

**2007 National Crime Victims' Rights Week
Community Awareness Projects**
April 22 - 28, 2007

Victims' Rights: Every Victim. Every Time.

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This is the fourth in a series of periodic messages to assist in the planning and implementation of NCVRW Community Awareness Projects. Please feel free to send your individual questions or requests for assistance to Anne Seymour at annesey@atlantech.net.

CAP TIPS #4

(To Improve Public awareness)
by Anne Seymour

Engaging Multi-faith Communities

Introduction

Faith communities serve an important role in helping crime victims on a daily basis throughout the year. Many victims and survivors turn to their faith community for support, counseling and other important services that can help them cope with the aftermath of criminal victimization. Others question their faith and the concept of a "just higher being" when they are hurt by crime, and seek answers to a variety of faith-related questions.

In addition, faith communities have become important partners in national, state and local efforts to address crime and victimization, and to help victims of crime as part of their overall missions. The Office for Victims of Crime has supported many cutting-edge initiatives that engage and involve faith communities and their congregations in identifying and addressing the needs of crime victims and survivors (please see "Office for Victims of Crime Faith-based Initiatives" below for additional information).

Tips for Engaging Multi-faith Communities in NCVRW Activities and Throughout the Year[i]

If your group or organization is interested in developing an multi-faith or interfaith program involving communities that represent different faiths, or materials specifically for 2007 National Crime Victims' Rights Week, here are some tips for getting started.

- **Start early and be patient.**

Faith leaders receive more mail and invitations than they can accommodate and often are reluctant to take on new initiatives. They are most likely to participate if they have been involved in the development of a program or project. It takes time to build trust, even among denominations or sub-groups of one faith. Start with a small group of representatives of various faiths who already are familiar with crime victims' issues and services. They do not necessarily need to be faith leaders, but may be volunteers in the community to whom victims informally turn for help. This initial group should meet a few times in order to move from tolerance to mutual respect and appreciation of each other. Early meetings might offer the opportunity for each group to share basic information about their faith, correct myths or misunderstandings, and identify common themes of peace and non-violence. The ultimate task of this group is to decide on a reasonable goal for commemorating 2007 National Crime Victims' Rights Week and identify interfaith members of a steering committee who can work together to achieve the goal.

- **Decide what you want to accomplish.**

- Sermons or teaching outlines for faith leaders who will address crime victims' most important concerns?
- Newsletter or inserts for the worship bulletin depicting crime victimization and where to go for help?
- Speakers' bureau of crime victims and victim services providers who will speak to faith groups during National Crime Victims' Rights Week?
- Resource guide for cross-referrals between faith communities and victim assistance agencies?
- Interfaith anti-violence forum or breakfast during National Crime Victims' Rights Week?

- Dating violence materials for faith-based youth groups and organizations?
- Domestic violence screening tools for pre-marriage counseling programs in faith communities?
- A victim memorial service that is spiritually sensitive to all faiths in your community?
- Theologically-based materials for each faith group that emphasize non-violence, compassion for victims, and offender accountability?
- Brochure outlining how members of the faith community can support victims of crime?
- Training about crime victim issues to faith communities?
- A spiritually-sensitive crisis response plan in the event of a community disaster?
- Other ideas?

- **Develop a steering committee with commonalities.**

Most steering committee members will emerge from the initial planning group. A few more key faith leaders may be added. While it would be ideal to bring together all faiths in your community, it is not likely to happen initially. Jews, Christians, and Muslims are likely to work well together because they share the same heritage. Buddhists and Hindus may work well together because of their common faith characteristics. Those who practice traditional Native American spirituality are accepting of other faith groups. If interdenominational groups within Christianity or interfaith groups have already been developed in your community, that's a good place to start.

- **Diversify leadership.**

While one person may be identified to schedule meetings and plan logistics, all participants on the steering committee should have balanced and equal authority in all phases of program development and implementation.

- **Remember that an interfaith program is not a melting pot program.**

An interfaith program is more like a mosaic than a melting pot. It is not realistic to seek to reduce each faith to a common denominator. However, it is reasonable to focus on multiple manifestations and expressions of a common theme, such as peace or anti-violence. For example, Jews may pray to Yahweh for peace; Christians may pray for peace in the name of Jesus; and Muslims may pray for peace directly from the words of the Qu'ran to Allah. Hindus and Buddhists are more comfortable with meditation than prayer. Never expect all groups to pray the same way.

- **Meet at different places to develop the program.**

The sites of various committee meetings should rotate among the faiths, perhaps at a church one time and a synagogue, temple, or mosque the next. Likewise, if the program is to be an annual one, such as an Interfaith Memorial Service for Victims of Crime, the actual site of the service may change from year to year.

- **Don't expect universal participation.**

A mailing to every faith community in your community is not likely to be effective. Rely on steering committee members to distribute information about the program within their own faith groups; these personal contacts are essential for success. Each can introduce the program to their youth groups, congregations, service agencies, seminaries, and faith leaders through personally signed cover letters or direct personal contacts.

Office for Victims of Crime Faith-based Initiatives

The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) within the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice (and sponsor of the 2007 National Crime Victims' Rights Week Community Awareness Projects) offers a variety of resources, including training and technical assistance, about how to partner with multi-faith communities on programs and issues related to crime victim assistance and community safety.

You can visit the OVC Web site at www.ovc.gov, and enter key words such as "faith-based" or "faith communities" into the site's "search" engine. A variety of resources provide great information and ideas on how to partner with multi-faith communities, both during 2007 National Crime Victims' Rights Week and throughout the year.

Tips for Identifying Multi-faith Communities in Your Jurisdiction

A great place to start is to ask members of your NCVRW Planning Committee to identify and provide contact information for the faith institutions at which they worship. Personal relationships with faith leaders are helpful to “get the ball rolling” for this effort.

The Internet has a variety of websites that make it simple to identify different faith communities by denomination, worship preferences, and even special needs for people with disabilities. For this CAP TIP, we simply entered “find a (type of faith denomination site)” into search engines to develop the following list of “one-stop” referrals for most faith denominations.

Please note that the Office for Victims of Crime and NAVAA offer the following resources for reference only, and do not endorse the contents of any of these Web sites.

- Beliefnet offers a user-friendly web site that provides information about and locations/contact information for a wide variety of faith denominations by proximity to state and/or zip code, including:
 - Buddhism.
 - Christianity.
 - Christian Science.
 - Hinduism.
 - Islam.
 - Judaism.
- Mormonism.
- Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).
- Scientology.
- Seventh Day Adventist.
- Sikhism.

The Web site can be accessed at: http://www.beliefnet.com/index/index_10060.html.

- Find a Church.com is an online global directory of houses of worship, and allows you to search its database by denomination, language, worship style, and special needs, among other criteria. You can access its Web site at: www.findachurch.com.
- The Pluralism Project at Harvard University offers links to a variety of faith denominations within the United States. The Web site can be accessed at: <http://www.pluralism.org/directory/search.php>.
- The Web site of the National Council of Churches has a page within its site devoted specifically to programs and issues related to “Overcoming Violence.” This website can be accessed at: <http://www.nccusa.org/>.
- The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism has a Web site that provides a listing of synagogues by clicking on a specific state within a map of the United States. This website can be accessed at: http://www.uscj.org/Find_a_Synagogue_Sea5425.html.
- The Judaism 101 Web site offers links to a number of synagogues, shuls and temples within the United States. This Web site can be accessed at: <http://www.jewfaq.org/shul.htm>.
- About:Islam lists information and referrals for mosques by state and zip code. This website can be accessed at: http://islam.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?zi=1/XJ/Ya&sdn=islam&cdn=religion&tm=15&gps=101_147_1020_547&f=10&tt=14&bt=1&bts=0&zu=http%3A//www.islamicfinder.org/.
- A national directory of Buddhist temples in the United States is available at: http://www.thaiembdc.org/directry/wat_e.htm.
- Cuisine Cuisine has a Web site to identify information about and locations of Hindu temples throughout the United States by state. This website can be accessed at: <http://www.cuisinecuisine.com/HinduTemplesinUS.htm>.

For More Information

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[i] Janice Harris Lord, (2005). 2005 National Crime Victims' Rights Week Resource Guide. Washington, DC: Justice Solutions and Office for Victims of Crime, U.S. Department of Justice.