

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 #12

To Improve Public Awareness

Sample Letter-to-the-Editor and Guidelines for Publication

Introduction

A letter-to-the-editor to your local newspaper is a great way to "get the word out" about 2015 National Crime Victims' Rights week; promote the NCVRW theme that "engages communities and empowers victims;" and educate your community about the important work of your organization, NCVRW Planning Committee, or coalition. There are some important strategies that can increase the chance that your letter will be published, which are highlighted in this CAP TIP. In addition, a sample letter-to-the-editor that reflects the 2015 NCVRW theme, and that can be easily adapted to your organization and community, is also included.

Ten Tips to Write Your Letter and Get It Published

The following ten tips, along with the "sample letter-to-the-editor" that follows them, should make it fairly easy for you to write an exemplary letter *and* get it published!

1. Your letter should promote 2015 NCVRW, but also include information related to the theme and a challenge or call-to-action that encourages readers to support your organization and/or victims' rights and services.
2. Virtually every print publication prefers to receive letters-to-the-editor by email. It's very important to visit your newspaper's website; carefully review "guidelines for submitting letters-to-the-editor;" and follow those guidelines!
3. *Your letter should be emailed to the newspaper at least one week in advance of NCVRW (April 12). If you'd like your letter to be published during NCVRW, you can make this request (which may or may not be honored).*

4. Letters that grab readers' attention in the first sentence and paragraph are more likely to be published.
5. Letters that are concise, brief and to the point – generally fewer than 300 words – are more likely to be published. Again, check the “guidelines” on your newspaper’s website for specific information about the length of your letter.
6. Letters that make a strong connection to your *local community* – and to issues related to crime and victimization at the *local level* – are more likely to be published.
7. If you want to invite community members to your local NCVRW special events, do so with very specific information (event; goal; day; date; and time) to encourage their attendance.
8. Newspapers and publications reserve the right to edit your letters – usually related to space limitations and *not* to content.
9. Somebody from the newspaper or publication will likely call or email the letter’s author to confirm that it was written by him/her prior to publication.
10. FINALLY, when your letter gets published:
 - Send a brief note of thanks to the editor.
 - Print paper copies for dissemination at your NCVRW events
 - Include the URL link to your newspaper and actual letter in all electronic communications (emails, listservs, websites, etc.) and social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) during NCVRW.

Sample Letter-to-the Editor

Please revise, edit and/or add to this sample letter to meet the needs of your organization, NCVRW Planning Committee, and community. You can also include information and a “community invitation” to any special events you are hosting.

280 Words

Dear Editor:

In our community, virtually everyone *is* or *knows* a victim or survivor of crime.

Crime is not “somebody else’s problem” but, rather, a collective challenge that has often devastating effects on individuals, families, neighborhoods, schools, businesses and our community as a whole. During 2015 National Crime Victims’ Rights Week – April 19 to 25 – we can embrace this special week’s theme that “engages communities and empowers victims” right here in (*city/county/state*).

Anyone in our community can simply be there to help a family member or friend who is harmed by crime, in the immediate aftermath and in the long run. You can simply say “I’m sorry” and

do whatever is needed to help a victim feel safe and supported. People can volunteer to help all crime victims at *(your organization)* and strengthen our efforts to provide quality services and support to survivors who greatly need them.

We can empower victims by simply treating them with the respect and dignity they deserve, and by avoiding anything that judges, blames or shames them. Empowerment means supporting victims' choices whether or not to report a crime; helping victims who do report to understand justice processes and their rights; making sure they have access to health and mental health services if they need them; and doing whatever is needed to help them on their often difficult journey to justice and healing.

(INSERT ANY SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR NCVRW EVENTS HERE)

During this week and throughout the year, *(your organization)* invites our community to help us help victims and survivors of crime; and to help us make sure that victims' rights and services are not just celebrated annually, but practiced daily.

Sincerely,

Name/Title
Organization

(NOTE: be sure to include all your contact information – name, snail mail address, email address, organization telephone number, your personal cell phone number, and agency website with your submission)

For More Information

Please contact National Crime Victims' Rights Week Community Awareness Project Consultant Anne Seymour via email at annesey@atlantech.net; or by telephone at 202.487.7329.