



CAP TIPS #8

To Improve Public Awareness

Crime Victim/Survivor and Community Awareness/Outreach in Rural Communities

Introduction

There are more than 50 million people who live in rural, remote and frontier jurisdictions in America. There are unique challenges to providing crime victim/survivor assistance, and promoting community awareness about victims' rights and needs in rural jurisdictions, which include:

- Limitations in the availability of victim services.
- Limitations in crime victims' ability to access services.
- Geographical challenges (serving victims across a large region).
- Fewer media outlets to promote victim and public awareness.
- Providing victim services that respect their *confidentiality* and *autonomy* in seeking services in communities where many people know each other.

However, rural/remote/frontier communities have unique benefits in that they are often close-knit, and have long-standing traditions of "helping our neighbors."

This CAP TIP is designed to help you:

- "Frame the issue" of rural crime and victimization.
- Identify national and state resources that can provide information and opportunities for collaboration to promote 2010 NCVRW.
- Build partnerships with allied professionals in rural communities.
- Obtain practical tips for victim/survivor and community outreach to promote 2010 NCVRW in rural/remote/frontier jurisdictions.
- Promote successful media relations to publicize your NCVRW events, as well as victims' rights and services.

Framing the Issue: Obtaining Rural Crime Statistics

It may be helpful for rural jurisdictions to be able to describe the scope and range of crimes that occur in rural communities. The most recent national data available from

the U.S. Department of Justice that compare rural victimization with that of urban and suburban jurisdictions is:

- “Urban, Suburban, and Rural Victimization,” Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2000.
<http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/usrv98.pdf>

However, state and local data are even more relevant in “personalizing” crime and victimization in rural/remote/frontier communities *within your state*. For state-specific rural crime and victimization statistics, check with your state’s Statistical Analysis Center (SAC). You can find your state’s SAC website by going to the Justice Research and Statistics Association at <http://www.jrsa.org/> and click on the “State SACs” map of the United States on the homepage. By clicking on your state, you will access your state’s crime statistics website, which may include resources such as:

- Statistics specific to rural jurisdictions within a state.
- Data comparing rural crime and victimization with crime in urban and suburban jurisdictions.
- Publications that focus on rural crime and victimization.

National Resources Specific to Rural Victim Assistance, Crime Prevention and Public Safety

There are a number of helpful publications and resources that can help you define the scope and prevalence of rural crime and victimization, and promote strategies that best serve victims and survivors:

General Victim and Community Safety Issues

“Victim Services in Rural Law Enforcement”

Office for Victims of Crime

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/infores/RuralVictimServices/welcome.html>

“Rural Victim Assistance”

Office for Victims of Crime

http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/infores/rural_victim_assistance/page1.html

National Victim Assistance Academy chapter, “Rural Victims”

http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/assist/nvaa2002/chapter22_6.html

“Violence and Rural Teens”

South Carolina Rural Health Research Center

http://www.vawnet.org/category/Documents.php?docid=1511&category_id=601

“Don’t Let Your Guard Down Just Because You Live in the Country!”

National Crime Prevention Council Brochure

<http://www.ncpc.org/resources/files/pdf/neighborhood-safety/rural.pdf>

Violence Against Women

“Getting the Word Out: Domestic Violence Awareness in Rural Communities”
West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence

http://www.vawnet.org/category/Documents.php?docid=963&category_id=256

“Unspoken Crimes: Sexual Assault in Rural America”

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

<http://www.nsvrc.org/publications/nsvrc-publications/unspoken-crimes-sexual-assault-rural-america>

“Building the Rhythm of Change: Developing Leadership and Improving Services within the Battered Rural Immigrant Women’s Community”

Family Violence Prevention Fund

<http://endabuse.org/userfiles/file/ImmigrantWomen/Building%20the%20Rhythm%20of%20Change.pdf>

“Sexual Assault in Rural Communities”

National Online VAW Resource Center

http://www.vawnet.org/category/Documents.php?docid=419&category_id=492

“Responding to Sexual Assault in Rural Communities”

(from Australia)

http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/briefing/acssa_briefing3.pdf

Building Partnerships for Victim and Community Outreach

At the national level, there are at least seven great resources that focus specifically on rural issues:

- Rural Assistance Center
(includes URL links to organizations that have a “broad interest in rural health and human services”)
<http://www.raconline.org/experts/group.php>
- Rural Crime and Justice Center
<http://warp6.cs.misu.nodak.edu/rcjc/index.shtml>
- National Center for Rural Law Enforcement
<http://www.cji.edu/ncrle.html>
- National Association for Rural Mental Health
<http://www.narmh.org/>

- The National Grange
(The National Grange has members in 37 states and D.C.; find a local chapter to by going to: <http://www.nationalgrange.org/about/states.htm>. The National Grange’s “*Blueprint for Rural America*” recognizes the need to support programs that protect the rights of crime victims in rural areas. <http://www.nationalgrange.org/legislation/blueprint.htm#point9>.)
<http://www.nationalgrange.org/>
- Center for Rural Affairs
<http://www.cfra.org/>
- National Rural Development Partnership
(Non-partisan forum for issues related to rural communities)
<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/nrdp/>

If you look at these web sites, they can provide you with good ideas about various professions that specialize in providing services within rural communities.

Practical Tips for Victim/Survivor and Community Outreach

The most important tip is to identify physical places and spaces where people gather as a community on a regular basis. This can include places such as:

- Schools.
- Community colleges.
- Community centers.
- Libraries.
- Coffee shops and restaurants.
- The general store.
- Recreation centers and gyms.
- Book stores and other shops.
- Beauty salons and barber shops.
- Senior centers.

Once you identify key places where people meet, you can visit the proprietors or staff, and ask them to display NCVRW posters and outreach resources (personalized with your program’s information), along with information about your NCVRW events and activities. You can also personalize your resources to the place, such as providing bookmarks to libraries and book stores, or information about domestic violence to beauty salons.

Many rural communities have “mobile units” that bring services directly to people’s homes, such as mobile health units, bookmobiles, and Meals on Wheels. If you work in advance with such programs’ sponsors, you can ask them to include your NCVRW and victim awareness materials in the resources and service information they provide to their clients.

Multi-faith communities are often anchors of rural communities. Previous CAP TIPS #4, “*Engaging Multi-faith Communities*” has lots of tips on how to engage multi-faith

communities in your NCVRW activities. A future CAP TIPS will provide congregation leaders with the “Sermon Ideas” and which you can use to ask them to highlight victim assistance services and themes in their sermons and Sunday School classes on April 18, 2010.

It’s also important to know that the Office for Victims of Crime is again partnering with the U.S. Postal Service. Every post office in the United States will have the NCVRW theme poster prominently displayed, with a brochure display containing information about victims’ rights and services. You can ask your Postmaster if you can stand by the display during high-traffic periods (often during the lunch hour), and answer any questions people may have and provide them with information about your NCVRW activities.

Finally, your community may have many rural routes and roads where homes are few and far between. You can consider ordering lawn signs, and have volunteers visit homes to ask the occupants to post your lawn sign in the weeks leading up to and during NCVRW. If you enter “lawn signs” into Google or other internet search engine, you’ll find many companies that offer double-sided lawn signs with the wire holders for as little as \$1.00 each (with extra bargains, such as “no set up fee for artwork” and “free shipping”). This is a great way to conduct individual outreach and provide colorful visual depictions of the NCVRW theme and contact information for your program.

Successful Media Relations

It can be a lot of fun to seek media coverage of your program and NCVRW activities in rural communities! Media outlets tend to be smaller, which eliminates the layers of bureaucracy that are often evident in larger media outlets (the reporter may also be the headline writer and editor). These outlets are often hungry for materials and are more likely to run your press releases, letters to the editor, or op-ed pieces.

Consider the messages you want to convey around NCVRW, for example:

- Any increases in specific types of crimes that may have affected your jurisdiction.
- The scarcity of victim services, and the need for volunteers to provide victim assistance.
- Any partnerships you’ve created with law enforcement and allied justice agencies that improve victim assistance services.

Some great media outlets for your outreach efforts include:

- Daily, weekly and free giveaway newspapers, shoppers and classified advertising publications (such as the “Pennysaver”).
- Community forum newsletters (both paper-based and on-line).
- Radio shows:
 - You can call in to respond to an on-air subject, and add information about your NCVRW activities.

- You can ask to be a guest on any talk shows.
- You can seek to place public service announcements on programming that has a built-in audience (for example, the daily farm report).

Also consider asking your local media outlets to “co-host” your events and, for radio and television stations, provide them with the opportunity to “broadcast live” from your NCVRW special events.

For More Information

Please contact National Crime Victims’ Rights Week Community Awareness Project Consultant Anne Seymour via email at anneseey@atlantech.net; or by telephone at 202.547.1732.