, the CVSC asks that grantees make sure that the overall total in the next quarter be correct. If the change cannot be addressed through adjusting a quarterly statistic, then contact Leslie O'Reilly and she will handle the situation.
- It was announced that VOCA state administrators in Minnesota have adopted the Michigan CVSC's online system and Arizona is currently in the process of doing the same.

IV. Grant Compliance Review & Needs Assessment Update

Fiscal Year 2004 marks the sixth year of the Grant Compliance Review and Needs Assessment process. All VOCA grantees were initially visited during a round of visits taking place over a 4-year cycle (fiscal years 1999 through 2002). Agencies were selected randomly for reviews during the first 4-year cycle and that same pattern of ordering has generally been maintained for the second cycle of reviews. This allowed for a fair and systematic selection providing agencies with equal time intervals (approximately four years) between the first and second rounds of site reviews. Agencies are now in the second round of reviews. Twenty (20) agencies have been scheduled for review this year and were notified in October. Participants were asked to share recommendations for improving the Grant Compliance & Needs Assessment preparation materials and review instrument, as well as the process itself. Council members raised the following comments and questions:

- Grantees expressed appreciation for the information and detailed instructions found in the Self-Review Checklists that are distributed prior to the site review. This allows for agency staff to be better organized and adequately prepared for the review.
- Question was raised as to which agency staff should be present during the site reviews. It is requested that appropriate personnel, including VOCA-funded staff providing direct services, participate in some or all of the site visit interview. This may include all persons responsible for administering and coordinating VOCA-funded staff, volunteer activities and financial matters. Service providers and agency staff are extremely busy, and their time is valuable. MPHI reviewers maintain flexibility throughout the day and complete various parts of the review at the most convenient time for those involved.

- A question was also raised whether MPHI staff needed to visit all agency sites in cases where service provision is carried out from more than one location or facility. It was explained that it is not necessary for MPHI staff to visit all the sites of one particular agency, but to meet with staff that can appropriately speak to the various categories of review. If there are occasions when a staff member cannot be present on the day of the scheduled review, it is acceptable to have those questions answered in advance in a written fashion.
- Participants asked how long a site review generally takes. MPHI staff responded that on average, a site review can take anywhere from three to seven hours. The length of the site review is largely determined by the agency's preparation. If agency staff had the opportunity to review the Self-Review Checklist and gather all the documentation outlined in the Document Checklist, the review should generally take less time. Additionally, if there happens to be a particularly large group of agency staff members participating in the review, this could also contribute to a slightly longer review—however, the knowledge and perspective gained from a large, diverse group is invaluable.
- Participants expressed that the VOCA grant compliance reviews and needs assessment process is very helpful and less burdensome than a peer monitoring review process. The peer monitoring review process was described as an intensive review with an in-depth look at the whole organization in three 24-hour days. There is a lot more preparation on the front end for this type of review and interviews are conducted with all agency staff. Interviews are also conducted with community agencies as well in order to address systems change.

V. *The Michigan Advocate* Newsletter

The Michigan Advocate is a statewide newsletter generated by the CVSC and MPHI that shares ideas and resources important to crime victim service providers, professionals, and victims. Recipients of *The Michigan Advocate* include all VOCA grantees, other state programs serving crime victims, prosecuting attorney offices, VOCA administrators in other states, national association colleagues, and federal offices. In an effort to conserve resources, the newsletter is no longer disseminated in printed hard copies, but is now published in electronic PDF format only and is distributed by email notification twice yearly.

The CVSC and MPHI extended thanks to all the authors who have contributed articles to *The Michigan Advocate* in the past. Their time and expertise is greatly appreciated and has helped further the knowledge and resources in the victim service community. The council members discussed article topics from the previous year, as well as suggestions for upcoming issues. The CVSC and MPHI extended an invitation to participants to propose topic ideas, nominate authors, and/or author an article. Some suggested article topics were as follows:

- Immigration Issues Affecting Victims
- Bilingual Services & Resources
- City Ordinance Charges Relating to Victim Services
- Increased Battering of Pregnant Women
- Victim Reluctance to Testify

The CVSC is considering the development of a website to host *The Michigan Advocate* in the near future. This would create a more interactive venue for readers, provide more space for resources and articles, and allow for frequent updates of upcoming events and training opportunities relevant to victim services. The CVSC encourages all VOCA grantees who are interested in authoring an article

or suggesting a topic to contact the MPHI Managing Editor, Tom Nelson at (231) 386-7919 or tnelson40@direcway.com.

VI. The Four Year Report

Council members were presented with a recent publication created by the CVSC and MPHI that underscores the first four-year cycle of the VOCA Grant Compliance Review and Needs Assessments, with additional information about the other components of the CVSC and MPHI partnership. One of the prominent ideas behind the Four Year Report was to compile a history and chronological background to serve as a starting point and guide for other state administrators wanting to assist crime victim service providers and gauge the quality of those services. The report includes the initial pilot phase of the Grant Compliance Review and Needs Assessment process and the evolution of the Crime Victim Services Commission Technical Assistance Project. It also describes how the Project has evolved with the help of valuable feedback from VOCA grantees to include program evaluation training, the production of *The Michigan Advocate*, and hosting the annual Council of Advocates meetings.

This publication will be distributed to all VOCA grantees; a number of other state agencies serving crime victims; prosecuting attorney offices; national colleagues; federal agencies, including the Office for Victims of Crime; and other state VOCA administrators.

The CVSC expressed their appreciation to the MPHI staff for facilitating the production of this comprehensive report. The CVSC also recognized the role of the VOCA-funded agencies that provide invaluable victim services as critical—without their contribution there would be no report at all. Readers are invited to contact the CVSC and/or MPHI to share their comments and feedback regarding the report.

VII. Program Evaluation Trainings

Program evaluation is not only a funding requirement for most agencies, it can also drive improvements to services. To that end, the CVSC has partnered with MPHI and Dr. Cris Sullivan to conduct several trainings for VOCA-funded agencies over the last five years. In the past, VOCA program evaluation workshops were divided into Level I and Level II curricula. In fiscal year 2004, Levels I and II will be combined to create one comprehensive training curriculum for VOCA grantees. This change is, in part, a result from participant feedback gathered in the evaluation surveys administered at the conclusion of each training.

Overall, the workshops continue to yield very positive feedback with respect to Dr. Sullivan's presentations and the evaluation training materials provided. Two trainings will be offered in fiscal year 2004, with space for 50 participants at each. In order to address travel considerations, the first training is slated to take place in June and will be held in northern Michigan to accommodate agencies in that region. The second training is scheduled for September in East Lansing, a relatively central location for the remaining agencies. Some agencies will have an opportunity to send more than one participant, and those will be identified by the CVSC.

A dialogue was held emphasizing the need for a venue that would facilitate the sharing of evaluation resources and methods, including the budgeting of evaluation efforts, database development, and data management strategies. Grantees indicated they face significant challenges with respect to budgeting required program evaluation. Finding methods for implementing efficient models and streamlining

data collection processes would be helpful. The CVSC will consider this request and investigate possible venues and opportunities to address this particular program evaluation need.

Council of Advocate members were invited to share suggestions for improvement of the program evaluation trainings. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive and no further changes were recommended. Furthermore, participants expressed gratitude for the guidance and expertise of the workshop instructor, Dr. Cris Sullivan.

VIII. Conclusion

Council members from all agencies were each thanked for their participation and feedback on the process of improving VOCA grant management and victim services throughout Michigan. Council members representing VOCA-funded agencies expressed their desire to hold the 7th Annual Council of Advocates meeting at the Kellogg Center in East Lansing again because of its central location. Participants indicated the timing of this year's COA coincided with the annual Director's meeting and proved to be very convenient with respect to time and travel. Several council members thanked the CVSC for hosting an event dedicated to an open dialogue that values the work crime victim service agencies perform and allows the agencies a strong voice in the VOCA Grant process.