

National Crime Victims' Rights Week
Community Awareness Projects
April 19 - 25, 2015

"Engaging Communities. Empowering Victims."

CAP TIPS is 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 TIP #11

To Improve Public Awareness

Engaging Multi-faith Communities and Sample Sermon

Introduction

The wide variety of faith communities in America and around the world serves an important role in assisting victims of crime on a daily basis. 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 number of faith-related questions.

Multi-faith communities have increasingly become important partners in local, state, tribal, Federal and national efforts to prevent crime, assist victims and promote community and public safety. The Office for Victims of Crime has sponsored many innovative initiatives that involve and engage faith communities and their congregations to identify and meet the diverse faith-related needs of crime victims and survivors (see "OVC Faith-based Initiatives" below).

The 2015 National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW) theme – "Engaging Communities. Empowering Victims" – is quite fitting to encourage proactive engagement of and partnerships among multi-faith communities, criminal and juvenile justice agencies, and victim assistance and community service organizations to empower victims and survivors of crime. Thirty-one years ago in 1984, the national organization Spiritual Dimension in Victim Services was founded in South Carolina to "involve the faith community in violence prevention and victim services." Over three decades of collaborating with multi-faith communities have strengthened the delivery of quality victim services and support – a significant accomplishment that should be celebrated during 2015 NCVRW.

Tips for Engaging Multi-faith Communities in 2015 NCVRW Activities and Throughout the Year

Start early and be patient.

Faith leaders receive more emails and invitations than they can accommodate and often are reluctant to take on new volunteer initiatives, depending on their availability and resources. 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 within 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 respective faiths, 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 2015 NCVRW and identify interfaith members of a Steering Committee who can work together to achieve the goal.

Develop a Steering Committee with commonalities.

Most Steering Committee members will emerge from the initial planning group, and 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 inter-denominational 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.

Decide what you want to accomplish.

There is a wide range of options to engage multi-faith communities, for example:

- Provide sermons (see "Sample Sermon" in this CAP TIP or teaching outlines to faith leaders who can address crime victims' most important concerns and the 2015 NCVRW theme
- Develop newsletter or inserts for the faith communities' worship bulletins depicting crime victimization, its impact, and where to go for help
- Provide copies of the posters included in the 2015 OVC NCVRW Resource Guide to faith institutions that they can personalize to their congregations and prominently display in their facilities before and during NCVRW
- Create a speakers' bureau of crime victims and victim services providers who will speak to faith groups during 2015 NCVRW
- Develop a resource guide for cross-referrals among faith communities and victim assistance agencies
- Host an interfaith anti-violence forum or breakfast during NCVRW

- Develop dating violence prevention and anti-bullying materials for faith-based youth groups and organizations
- Educate faith communities about domestic violence screening tools for pre-marriage counseling programs in faith communities
- Provide guidelines for identifying and assisting victims of human trafficking and slavery
- Sponsor a victim/survivor memorial service that is spiritually-sensitive to *all* faiths in your community
- Partner with correctional agencies to assist and engage offenders and inmates who have personal histories involving trauma and/or victimization
- Provide theologically-based materials for each faith group that emphasize non-violence, compassion for victims, and offender accountability
- Create a brochure outlining how members of all faith communities can support victims of crime
- Conduct training about crime victim issues to faith communities
- Develop a spiritually-sensitive crisis response plan in the event of a community disaster

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 your NCVRW strategy.

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. The hosting faith institution can provide a brief overview of its faith and any efforts it has sponsored to assist victims of crime. Likewise, if the program is to be an annual one, such as an NCVRW Interfaith Memorial Service for Victims of Crime, the actual site of the service may change from year to year.

Don’t expect universal participation.

An email or invitation to every faith institution 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, emails or other direct personal contacts.

Office for Victims of Crime Faith-based Initiatives

While many OVC initiatives and products integrate collaboration with multi-faith communities within their content (please visit www.ovc.gov for additional information and resources), the six documents below may be particularly helpful in framing issues of mutual concern between victim assistance organizations and multi-faith communities:

The "Vision 21: Transforming Victim Services" initiative was launched by OVC in fall 2010 to expand the vision and impact of the crime victim assistance field. This *Final Report* provides a set of findings and broad recommendations, informed by stakeholder forums and literature reviews, that forms a framework for strategic, transformative change. The *Final Report* outlines ways the field can overcome the obstacles it faces and change how it meets victims' needs and addresses those who perpetrate crime.

http://ovc.ncjrs.gov/vision21/pdfs/Vision21_Report.pdf

Good Samaritans: Volunteers Helping Victims Program Handbook and Training Guide (2009)

This online guide is designed for prosecutors, law enforcement agencies, community groups, and faith-based organizations interested in using volunteers to expand their outreach to crime victims. A product of the Good Samaritans program in Mobile, Alabama, it provides guidance for replicating the program in other communities, as Mobile has done, and training volunteers to provide emergency services to victims including home repair, compassionate support, and referrals to other services.

http://www.ovc.gov/publications/infores/Good_Samaritans/welcome.html

Building Victim Assistance Networks with Faith Communities

This document summarizes how the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services, as part of the Office for Victims of Crime's Victim Services 2000 demonstration project, built and used relationships with the faith community to improve victim services. It specifically addresses the need for collaboration; victim needs from a faith-based perspective; elements of collaboration; "lessons learned"; and issues unique to faith-based victim assistance.

http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/infores/faith_based_vict_asst/pfv.html

Partnering with Faith Communities to Provide Elder Fraud Prevention, Intervention and Victim Services (2006)

This bulletin highlights the innovative collaboration between the Denver District Attorney's Office and over 200 faith community partners in Denver. It provides key information and "lessons learned" that may be useful to other communities across the Nation that are interested in developing a similar initiative.

http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/bulletins/elderfraud_case/pfv.html

Faith Community Involvement in Task Forces and Community Initiatives

This document highlights "lessons learned" from the engagement of faith communities in victim assistance collaborations and initiatives.

http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/infores/faith_based_vict_asst/faith_community.html

Spiritual Dimension in Victim Services Manual for Congregations and Clergy – Special Edition for Military Chaplains

This historic curriculum includes information about how faith communities can assist different types of crime victims, along with tips about how to conduct a clergy training event.

https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc_archives/reports/clergy/welcome.html

Tips for Identifying Multi-faith Communities in Your Jurisdiction

A good place to start is to ask members of your NCVRW Planning Committee to identify and provide contact information for the faith communities and institutions where *they* worship. Personal relationships with faith leaders are an important “first step” to engage them in your 2015 NCVRW activities.

There are a variety of websites that ease the process of identifying different faith communities by denomination, location, and programs and services offered.

- Beliefnet (www.beliefnet.com) offers a user-friendly website that provides information about a wide variety of faith denominations, including but not limited to:
 - Atheism
 - Buddhism
 - Catholicism
 - Christianity
 - Christian Science
 - Hinduism
 - Islam
 - Judaism
 - Mormonism
 - Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
 - Scientology
 - Seventh Day Adventism
 - Sikhism
 - Taoism
- Find a Church (www.findachurch.com) is an online global directory of nearly 38,000 faith communities, which allows you to search its database by denomination, language, worship style and special needs, among other criteria.
- The Pluralism Project sponsored by Harvard University (www.pluralism.org) offers links to a variety of faith denominations and religious centers within the United States.
- The National Council of Churches (www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us) has a page within its extensive website devoted specifically to “justice and advocacy.”
- Links to local synagogues across the United States can be found at www.mykaddish.com.
- The Judaism 101 website (www.jewfaq.org) is an “online encyclopedia of Judaism” that also offers links to a number of synagogues, shuls and temples within the United States.
- IslamiCity (www.islamicity.com) provides extensive information and resources about Islam, as well as contact information for mosques by state and zip code.
- The World Buddhist Directory (www.buddhanet.info/wbd) allows you to identify Buddhist temples by clicking on your state within a map of the United States.
- Sikh temples nationwide can be identified by region at www.gurdwara.us.
- Contact and location information for Hindu temples in the United States can be found at www.hindutemples.us.

Sample Sermon

One of the most requested resources from previous CAP recipients is a “sample sermon” that can be provided to leaders of multi-faith communities. The following sample sermon that reflects the 2015 NCVRW theme was written by the Reverend Dr. Richard Lord of Arlington, TX:

*A Journey:
Engaging the Community to Empower Victims*

(A National Crime Victims' Rights Week Sermon based on Exodus 6:2 – 9)

By Dr. Richard (Dick) Lord
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Around 1200 B.C., the Hebrews had become a people without hope.

All they knew about themselves was that they were slaves. They belonged to Pharaoh, King of Egypt, who was the most powerful man on earth.

They had no identity of name or place. They did not know where they came from or where they were going. They had no past. They had no vision of a future. All they knew was that they were victims, and no one could do anything about it.

Then a man named Moses came along and reminded them they were God's children. They were the descendants of Abraham, the One the Hebrew slaves could call "Father." Judaism (and later, Christianity and Islam) trace their roots to Father Abraham.

The idea of being God's children had been so incredible when God first revealed it to Moses, that even he didn't believe it at first. But Moses obeyed and told the Hebrews that they had future. He promised them that they would eventually live in their own land as free human beings.

The Hebrews were highly skeptical. To tell someone who is suffering about a fairy tale life they might live some day seems like a cruel trick. The idea that a gang of runaway slaves could find a new life in their own land was unbelievable. When people are in bondage, whether political, psychological, economical, physical or whatever, the bondage controls them. They have no sense of the future being different.

Bondage could be defined as loss of hope. There are no longer possibilities, only necessities. There are no dreams, only nightmares. There is no light, only darkness.

What does that have to do with serving victims of crime, whether as clergy, mental health professionals, justice professionals, or victim advocates? The most important thing to offer a victim is hope, even when they are in too much pain to experience it. Their situation is not hopeless. A path, a future, a new possibility awaits them, even though their lives will never be the same as before.

Hope may come in the form of therapy or social services that slowly helps the victim or survivor begin to develop a new understanding of him/herself. Hope can derive from a community of voices who come together to speak out against crime and support the survivors. Hope may come from community agencies that provide various kinds of resources as new possibilities. Hope may arise from a faith community that affirms that there is more to life than what has been done to a person. Wherever it originates, if offered at the right time (later more than sooner), a word of hope enables one to undertake the journey of developing new life.

The scriptures are not naïve about the challenges of the hope journey. The Hebrews who followed Moses out of Egypt all died before the 40-year journey was completed. But their children did complete the journey, believing, along with quite a bit of grumbling, that new possibilities awaited them and their own children.

Hope gives the journey direction. Hope guides the pilgrimage, providing meaning that is not determined by an arrival date. So long as we can love one another and seek justice throughout the journey, we contribute in our own small ways to that grandest of human visions where all life is respected and justice prevails.

To invite travelers who have been crushed by life to join us on the journey is to empower them. It is not a pill to be taken, but a beckoning to join in a common vision.

To catch that vision and undertake that journey is to diminish cynicism and increase hope. It is an invitation to a more free and responsive life. Let us arise and be on our way.

"Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is mystery. Today is a gift of God, which is why we call it the present."
- Bil Keane

Spiritually-sensitive Caregiving

An excellent book that highlights key aspects of six faiths – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Native American culture – is [Spiritually Sensitive Caregiving: A Multifaith Handbook](#). Co-authored by four respected national victim advocates, this book describes each faith's ritual beliefs and rituals, death issues and justice-related issues. It can be ordered from Amazon at www.amazon.com.

For More Information

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