

*Michigan Department  
of Community Health*



## **The Michigan Crime Victim Services Commission**

# **Eighth Annual VOCA Council of Advocates December 07, 2005 Report Summary**

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



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December 7, 2005**

**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. Meetings have occurred annually since fiscal year 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 victims, domestic violence victims, drunk driving victims, sexual assault victims, crime victims in American Indian communities, victims 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 as a forum to share information concerning crime victim services in Michigan and to allow the participants to network with each other and with CVSC and MPHI staff. What follows is a summary of the Eighth Annual VOCA Council of Advocates held during fiscal year 2006 at the Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center in East Lansing, Michigan.

**I. Welcome/Participant Introductions**

The FY2006 Annual VOCA Council of Advocates meeting was attended by:

Mike Fullwood	Crime Victim Services Commission, Lansing
Leslie O'Reilly	Crime Victim Services Commission, Lansing
Randy Parker	Crime Victim Services Commission, Lansing
Julie Boggs	Wayne County Prosecuting Attorney, Detroit
Joanne Cooper-Reid	Detroit Police Department, Detroit
Kimberly Greenfelder	Macomb County Prosecutor's Office, Mt. Clemens
Tess Greenough	Domestic Violence Escape, Inc., Ironwood
Valerie Hoffman	Underground Railroad, Saginaw
Lee Ann Holland	Sparrow Hospital, Lansing
Sue Johnson	Every Women's Place, Muskegon
Desirae Kelley-Kato	Lansing Police Department, Lansing
Darcy Komejan	Children's Assessment Center, Holland
Jennifer Shoub	YWCA-Kalamazoo
Joyce Seigel	Battle Creek Health System, Battle Creek
Dr. Katherine Tucker	Detroit Receiving Hospital, Detroit
Courtney Chapin	Michigan Public Health Institute, Okemos
Julia Heany	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. *When can VOCA-funded agencies expect an increase in funding for staff salaries, particularly as services increase?*

The Crime Victim Services Commission does not designate specific increases for staff salaries. Instead, staff salaries are viewed as a function of local agency budgets and salary increases are viewed as a local management decision. Often agencies must contend with multiple funding sources, some of which may not be as flexible with staff salary increases. As only one piece of the funding puzzle, the CVSC often cannot substantially influence overall staff salary levels across an organization. The CVSC is not aware of any federal plan to boost funding to allow for staff salary increases.

[Question from an advocate: *How does turnover at our agencies affect the CVSC's opinion of the management of our grants?*]

The CVSC anticipates that there will be a certain amount of turnover among victim service agencies. In fact, those programs that manage to maintain a long-term staff commitment are very fortunate and may perhaps be doing some good things. However, there are times when it appears that something may not be right, either because of a long-term, consistent pattern of staff turnover or inability to fill positions. The VOCA grant requires that agencies report staffing changes within 30 days and to report difficulty filling vacant positions within 60 days. If positions go unfilled for over 90 days, the CVSC can decide not to fund that position in the future. However, the CVSC understands that there are circumstances that are outside of agencies' control, which may impact hiring and turnover. When such circumstances occur, simply communicating the issues to the CVSC is required.

### 2. *Do you anticipate that programs will be able to make slight additions to their programs, or will we have to make flat and/or reductions in budgets?*

Each year it is the goal of the CVSC to maintain at least a consistent level of funding based on what is available from several pots of federal money. Although this year there was a recommendation in the federal budget process to rescind the entire balance contained in the VOCA fund, the efforts of advocates across the country prevented this from happening. However, the state still may receive a flat level of funding from the federal government. If this happens, each agency will have to decide whether to maintain positions at current salary levels or to increase salaries for some positions to maintain qualified staff and cut staffing levels overall. While these are local management decisions, the CVSC will consider community needs when making funding decisions. For example, the CVSC may be inclined to move some funding to cover a small program, rather than risking losing the whole program in the community. The CVSC will try to ensure that federal budget changes will not force an entire program to close down. However, it is difficult to predict what the federal budget will look like, and these difficult decisions may not be necessary.

3. ***Is there anything else we can do to have our voices heard in the “political arena” regarding the importance of servicing victims and keeping the VOCA fund viable?***

Victim service agencies were very effective last time there was a call for advocacy! There are several articles in *The Michigan Advocate* on political advocacy and lobbying. In addition to reviewing those resources, the CVSC recommends maintaining good and active relationships with the press in your community, community leaders, and other service agencies. It is also important to communicate to the public the positive aspects of the work that you do.

[Question from the CVSC: *What information do victim service agencies need from the CVSC in order to effectively advocate at the local level?*]

It is difficult to follow legal jargon, like that contained in a bill, and it is very helpful to have a simple overview that explains a bill’s purpose. In addition, it would be helpful to have a document that simplistically explains VOCA funding and where it comes from. Legislators, funders, and others ask us, “What do you mean by VOCA?” and it would be helpful to have a simple explanation for them. The articles in past issues of the *Advocate* on VOCA were very helpful, and cannot be republished enough.

An agency’s connection to the Crime Victim Services Commission or the Victims of Crime Act helps communicate that they address serious criminal behavior in a community. It helps people understand that domestic violence is a crime, since the state and the federal government provide funding to address this crime. So anything that will help our agency notify the community of our relationship with the CVSC and VOCA will be helpful. A notification in the newspaper, a window sticker, a flyer, or a certificate to hang in the lobby would be very useful.

It is also helpful for agencies to connect with the lobbying organizations in the state. Since lobbyists are not often involved in front-line work, they often need information from agencies about the issues they confront or the needs they fulfill. Also, lobbying organizations sometimes need speakers, and if you are connected with a lobbying organization you can be a spokesperson for the issues that impact your agency.

[Response from CVSC staff:]

The articles about the CVSC can be centralized on the website for easy access. MPHI will take care of this after the meeting. In addition, the CVSC will look into developing a handout on the CVSC and VOCA for agency use. The CVSC will also explore developing a certificate or community notice for grantees to hang in their office to indicate to the community that the state funds the services to victims of crime provided by the grantee.

4. ***What became of the push in the legislature for hospitals to bill the CVSC directly for rape exams?***

This question references legislation introduced by Senator Shirley Johnson several years ago, which has been reintroduced during subsequent sessions. The department has two major concerns about the bill, (1) it would shift costs from private insurance companies to the state, and (2) a police report would not be required in order for the hospital or other facility to be eligible for a payment. The amount of money that could be diverted from private insurance is about a million dollars a year, which is not a giant windfall to the insurance companies but could be a significant cost for the CVSC. The bill would limit reimbursement to \$200 for an emergency room, \$125 for the use of a clinic or a medical office exam room, and the actual exam would be reimbursed at

\$100. In the past several years, a number of states have established some type of program along these lines, and by going through the compensation program, the state could receive VOCA federal matching funds for this type of program. Mike Fullwood stated that the department is interested in meeting with Senator Johnson to discuss the bill and to identify ways to ease concerns about the bill's impact. Mike will bring to the table comments raised by the Council of Advocates.

[Question from an advocate: *Is this related to the legislation about sexual assault evidence collection?*]

No. That is a separate bill. This bill would be an amendment to the Crime Victim Compensation Act, which says that the CVSC would receive a simple, itemized bill from the hospital, and based on restrictions contained in the bill for repayment, would pay the facility without further typical investigation.

[Question from an advocate: *Is the concern that the bill is unfairly focused on victims of sexual assault to the exclusion of other crime victims?*]

The law does differentiate between victims of sexual assault and victims of other types of crime. However, the idea behind the bill is that confidential sexual assault exams are designed to also collect evidence of a crime, not just to provide important medical treatment to a crime victim. As such, the idea is that the state should pay for confidential evidence collection, rather than the victim.

[Concerns voiced by advocates:]

One concern for non-hospital based SANE programs raised by this bill is that hospitals may no longer refer sexual assault victims to SANE programs to conduct the exam. Hospitals may instead choose to conduct the exam themselves and collect the reimbursement. On the other hand, hospitals may still prefer to refer sexual assault victims to SANE programs to avoid the paperwork and other additional work associated with a sexual assault case. Second, many victims already do not go to the hospital, even though they need medical treatment, because the hospital will call the police. The issue of requiring or not requiring a police report is very complicated because it has such serious implications for victims. Third, if non-hospital based SANE programs are not considered reimbursable providers in the bill, they should be. Fourth, both hospital and non-hospital based SANE programs should be consulted as the bill moves along to make sure that the needs and interests of each are incorporated into the discussion.

An alternative way to approach this bill might be to follow the pattern of the uninsured motorists' fund. The funds to reimburse for sexual assault exams could be pooled from insurance companies and the fund could be supplemented by the CVSC only when necessary.

[Question voiced by CVSC staff: *Are there criteria in the bill regulating appropriate patient care?*]

No. There are no criteria in the bill specifying what kind of training is necessary to conduct a sexual assault exam. The bill is Senate Bill 119 and can be reviewed at [www.michiganlegislature.org](http://www.michiganlegislature.org). It is almost an exact duplicate of the Iowa statute.

5. ***Our agency is struggling with several issues related to DHS policies that we would like to bring to the table for discussion, including: (1) pressure from DHS to make a report when children have witnessed violence and charging victims (but not assailants) with failure to protect, (2) requiring 60 days of employment before providing child care support for victims, (3) inconsistencies between caseworkers when describing DHS rules and regulations to victims, and (4) requiring victims to produce a police report as proof of domestic violence. Have other agencies faced these issues? What can we do to address these issues effectively?***

[Comments by the advocate who posed the question:]

What the agency is experiencing is not exactly reflected in the question. The first issue will be resolved as of January 1<sup>st</sup> when the new Child Protective Services manual is published. DHS has been filing failure to protect on a regular basis against victims of domestic violence, and the assailant is not also charged. The new CPS manual specifies that this is not to be considered child abuse or neglect, so hopefully that issue will go away. The second issue is related to DHS funding. They have 60 days to make a determination about a case, and now they take the full 60 days. However, it is very difficult to maintain 60 days of employment without childcare. The third issue, inconsistency between caseworkers, sometimes their inconsistency feels retaliatory. The final issue is that there is no effort to expedite assistance to victims of domestic violence who are staying in our shelter unless they produce a police report that “proves they’re victims of domestic violence.”

One issue is that CPS only deals with civil cases, so they see the criminal behavior perpetrated by the assailant as the responsibility of the criminal justice system. They are only there to address the civil side of things, so they focus on the victim. However, oftentimes nothing happens to the criminal, because there was not another witness or for whatever reason, and the victim is still the focus of a CPS investigation.

[Additional comments by advocates:]

This problem extends beyond this advocate’s county. In counties across Michigan, according to my doctoral research, there is a discrepancy between how the workers deal with domestic violence and how willing they are to confront the assailant at all. Women are charged with failure to protect or child endangerment and put in parenting classes. The worst that happens to assailants is that they are transferred to anger management, and CPS does nothing to confront them.

In another county, CPS poses less difficulty than the prosecutor, who will call CPS to get them involved when a victim chooses not to testify. He uses CPS to coerce victims into testifying. In addition, some victims will not call the police because they know that CPS might take their children.

The CVSC can help address this issue by being aware that these things are going on and that our advocates have to sometimes jump through hoops to provide services. Also, the CVSC can help by being involved at the policy level when these things come up, or by being an advocate for victim services at various meetings and events where these issues are discussed. The CVSC is particularly persuasive because it sends the message that the state takes domestic violence seriously, expects it to be treated as a crime, and expects victims will have assistance available to them in Michigan through VOCA.

The Child Advocacy Center model is one way of coordinating the efforts of various agencies when responding to victims, which has worked well for providing services to children. By using

multi-disciplinary teams, there is increased communication on every case and cases are addressed collaboratively. Educating the various agencies that are involved with these cases is particularly important. With one-on-one attention, other agencies can be encouraged to see how victims are victimized by the system and how agencies can work together to resolve the situation. While a coordinated response and educational efforts are critical, it can be more difficult with adult than child victims. Attitudes toward older victims tend to be less sympathetic, and, as the age of a victim increases, her credibility tends to decrease in the eyes of the system. So while a coordinated response system is a great way to address these issues, there are some barriers to creating such as system to respond to domestic violence and sexual assault. However, continually working to bring various agencies to the table and avoiding becoming isolated or seeming unwilling to work with outside agencies is critical.

Different communities also face somewhat different issues with respect to bringing various agencies to the table. In some communities Coordinating Councils function very well. In communities where judges and prosecutors are supportive, they can be very effective. However, in communities where people in positions of influence are not involved or are hostile toward domestic violence, coordinating bodies are less effective. Some agencies have found creative ways to get influential people involved, like inviting the wives of influential political leaders to serve on the board or attend meetings. Also, voices from outside the community can be very persuasive, such as those of state funders.

**6. *What are the CVSC's funding priorities for the next fiscal year?***

The CVSC will make its announcement about funding priorities at the end of January but does not anticipate that we will see too many shifts in funding priorities from what we have seen in the past. Again, VOCA priority funding categories are child abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence, previously underserved homicide survivors, drunk driving victims, and tribal programs.

**7. *Could the CVSC provide an update on the state of VOCA funding? What do you anticipate for the upcoming year in terms of availability of funds?***

Although the President signed the budget, until the Office for Victims of Crime issues the applications we do not know officially what the funding level will be. Right now, preliminary projections suggest that there is a possibility of an increase in the award for the coming year. However, that does not take into consideration some of the structural reductions that were proposed in the legislation. As a result, until we see the final award, the CVSC is unsure what to expect for purposes of the VOCA grants. The CVSC funding policy is to try to fund stable victim services. If we anticipate stable funding for the next couple years, or if we anticipate some kind of increase or decrease, the CVSC will strive to give grantees at least one year's notice on any such changes. One of the proposals that the National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators has championed is a proposal to stabilize funding, which would mean that there would be a projected increase in funding from year to year. It would bring funding stability to states and bring additional sources of support into the fund.

[Question from the CVSC: *What would grantees like the CVSC's training priorities to be?*]

It's really important for SANE nurses to get yearly updates because the field is always changing. In addition, in some parts of the state SANE nurses are having difficulty accessing the 40 hours of clinical training that is required. Staff in the UP have a particularly difficult time accessing state training opportunities because of the travel time and expense involved with traveling to the Lower Peninsula. There is also a need for more advanced training for sexual assault and domestic

violence service providers. Training on expert witness testimony, working with diverse victim populations, and providing culturally competent services would each be helpful. The Michigan Victim Assistance Academy trainings are good, but it would be helpful if sexual assault were the focus of one day of training and domestic violence were the focus of a second day of training, since many providers focus on one or the other. It would be helpful if sexual assault counselors and advocates had more opportunities to meet together by region to have some training and to support one another. Training for agencies focused on children is also needed, as is training describing the difference between therapeutic and empowerment models for service provision.

There is very little training available in the state to offer staff who have been involved in the movement for a long time. There are excellent national trainings available, but no one wants to fund training outside of Michigan. It can be very cost effective, however, to bring a national expert to Michigan to speak to a large group of service providers. Using the VINE Network or other web- or video-based training mechanisms would be helpful as well, so that agencies across the state can participate without traveling.

It would be helpful to have timely information available about upcoming training opportunities as they are scheduled. For example, the Coalition, PAAM, and the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board are hosting a sexual assault expert witness training April 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> at Sparrow Hospital, which will cost \$40. An expert witness training for domestic violence would also be helpful.

Another important training need is training for law enforcement. Local service providers are often not taken as seriously as outside “experts” or professionals from within the legal system. Also, prosecutors and judges face serious time constraints that limit their availability to attend trainings. Scheduling training to correspond with judges’ or prosecutors’ quarterly or staff meetings can help overcome this time issue. In addition, training videos can be helpful, but are more effective when an outside professional facilitates them. In general, training that is co-facilitated by a professional from the legal system and a service professional can be effective.

[Comment from the CVSC:]

An interagency state government workgroup including the Commission, Michigan State Police, Women’s Commission, Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board, DHS, DCH Communications, and DCH Violence Prevention staff that is updating the Stalking, Personal Protection Order, Safety Planning, and Dating Violence brochures that will be available in Spanish, Arabic, English, and on-line printable versions. The brochures can be ordered in quantities through the Health Promotions Clearinghouse. Other distribution methods are being explored.

### **III. VOCA Online Application & Reporting Update**

The CVSC continues to make upgrades to the online application and reporting processes. Automatic delinquency notices have been added to the system. Grantees receive automatic notices whenever the monthly, quarterly, and final reports are delinquent. The system has been finalized; grantees receive automatic emails five days in advance of the deadline to submit required reports as a reminder.

The CVSC also installed the list of program outcomes on the website, and soon these will be added to a drop down menu, so that they can automatically be inserted into grant applications. A next step may be to require grantees to select outcomes from a list of standard outcomes and to provide

additional space to include additional outcomes. An EMPLOYEE FUNDING DISTRIBUTION TIME REPORT has been added to the system. This Time Report is required for all grant funded and match positions to document time devoted to the VOCA grant project. It is a printable version of the Time Report.

A critical monitoring tool for non-profits is the board of directors, and it is important for boards to understand and fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities to the non-profit organization. It may be helpful for the CVSC to provide board training in some form to help ensure that boards are equipped to fulfill their responsibilities. For example, a board should be active, have a director who actively participates in the operation of the organization, ensure accurate record keeping, assist the organization in obtaining adequate resources, and monitor an agency's performance, compliance, and financial management. A board should also annually review an agency's budget, including pay rates, the audit reports, and other financial oversight responsibilities.

[Comments from advocates:]

It would be really helpful to have something that explains the CVSC's board requirements that agency directors could use for board training. It would be difficult to schedule statewide or regional board training because board members often have tight schedules and board membership rotates on a regular basis.

One concern is that some board members could take some of the requirements further than is necessary. For example, a board might approve salary ranges for all positions once per year, but not approve specific individuals' salaries. Some board members might read the requirement to review and approve pay rates to suggest that this system is inappropriate. It is important to maintain a balance when training a board, such that board members do not get the sense that it is necessary to micro-manage the organization. For training purposes, it might be helpful to have several examples of how each board responsibility might be translated into practice in different organizations.

#### **IV. Grant Compliance Review & Needs Assessment Update**

The CVSC provided an update on the GCR&NA process. The site visit process set-up by MPHI has been retained by the CVSC this year as they have taken over the review process. The process begins when Randy Parker sends the site information to help prepare for the visit and follows-up with phone calls and letters to schedule the visit. During the visit, Mr. Parker goes through the reporting protocol and talks with staff about their work. Sites sometimes provide documentation, which the CVSC maintains in their records. It is preferable if the site's staff is also available to talk with Mr. Parker. After the visit, Mr. Parker completes a report, which he sends the site to review. The site has 30 days to review the report and provide comments, although this 30-day review period slows the process and may be reduced. Once any changes are made, the CVSC reviews the report, contacts the site again if necessary, and at that point the process is complete. The process is designed to be friendly and not adversarial. Mr. Parker focuses on understanding and documenting the important things that grantees are doing. The process is intended to protect grantees as a whole from corruption anywhere in the system.

The federal government is considering requiring states to adopt a particular performance assessment system, and the CVSC is in the process of reviewing information regarding this proposal. The OMB is trying to identify specific measures to assess the effectiveness of the Crime Victims Fund. However, at this point, the performance objectives of the Crime Victims Fund have been identified as to provide and expand services to crime victims; to enhance practice, knowledge, skills, and ability; and to increase public awareness. These are the areas that encompass the whole

scope of program activities supported by the fund. Right now grantees know what the data collection requirements are for the grant, because they are already meeting those requirements. If the federal data collection requirements are modified, they are required to provide public notice through the federal register, which will give states and local programs an opportunity to comment on any changes. Also, the federal government is consolidating the grants management process, which may have some implications. These things are up in the air at this point, and we do not know how all of these changes will impact the state or our grantees. If there are any revisions in reporting requirements the CVSC will know what those are in advance and will modify any training and make any other changes to the reporting forms at that point. This is our standard grants administrative practice and is required by the DCH.

[Comments from advocates:]

It would be hard for grantees to review site visit reports in fewer than 30 days, so if the CVSC could maintain that part of the process, that would be helpful.

Also, one agency reported that going through the process with Mr. Parker was very gratifying. After the visit, staff felt like he was an advocate for their work and appreciated the work that they did. He was honestly interested in knowing what kind of issues they faced. It was a really positive experience.

## **V. *The Michigan Advocate* Newsletter**

*The Michigan Advocate* is a statewide newsletter published 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, additional 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 electronically and hosted by a website at [www.michiganadvocate.org](http://www.michiganadvocate.org). The most recent edition was posted in November.

The website is expanding on an ongoing basis and incorporating new functions. The new edition is posted on the left hand column of the home page, and within a few weeks a search tool will be added to help visitors find articles in past editions. Also the web resource list is being expanded and a calendar of community events will be added to the site by the end of April.

The council members discussed article topics from previous years, as well as suggestions for upcoming issues. The CVSC and MPHI extended an invitation to advocates to propose topic ideas, nominate authors, and/or author an article. Advocates were also encouraged to submit ideas through the website. Suggested article topics follow:

- ❖ There was a great article in the *State Trooper* magazine about forensic nursing recently that possibly could be cross-printed in the *Advocate*.
- ❖ One of the advocates was involved with a summer camp for child victims of sexual assault. It was a powerful experience for the children, and it would make a good article.
- ❖ More articles focused on children's issues would be helpful.
- ❖ More articles focused on special populations or cultural competency would also be helpful.

## **VI. Program Evaluation Trainings**

Program evaluation is necessary for service providers to adequately assess quality assurance and the overall effectiveness of crime victim services. The CVSC has partnered with Dr. Cris Sullivan and MPHI to conduct program evaluation trainings for VOCA-funded agencies over the last six years. Two trainings will be offered in fiscal year 2006, with space for 50 participants at each. In order to address travel constraints, the first training will be held in northern Michigan to accommodate agencies in that region. The second training will be held Lansing, a relatively central location for the remaining agencies.

The evaluation training has consistently received very positive feedback from participants. However, the CVSC, MPHI, and Dr. Sullivan are always interested in improving the training based on the needs of grantees. Advocates were invited to share challenges or concerns regarding their program evaluation efforts, as well as suggestions for improvement of the program evaluation trainings. Topics of discussion are listed below:

- ❖ It would be helpful to know the training dates as soon as possible.

The Evaluation Trainings will be held on June 23<sup>rd</sup> in Traverse City at the Hagerty Center and on August 4<sup>th</sup> in Lansing at the Henry Center. Invitations and registration information will be sent within the next few months.

## **VII. Conclusion**

Council members from all agencies were thanked for their participation and asked for feedback on the process of improving VOCA grant management and victim services throughout Michigan. Council members were very positive about the format and location of the meeting, and would like for the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Council of Advocates to be held in Lansing on December 13<sup>th</sup>. The MDVPTB Directors meeting is December 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, so hosting the COA the day before would make travel less costly. Council members were satisfied with the group size, but felt that it would be easier to hold a discussion if the tables were arranged in a horseshoe. Council members expressed gratitude to the CVSC for hosting an event dedicated to an open dialogue that values the work crime victim service agencies perform and allows agencies a voice in vital crime victim issues and VOCA grant administration.