

EVERY
VICTIM
EVERY
TIME

VICTIMS' RIGHTS

National Crime Victims' Rights Week offers a unique opportunity to raise public awareness about the impact of crime, victims' rights, and the vital need for victim services. The recent upsurge in violent crime, cited in the 2005 FBI Uniform Crime Reports, has already intensified media attention to crime trends. Your local media outlets—newspaper, radio, and television—should have a strong interest in helping you spread the word about National Crime Victims' Rights Week.

The best way to build successful relationships with the media is to become a reliable, trusted source of information, analysis, and referrals to other sources that can help the media do their work. Once you have established your credibility, the media will not only work with you, they will come to you!

Get to know the producers and reporters who cover issues that you care about. When you read local newspapers, listen to the radio, and watch local news and cable television, pay attention to the reporters who cover criminal justice, legal, public policy, social, and health stories. Make a list of these reporters, and update it regularly.

If you notice a local story on which your organization has information or expertise, call the reporter and offer yourself or your colleagues as experts. If the media cover “your” story (or other stories you find useful), be sure to follow up with a thank-you letter to the reporter and editor. If the media call you, make sure to return their calls quickly and provide all the information you have available.

How to Interest the Media

The media cover two kinds of news: “hard” news (e.g., enforcement of rights under the Crime Victims' Rights Act, the crime spike in St. Louis, or proposals to restrict where sex offenders can live) and “soft” or feature news (e.g., how a victim whose estranged husband set her on fire is speaking out against domestic violence). The media will usually view National Crime Victims' Rights Week as “soft” news, unless newsworthy events happen to occur during the week.

You can increase your odds of media coverage by laying the groundwork for reporters. First, think about your messages. Build your strategy around this year's theme, “Every Victim. Every Time.” You may want to focus on unreported crime, witness intimidation, inadequate funding of victim services, or any other issue that fits the theme. In your outreach materials, articulate how local crime victim issues make National Crime Victims' Rights Week particularly relevant to your community.

Most reporters and readers want to know the human interest impact of any story. Crime trends or statistics are important, of course, but a feature on the impact of a drug-assisted sexual assault (a frequently unreported crime) against a college student, for example, shows readers how crime affects real lives.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Media Lists

To help you make the right media contacts, develop a list of local sources by using the following tools:

- Internet for listings of local media and staff contact information;
- Yellow and white pages for the call letters and addresses of your city's radio and television stations and newspapers;
- Media directories in your local library.

Use your favorite Internet search engine to find the listings for the media in your area. Many local media provide contact information for editors, producers, and reporters on their Web sites. You can also use phone books or visit the library; your librarian can direct you to media directories that list the names of reporters and editors, reader demographics, the paper's circulation, and staff contact information.

The following sample tools included in this section of the 2007 NCVRW Resource Guide can support your work with the media.

Sample News Release

News releases can help your organization publicize important information to a large audience. The media pay attention to well

written and newsworthy releases. The 500-word sample news release provided in this Resource Guide announces National Crime Victims' Rights Week and the kick-off events in Washington, DC. It also features a quotation from John W. Gillis, director of the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, at the U.S. Department of Justice.

You should also "localize" your news release by listing National Crime Victims' Rights Week events in your community. Add a one-page summary that includes the name of the local event, featured activities, date, time, location, sponsors, a brief description of the event, and contact information.

Write your news release in "inverted pyramid" style with the most important information first, followed by supporting details. Conclude with a brief paragraph about your organization, its mission, and its relationship to the event.

Send out your National Crime Victims' Rights Week news release via mail, fax, or e-mail **at least ten days before April 22**. You can also use volunteers to make follow-up phone calls to offer more information and confirm media participation.

Sample Public Service Announcements

The Resource Guide includes four sample public service announcements (PSAs)—60 seconds, 30 seconds, and two 15-second versions—the most commonly used lengths for most media outlets. PSAs are free advertisements about issues and organizations that serve the public interest. Notice that for each PSA, you should supply names, phone numbers, a Web site (if available), and e-mail addresses so that listeners and viewers can seek more information.

At least two months before National Crime Victims' Rights Week, contact the public service departments of your local radio and television stations to learn the requirements and deadlines for PSAs. Many stations will accept a written "live-copy" script that you provide. Some radio and television stations will produce a PSA for local nonprofit organizations featuring the station's on-air staff. This community service, provided by many local stations, guarantees a good result and saves you production and distribution costs. You can also ask the stations to use your preferred spokesperson.

When you mail either the finished PSAs or scripts, include a cover letter that encourages the

radio or television station to support your public awareness campaign.

Op-ed Column

Editorial pages are among the most widely read sections of newspapers. Opposite the editorial page are “op-ed” columns—opinion-editorial essays often written by individuals who are not members of the newspaper staff. Op-eds are usually 500-700 words, but check with the editorial page department for the exact requirements. An op-ed should be timely (connected to a current event) and provide a unique perspective on an issue related to the public welfare. You can write your own piece or collaborate with another organization to coauthor the column. This section of the Resource Guide also includes a sample op-ed and tips on how to write your own.

Other Tips

Media Advisories. Media advisories, or media alerts, are one-page notifications to the media that briefly describe an upcoming event, such as a news conference, candlelight observance, rally, or open house. Present the “who, what, where, when, and why” of your event. Send out your media advisory **two weeks** before your event (four weeks for a listing in

the news outlet’s calendar). Follow up with calls to targeted reporters. If any of the major news wire services (such as the Associated Press or Reuters) has an office in your city, call their “day book,” which lists each day’s newsworthy events in your community, to make sure your event is included.

Fact Sheets. Reporters like to have reliable data to add

substance to their stories. Prepare fact sheets on the issues you have decided to highlight for National Crime Victims’ Rights Week. You can include information such as national and local statistics on crime rates, overviews of victims’ rights laws and pending legislation, and details about volunteer activities to support victims of crime. ★

Insider Media Strategies:

- Two months before National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, write to the managing editors of local newspapers and the owners of radio stations to ask for their support for your public service campaign.
- Ask media representatives to produce a series of programs or articles that provide an overview of victims’ experiences, focusing on some of the crimes you have chosen to highlight.
- Consider asking a local public relations or marketing firm for free help in planning and implementing your campaign.
- Contact your local cable access talk shows, which are always looking for ideas and often feature local community service agency programs.
- Encourage your mayor, county executive, or city council chair to read your National Crime Victims’ Rights Week proclamation at a meeting or prominent event the week before National Crime Victims’ Rights Week.
- After events, send professional quality, digital or 35mm black and white photographs to your local newspapers. Many newspapers will print community event photos, but may not have staff to cover these events. Be sure to include a caption that identifies each person in the photo and provides a brief description of the event. Also provide the name and phone number of a person the paper can contact for more information.

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

[Date]

CONTACT: [Name/Title/Agency]

[Phone Number]

[E-mail]

[Your City] Joins 2007 National Crime Victims' Rights Week Observance: Victims' Rights: Every Victim. Every Time.

[City, State]—April 22–28 is National Crime Victims' Rights Week—a time for all Americans to learn about victimization, reflect on the cost of crime to our society, and promote laws, policies, and programs to help victims of crime rebuild their lives. The week's theme, "Victims' Rights: Every Victim. Every Time.," envisions a strengthened national commitment to the nearly 24 million Americans harmed by crime each year.

During the past three decades, the United States has made dramatic progress in securing rights, protections, and services for victims of crime. Every state has enacted victims' rights laws; law enforcement agencies give victims greater protection; and more than 10,000 victim assistance programs have been established throughout the country. Every state has a crime victim compensation fund, and powerful federal laws, such as the Violence Against Women Act and the Crime Victims' Rights Act, to help protect victims and fund needed services.

Yet many crime victims have not experienced the promise of such progress. Only a fraction of victims report the crimes against them and participate in the criminal justice system. Victims' rights vary from state to state. Not all protections are enforced. Services are sometimes not available, or they may not meet the physical, financial, and psychological needs of victims or their families. Particularly vulnerable populations—the elderly, persons with disabilities, ethnic and racial minorities, or residents of rural areas—may not receive the support they need to rebuild their lives.

"We are all diminished when victims go without the protections and help they need," said John W. Gillis, director of the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. "Anytime a crime is not reported, a witness is intimidated, or an order of restitution is not enforced, we are all less secure. Achieving justice means repairing the harm suffered by all victims of crime."

The U.S. Department of Justice will launch National Crime Victims' Rights Week in Washington, DC, with its fifth annual National Candlelight Observance Ceremony on April 19, and its Awards Ceremony, April 20, to honor extraordinary individuals and programs that provide services to victims of crime. [City/County/State] will commemorate National Crime Victims' Rights Week with special events and programs [from (date) to (date)]. Among these activities are [list examples and attach a summary of main events to the news release].

Community members are encouraged to join in the week's activities and get involved in helping victims of crime. For additional information about National Crime Victims' Rights Week and ideas on how to serve victims in your community, please contact [agency/organization] at [area code/telephone number] or visit [agency's] Web site at [Web site address]. For information about national resources available to help crime victims, visit www.crimevictims.gov. ★

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Type your news release double spaced on the sample letterhead included in this Resource Guide. Distribute your release to the local media outlets at least 10 days before your event.

SAMPLE PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

15-second PSA

“Anytime there’s a crime, there’s a victim. And every victim deserves help—every time. This is National Crime Victims’ Rights Week. If you or anyone you know has been a victim of crime, we can help. Call [your organization] at [your phone number]. Help build a brighter tomorrow for victims of crime.”

15-second PSA

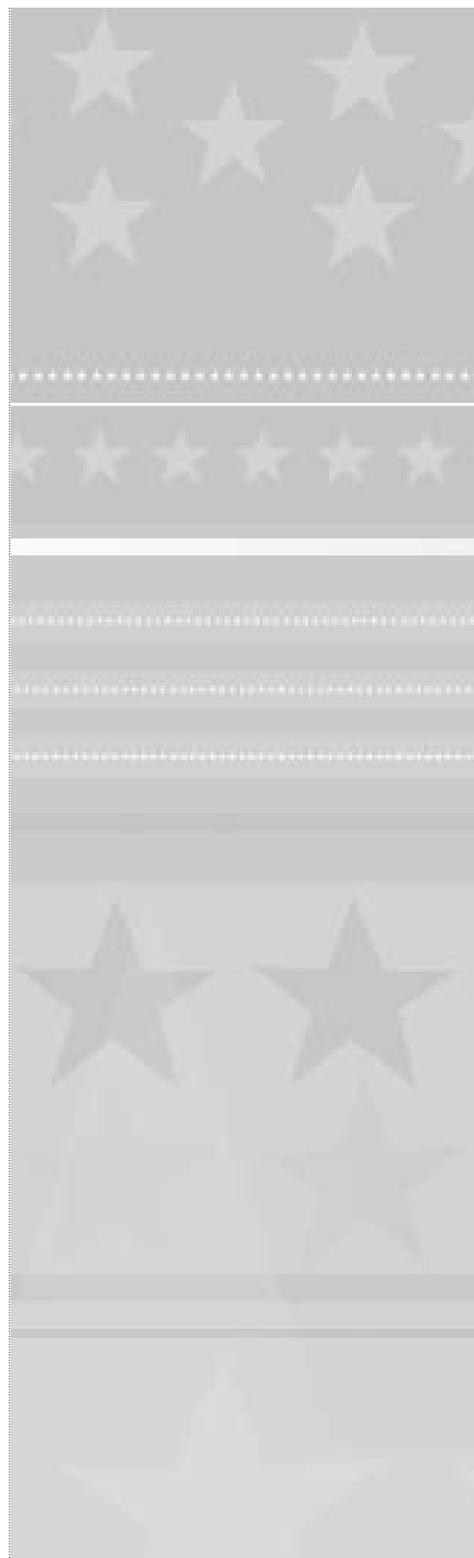
“Anytime there’s a crime, there’s a victim. And every victim deserves help—every time. April 22–28 is National Crime Victims’ Rights Week. Find out what you can do to help victims and to make our community a safer place. Call [your organization] at [your phone number] or log on to [your Web site].”

30-second PSA

“In the 30 seconds it takes to hear this message, five Americans will become victims of violent crime. And *every victim* deserves help. This is National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, and [your organization] wants you to know that help is available. Call [your number] or visit [your Web site] to find out more about victims’ rights and services. Find out what you can do to help victims of crime. Working together, [our community] can serve *every victim, every time.*”

60-second PSA

“During the next 60 seconds, 10 Americans will be harmed by violent crime. That’s one victim every six seconds. And violent crime can strike anyone. Some victims recover quickly, but others suffer for years—or even a lifetime—from the physical, psychological, and financial impact of crime. All victims should receive the help they need. This is National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, when communities throughout the nation honor victims of crime and the people who help them rebuild their lives. If you or someone you know has been a victim of crime, find out how our community can help. Call [your organization’s number] or visit [your organization’s Web site]. Help our community serve *every victim, every time.*”



OP-ED WRITING TIPS

Writing an opinion-editorial column (op-ed) for your local newspaper, community paper, or civic organization newsletter is a powerful way to raise awareness about National Crime Victims' Rights Week. You can highlight crimes that affect your community to involve your readers in making "Victims' Rights: Every Victim. Every Time." a reality. Through a published op-ed, you can convey your message, in your own words, to thousands of people at one time.

What is an op-ed? An op-ed is a brief essay that takes a position on a current topic. Op-ed writers seek to educate the public and often to convince policymakers and community leaders to adopt a certain point of view. Before you draft your op-ed, you should ask yourself: (1) who is your audience, (2) what do you want them to know, (3) and what do you want them to do.

How do I choose my approach? You can use many different approaches. Remember that your op-ed is a call to action to educate your readers about the needs of victims and involve them in serving *every victim, every time*. Check the newspapers and television news—or interview your local victim service providers—to find crime-related problems that affect your community right now. Use

those issues as a "hook" to explain the importance of National Crime Victims' Rights Week. Has a local rape crisis center shut down for lack of funds? Is your state legislature struggling to pass a human trafficking law? Is a teenage victim of dating violence afraid to report the crime? By describing local crime victims who don't get the help they need, you show the importance of this year's theme.

How should I plan my op-ed?

- Grab your reader's attention with a memorable first line:
 "Some crimes seem too terrible to talk about. One night last year, a teenager was raped by a local high school football player. She had been drugged at a party, assaulted, and left to find her way home alone. She did not report the crime because her attacker is popular, and she feared being mocked and blamed. Only after the player sexually assaulted two more students did the victim tell a friend, but she still feared telling a counselor and refused to report the crime."
- State your position (first or second paragraph):
 "Every year, thousands of victims of unreported crime can't receive justice or the help they need to recover from crimes.... That's thousands too many."

- Link your theme to National Crime Victims' Rights Week:
 "April 22–28 is National Crime Victims' Rights Week, a time to think about the cost of crime to victims and our community. It's time to take a stand against crime, to support victims, and to explore ways to prevent future crime."
- Use two or three points to support your argument:
 - Drug-assisted acquaintance rape is often unreported.
 - The crime is devastating to victims.
 - Teens need education to avoid being victimized.
- Support these points with facts and solid research. You may use footnotes:
 - Cite studies or quote experts that back up your point. (Actual quotations should be attributed to a specific expert.)
 *"Rape statistics have been going up, not down."
 "Most of the rapes we have are acquaintance rapes."*
 - Use statistics (sparingly).
 "The 1998 Minnesota Student Survey of 9th and

12th grade students in public high schools across the state found that 3,500 girls and 2,400 boys said they had experienced date rape, violence on a date, or both at least once.”

► Quote victims of crime.

“I wish I had known *never* to take a drink from someone I didn’t know,” said a 16-year-old victim at a recent Men Against Rape rally. “It was two years before I was comfortable going out with friends again.”

- Conclude with a memorable line that cites the National Crime Victims’ Rights Week theme:

“Let’s make sure that no victim in [our city] fears to come forward. Working together, we can serve *every victim, every time.*”

What style should I use?

- Use clear, powerful language (no jargon or acronyms).
- Use active verbs and short sentences.
- Use a conversational tone.
- Don’t preach—persuade.

How do I get my op-ed published?

- Check your newspaper’s space limits and other requirements. Submit your document typed and double spaced.
- Check how to submit your document: mail, e-mail, or fax.
- Include your name, address, title, e-mail address, and phone number. ★



SAMPLE OPINION/EDITORIAL COLUMN

National Crime Victims' Rights Week: Serving *Every Victim, Every Time*

Ask most Americans how our nation treats crime victims, and they are likely to say, “very well.” In most ways, they would be right. Every state has victims’ rights laws. We have more than 10,000 victim assistance programs throughout the country, and every state has a crime victim compensation fund. Powerful federal laws, such as the Crime Victims’ Rights Act, protect victims and fund needed services. As we prepare to observe National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, we have much to celebrate.

If we ask, “Do we serve every victim, every time?” the answer is “no.” Despite all our progress in supporting victims, we still have much work to do. Only a fraction of crime victims actually participate in the criminal justice system. Victims’ rights vary from state to state. Services aren’t always available to meet all victims’ needs. And populations with special vulnerabilities—the elderly, victims with disabilities, human trafficking victims, children, teens, and victims from racial minorities—often fall through the cracks. If we are to serve *every victim, every time*, all Americans must do their part.

So, how can the average person help our nation reach this goal? **First, we can open our eyes to the “hidden” victims around us.** Check in with your elderly friend or neighbor, who may be vulnerable to exploitation or abuse. Only 1 in 14 incidents of elder abuse is ever reported.¹ Be alert to the teens in your life whose behavior may have suddenly changed, who may be experiencing dating violence or abuse at home. Teens are twice as likely as adults to be victimized by violent crime.² Consider the possibility that a neighbor’s housekeeper who never leaves the house may be a victim of human trafficking, the third most profitable illegal enterprise in the world.³ Recognize that the increasingly isolated young wife who seems afraid of her husband may be a victim of domestic violence—and may fear that reporting the crime will intensify the abuse or endanger her children. Thousands of such victims remain “under the radar,” outside the criminal justice system and the victim services designed to help them.

Next, know what rights and services are available for victims in your community. Would you know how to help a victim? Find out where the nearest rape crisis center and domestic violence shelters are, and whether they serve teens. Do they have multilingual staffs? Do they serve persons with disabilities? Find out where to report suspected child or elder abuse. If you need help, check the online directory of victim services at <http://ovc.ncjrs.gov/findvictimservices> (operated by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice) or call the National Crime Victim Helpline at 1-800-FYI-CALL.

Support victim services and victims’ rights. Find out about legislative initiatives to strengthen victims’ rights and expand victim services, and let your voice be heard. Make sure political candidates know that crime victim issues are important to you. If your community has a problem that requires action, visit your local or state lawmakers to explain what you think should be done. Then, get involved with a local crime victim organization. You may be able to distribute educational materials or donate an item on their wish list.

Great progress for victims can result from many small steps. And by working together, we can help our community support *every victim, every time*. ★

¹National Center on Elder Abuse, “Fact Sheet: Elder Abuse Prevalence and Incidence,” (Washington, DC: National Center on Elder Abuse, 2005).

²National Crime Prevention Council and National Center for Victims of Crime, *Reaching and Serving Teen Victims*, (Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council and National Center for Victims of Crime, 2005), 1-3.

³Department of State, “Trafficking in Persons Report: 2004,” (Washington, DC: GPO, 2004), <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2004/34021.htm> (accessed September 25, 2006).