



# OVC SEPTEMBER 2003 Bulletin

## LEARNING ABOUT VICTIMS OF CRIME: A TRAINING MODEL FOR VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS AND ALLIED PROFESSIONALS

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In 1997, a discretionary grant from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) funded a 5-year demonstration project for the development and implementation of Victim Services 2000 (VS2000)—a model for comprehensive, coordinated, and seamless delivery of services to meet the needs of crime victims at a particular site. In the VS2000 model, onsite VS2000 staff identify unique factors present at the site, such as geographic, political, demographic, and others, and evaluate how these have resulted in the specific needs of the victims. Denver was selected in 1997 as the urban site for the VS2000 model demonstration project, and Vermont was selected in 1998 as the rural site. Both sites use the two key VS2000 principles, collaboration and innovation, and each site must develop its own distinct service delivery model that meets the specific needs of the victims at its site.

Part of a series that documents VS2000 initiatives, this bulletin provides an

overview of the Denver VS2000 training and education efforts for victim service providers and allied professionals. Additional bulletins are available that discuss other aspects of the VS2000 model, including needs assessment, collaboration and planning, technology, and community advocacy.

In accordance with VS2000 principles, this bulletin shares lessons learned and knowledge gained during the development and implementation of a VS2000 model site for use by other sites interested in developing similar initiatives.

### Denver VS2000

In Denver, an extensive network of more than 50 nonprofit and government agencies plays a critical role in the delivery of services to victims of crime. Individuals and representatives from each participating agency collaborated for the past 4 years as partners in the

### Message From THE DIRECTOR

To support the development of integrated service delivery systems that could serve as models for other communities, OVC funded the Victim Services 2000 (VS2000) demonstration sites. The goal of each VS2000 demonstration site was to improve the range, quality, and accessibility of services for crime victims and to provide technical assistance to interested communities. In 1997, Denver, Colorado, was selected as the urban demonstration site.

Since its inception, Denver VS2000 has produced a series of bulletins describing its accomplishments. This fifth bulletin in the series, *Learning About Victims of Crime: A Training Model for Victim Service Providers and Allied Professionals*, provides an overview of Denver's efforts in the area of training and education for victim service providers and allied professionals. It is useful as a technical assistance document, illustrating that training in the field of victim services builds not only increased competency among victim service providers, but also increased trust and sharing among agencies by providing common terms of understanding, language, and approaches to training.

John W. Gillis  
Director

Denver VS2000 project, including community and criminal justice-based victim service programs, allied professionals, and victims and survivors of crime. Together, they created a multidisciplinary, integrated network that provided effective delivery of services to crime victims by addressing the gaps in service and the barriers that prevented victims from accessing services.

Although many of the participating Denver organizations and programs have a history of collaborating on other projects and initiatives, the VS2000 project provided the first opportunity for participation and collaboration by the full spectrum of Denver's victim service agencies. OVC funding for staffing and programmatic innovations allowed these service providers and allied professionals to come together and work toward the following goals:

- Create a seamless, comprehensive, coordinated, interdisciplinary system for delivery of services for victims of crime, emphasizing services for previously underserved and unserved victims.
- Apply technology to the delivery of services for victims of crime.
- Establish a training institute to integrate technology, cross-train victim service providers, and train allied professionals who work with victims of crime.

## Importance of Training

**G**rowth in the victim services field depends on training in victimization issues and the growth and development of the victim service providers' new skills so they can deal

effectively with all types of victimization. Continued training enables the service providers to sustain the systemic changes of the growing victim services field.

As the participants in the Denver VS2000 project discovered, training plays a critical role in a collaborative effort by enhancing trust and increasing the capacity of the collaborative system to develop and adopt common understanding among members regarding goals and approach. The greatest challenge is coordinating and focusing training resources to respond to the collective needs of the community. The implementation of a plan for cross training between victim service agencies and other allied professionals proved to be a major collaborative breakthrough for the Denver participants, increasing their levels of trust and knowledge. As input was received from all sectors of Denver's victim services, participants found they were comfortable with the process and able to discuss in a nonthreatening way the gaps in victim services and the barriers victims often face in accessing them.

A Denver VS2000 training priority was to develop curricula for allied professionals. A goal of the Training and Education Team was to establish an initiative that developed learning objectives about victim issues, then include those objectives in core curricula for appropriate professional schools.

### Training Team Structure

To accomplish a project as large as VS2000, participants were originally organized into four working teams: the Needs Assessment Team, the Model Network Development Team, the Training and Education Team, and the Technology and Automated Systems Team. Teams were further divided into committees and subcommittees and assigned to work on specific components of the model victim

services network. As the project matured and the goals were accomplished or revised, this structure changed. Today, teams and committees are composed of Denver community and criminal justice-based service providers, allied professionals, and crime victims. For 5 years, five full-time staff members coordinated and documented the planning, development, and implementation of the VS2000 project, while the teams, steering committee, and Victim Advisory Council provided guidance throughout. For a full description of the Denver VS2000 planning process, refer to the OVC bulletin *Making Collaboration Work—The Experiences of Denver Victim Services 2000*.

Beginning in 1997, the Denver VS2000 training team met monthly to work on the training and education project goals. Under the first-year grant, the training and education goal was to establish training in all aspects of delivery of services to victims of crime within the curricula of relevant agencies and professional schools—including law enforcement, the judiciary, mental health, social services, medicine, religion, and education. Because creating a truly comprehensive training plan for victim service providers and allied professionals was such a huge task, the training team decided to focus on two distinct areas and divided itself into two committees—the Professional Curriculum Development Committee and the Multidisciplinary Training Committee.

The Professional Curriculum Development Committee developed victimization curricula for use in professional schools, while the Multidisciplinary Training Committee focused on training for victim service providers. In 1998, VS2000 hired a training coordinator to guide and facilitate the rapidly growing initiatives conceived by the training

team. Several committees were formed to work on these training initiatives, including training for law students, law enforcement, and the faith community. Later in this bulletin, the efforts of these committees are detailed.

The Professional Curriculum Development Committee was formed to review and assess the content of current training material for victim service providers, advocates, and professionals who will work with or interact with victims of crime at some point in their careers. In addition, the committee investigated the feasibility of developing minimum training standards and core curricula for victim service providers and direct service volunteers. Ultimately, the committee narrowed its focus to develop and establish comprehensive victimization curricula for three allied professional fields.

Committee members conducted a telephone survey to determine whether Denver-area colleges and professional schools offered victimization classes. Each member targeted a specific professional field and interviewed school personnel about victimization curricula at their institution and whether there was a need or interest in the areas of victimization and victim issues. After researching the schools' curricula, members asked school personnel about their interest in developing a victimization curriculum or in having VS2000 develop one for them. The committee used the interview results to prioritize the schools according to their need and interest in a victims-of-crime curriculum, identifying the top three most interested types of schools—law schools, law enforcement training academies, and seminaries. With this information, committee members focused on establishing a victims-of-crime curriculum for these distinct educational settings.

The goal of the Multidisciplinary Training Committee was to review and assess current cross-training efforts between Denver victim services and criminal justice agencies, including training needs, training provided, and the development of a comprehensive, multidisciplinary training plan to enhance the frequency, accessibility, and quality of cross training in Denver. The committee surveyed 90 victim service agencies, asking each agency what victimization-related training it used; what training, if any, it provided; and what training its staff needed most.

Using information from the survey, the committee developed a comprehensive plan for interagency and interdisciplinary training. Initially, the group discussed the difficulty of visualizing this plan because of its inherent complexity and decentralized nature. However, the committee agreed that the following points would impact the plan positively and were worth consideration.

- Establish a centralized victim assistance academy (VAA) as an ideal way to offer free or very low-cost training on all topics, particularly if a building could be acquired.
- Offer training through a local university, either collaboratively or by simply using its space, to be most efficient.
- Designate a training coordinator to oversee volunteer trainers from service agencies to run an organized, centralized, comprehensive, and easily accessible program.
- Keep an updated schedule of training sessions available on the VS2000 Web site or as part of the online resource directory developed by the VS2000 Technology Team.

Further discussions revealed that it would be too costly to provide training at a centralized VAA both financially and in the time required to coordinate and oversee such a project. The committee determined that a more feasible approach would be to expand and standardize the cross training already being offered by victim service agencies and post its availability on the VS2000 Web site.

## VS2000 Training Initiative

### Cross Training

The initial needs assessment revealed the need to provide training across agencies and systems. Because most agencies knew little about the internal workings of other agencies, cross training would increase knowledge, awareness, and the effectiveness of referrals among service agencies and allied professionals.

Implementing a complex, multidisciplinary cross-training plan posed a major challenge because the plan had to organize and accommodate the many agencies and allied professionals that were participating in Denver VS2000. Difficult questions included how to best allocate resources such as personnel, skills, knowledge, time, materials, finances, and facilities, as well as the logistical problems of communicating with and gathering so many for meetings.

During the cross-training planning process, Denver VS2000 benefited by bringing several teams together for brainstorming and problem solving. The case management and technology teams together designed the cross training and its implementation for delivery to various agencies. To ensure that everyone worked from the same concept, the following definition was adopted:

Cross training is a continuous process of interagency training

in diverse styles on delivery of services, procedures, values, philosophies, and specific types of victimization to ensure that meaningful, cooperative, collaborative, and trusting relationships are developed and maintained between agencies and improve our ability to provide services.

Onsite training at participating agencies and an online training center to manage logistics were key to formulating the cross-training plan and ensuring the flow of information citywide. Next, the plan's success depended on shared commitment and approach by the VS2000 network participants. The result was the implementation of a quite successful Denver VS2000 cross-training plan citywide. Further, in its second year, the plan sustained itself after OVC funding was discontinued, and the victim service model became institutionalized within the victim service community.

### VS2000 Cross-Training Plan

The Denver VS2000 cross-training plan had four developmental phases:

**Phase One: Commitment.** Participants and agency executive directors signed a memorandum of understanding that stated a commitment to the cross-training plan and the cultural competency training. Participants determined timelines and selected staff members to receive cross training.

**Phase Two: Process Development.** Participants determined the roles and responsibilities of agency staff, such as who will train and who will coordinate; developed assessment tools to determine the skill levels of staff members; ensured that each training orientation covered required topics; and developed the evaluation and tracking processes.

**Phase Three: Implementation.** Trainers coordinated the schedules and locations of training orientations using the online training center, assessed individual employee training needs and provided onsite training, and provided cultural competency training.

**Phase Four: Evaluation.** Trainers and participants evaluated onsite training, analyzed the evaluation, and recommended plan changes after review of the analysis.

### Technology

The VS2000 online training center was the technological component of VS2000's training initiative. The online training center was developed as part of VS2000's broader, technology-based effort that included the online case management system and the online resource directory. The online training center made successful implementation of the cross-training plan possible.

The idea of an online training center grew out of the need for a centralized source of regularly updated information that could be easily accessed by field personnel. The online training center allowed agencies that were hosting trainings to post information about the events, such as content, location, maximum class size, and deadlines for registration. The center even provided online registration. The training center, accessible through the VS2000 Web site at [www.vs2000.org](http://www.vs2000.org), included access for the general public and offered information on events and training open to community members.

## Curricula for Allied Professionals

The Professional Curriculum Development Committee of the Training and Education Team targeted seminars, law

enforcement academies, and law schools with its curriculum development efforts. As a result, three subcommittees—the Faith Community Committee, Law Enforcement Committee, and Law School Committee—were formed to research and develop a curriculum for each academic setting.

Although each academic discipline and each institution presented different challenges to the introduction of victimization courses into the core curriculum, some basic points were common:

- Assess needs and conduct research first. Know the facts so others will invest their time and effort in adopting the victimization curriculum.
- Build a support base and identify partners. Attract support from faculty, students, alumni associations, and other community members interested in including victimization content in the professional school curricula.
- Understand the internal processes and their impact on a school being targeted for introduction of a victims-of-crime curriculum. Consider the timelines of the school's various internal processes, including the internal curriculum process, the catalog printing schedule, and the budget process.
- Develop a curriculum, or at least have a course outline prepared, that can be tailored to the needs of the institution being targeted. Before making a decision, institution officials will want to review the curriculum and understand how the proposed curriculum will serve the school's needs and whether it can be tailored to fit with existing courses.

- Build relationships with the people at the institution. Communicate with the people involved in the decision to adopt victimization curricula. Provide them with information and updates as needed.

## Faith Communities

The Faith Community Committee found that victimization curricula for faith communities were virtually nonexistent and that faith communities were not actively involved in the victim service system. The committee agreed to make development of a victimization curriculum for the faith community a priority. The challenge was to develop resources in faith communities, then integrate them with the existing system of victim services. By providing curricula, the committee aimed to raise the awareness of the community and instruct clergy and other faith leaders. A major barrier was the tendency for churches, synagogues, mosques, and other faith communities to function as isolated entities rather than collaboratively with other community-based agencies and the criminal justice system.

Working within the internal curricula processes in the seminaries was challenging. The committee adopted the following approach for working with faith-based communities:

- Establish an interfaith support base. Select an inner-city church as the base of operations because of its location in a high-crime area and the pastor's reputation for building interfaith relationships.
- Create a forum for faith communities to come together. Send invitations to faith leaders to attend a luncheon with the local district attorney. Pose the question, "What is the role of faith communities in

healing victims of crime and in restoring communities?"

- Identify those persons who are willing to focus on curriculum development and will serve together as a focus group for curriculum development. These may be clergy, laypersons, seminary administrators, faculty, students, chaplains, and other community members interested in victimization and faith issues.
- Hire an intern research assistant to identify resources specific to victimization and faith communities. Link with other efforts to develop similar curricula and collaborate with the national *Neighbors Who Care* curriculum project as well as seminary faculty around the country.
- Develop a curriculum outline and a bibliography. Recruit a student leader to present the curriculum at two local seminaries.
- Tailor the presentation package to meet the needs of the seminary most receptive to adopting and teaching a victimization curriculum, develop relationships inside the seminary, and make the academic dean and faculty counselor allies of the project.

## Pastoral Counseling Curriculum

The seminary curriculum developed by VS2000 was an introductory course that explored the issues of crime and trauma in the context of pastoral counseling. It was written to augment the existing curriculum of the local seminary noted for its pastoral counseling program and community counseling center. The seminary course presumed that pastoral counseling is an integral part of faith-based ministry and was developed for all persons preparing for ministry, not just for those specializing in clinical pastoral counseling.

The seminary curriculum was VS2000's most successful effort at institutionalizing training within an allied professional school. Denver Seminary adopted the curriculum and now teaches it as a pilot program.

## Continuing Education

The continuing education course entitled, "There Are Victims in Our Congregations: A Faith Response," was offered to clergy and other pastoral caregivers at the Iliff School of Theology during spring 2000. The VS2000 training coordinator, local clergy, and other allied professionals from the victim service community taught the course in workshop format to raise awareness among faith leaders and provide tools for interventions with congregation members who have been victimized. Members of the Iliff School of Theology were interested in offering similar continuing education courses in the future.

## Law Enforcement

The greatest challenge to Denver VS2000 institutionalizing a victimization curriculum in the law enforcement arena was that training standards for police academies are determined at the state level by Colorado's Police Officer Standards and Training (POST) Board. Another challenge was to balance the need for victim sensitivity training with many other types of instruction that police officers must receive to do their jobs. The other training areas may seem far more compelling than victimization training because they often include training in skills that make the difference between life and death for a police officer. The Denver Police Training Academy already offered a curriculum that exceeded the state minimum standard for training in victimization issues. Nevertheless, Denver's victim service community indicated that Denver police officers were in critical

need of additional training in victims' issues.

The strategy of the Law Enforcement Committee was to find creative ways to challenge this field to incorporate victimization training into its existing curriculum, despite the constraints. VS2000 proposed including victimization training as an integral part of police officer job proficiency and identified gaps in the existing curriculum. To be effective in getting victimization training included in Denver's police training, VS2000 developed relationships with key individuals at the administrative level. The implementation of the cross-training plan aided efforts toward collaboration. For example, it was beneficial to have the staff sergeant of the Denver Police Academy serve as chair of the Law Enforcement Committee of the VS2000 Training Institute Team.

VS2000's collaboration with local victim service providers and the Denver Police Department Training Academy produced "Black and Blue," a course designed to present the basics of a comprehensive response to the needs of crime victims. Topics covered included legal obligations to victims, working with the difficult victim, and assessment versus assumption. The goals of this course are for police officers both to understand their responsibilities and obligations when working with victims of crime and to develop the awareness, knowledge, and skills they need to work with the most difficult victims of crime.

VS2000 also drafted a proposal to the POST Board that proposed expanding the curriculum by identifying additional gaps in the existing basic training curriculum and demonstrating where victimization would fit into it.

## Legal Profession

### Law Schools

The training team did not have enough members with the desired expertise to work on this subcommittee, and identifying other legal professionals who had time to take on the extracurricular task of working on this committee was a challenge. Also, the curriculum process within the law schools presented a major barrier to the committee's efforts to insert victimization content into the curriculum. Another challenge for VS2000 was to synchronize its timelines with those of the law schools' internal curriculum development and approval process. This was very difficult because the schools set their curricula far in advance and generally resisted making changes, particularly to core curricula.

Existing relationships among the Denver District Attorney's Office, other key persons in the judicial arena, and the law schools were crucial to keeping the lines of communication open. Luncheons, workshops, and an adjunct class on the Colorado Victim Rights Amendment kept the discussion about a core victimization curriculum alive. Professor Doug Beloof, author of the textbook *Victims in Criminal Procedure*, was invited to present his curriculum to the Denver University (DU) Law School, and now DU currently pilots an adjunct course using this curriculum. Course topics include the victim's role in the criminal justice system from charge to remedies, criminal procedure and the victim, ethical treatment of victims by the criminal justice system, compare and contrast the experiences of victims in states with victims' rights statutes and those without, and the prosecutor's role in relation to victims.

## Training at the District Attorney's Office

Parallel to the efforts in the law schools, an innovative, online training curriculum for prosecutors in the Denver District Attorney's Office was under development. The Prosecutor Training Committee began meeting in late 1998, prompted by two factors. First, the VS2000 training objectives were originally written only for law schools, and VS2000 staff wanted the project to provide a more direct training benefit to the Denver District Attorney's Office. At the same time, there was discussion within the Denver District Attorney's Office about several efforts to create a more standardized approach to training prosecutors about victim issues. The goal of the Prosecutor Training Committee was to develop a curriculum and training program designed specifically for the needs of prosecutors in the Denver District Attorney's Office. Using existing curricula, protocols, and best practices, the committee's intent was to develop and provide training on the practical elements used in daily interactions with victims of crime.

To learn all they could, the committee surveyed prosecutors, advocates, and investigators in the office about their training needs. Members then reviewed existing curricula and office protocol, discussing at length the best practices for working with victims of crime. As a result, recommendations were made about both curriculum content and training format within the office. The goal was to offer the curriculum as online, face-to-face, and written training for district attorney deputies in county, juvenile, and district courts.

## Conclusion

As the network of VS2000 members develops a structure for sustaining its projects and collaborations beyond the 5-year federal funding period, training and education will continue to be important. As the victim services field matures and develops as a profession, ongoing training will be necessary to develop the skills needed to address the growing challenges for victim service providers and allied professionals. Within the Denver VS2000 collaborative efforts, training continues to build trust among agencies and provide common terms of understanding, language, and approach. Providing accessible, relevant training for those who work with crime victims is an ongoing endeavor, and the curricula, technology, and implementation plans developed by VS2000 and others are only the beginning of a training initiative that will continue to enhance the ability of service providers and allied professionals to meet the needs of crime victims.

## For More Information

For more information about the Denver Victim Services 2000 project and related products, please contact

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