

A. WHAT ARE THE MAJOR ISSUES IN YOUR STATE, IF ANY, THAT HINDER VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS IN ASSISTING CRIME VICTIMS IN FILING FOR COMPENSATION BENEFITS AND IN UNDERSTANDING STATE VICTIM COMPENSATION ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS?

BARRIERS TO FILING CVCP

Oregon's Crime Victims' Compensation Program (CVCP) continues to provide quality, reliable services to victims and providers in the state of Oregon. While considered a forerunner in state compensation programs, the management and staff of the Oregon CVCP continue to look for methods whereby they can improve their efficiency and effectiveness in meeting the needs of those they serve.

As of 2006, and reported last year, the CVCP has a dedicated Compensation Manager, Rebecca Shaw who focuses primarily on the work of this Section. Under Ms. Shaw's leadership the CVCP continues to grow and thrive. The CVCP is currently processing a historic level of applications with professionalism, courtesy and the needs of the victim in mind. Despite the work to staff ratio, the CVCP has put into practice procedures that allow them to accomplish what never was achieved in the past. For instance, files are archived on a regular basis, the predetermined claims backlog remains at benchmark levels and payments are being processed more quickly due to a shorter "pending" period.

The CVCP continues to receive feedback from community partners and grantees alike that affirm the program is truly an asset to Oregon's victims of crime. For instance, the Douglas County Victim Assistance Program in Southern Oregon states that their "*access to the CVCP information online has been a great asset.*" This is echoed by the Crook and Jackson County programs who respectively state, "*I like the on-line lookup for claims it makes it a lot more assuring that it is there and it works,*" and "*the new CVCP look up system is terrific.*"

Grantees report that a portion of clients are not being reached by CVCP benefits, either because they do not want to apply for CVCP funds, or they are unable to apply. This is an area which the Crime Victims' Services Division (CVSD) and grantee programs continue to address. Grantee feedback summarizing the barriers to victims completing CVCP applications is listed below, grouped according to the most significant common barriers. As in the previous reporting period, grantee feedback on this topic reflects both progress and challenges.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BARRIERS

Project DART, a Portland based program serving disabled victims of crime, states that they continue to face the same issues when assisting survivors to complete applications for the CVCP. Specifically, they state, "The language in the application is not accessible (not readily understood/easy to comprehend) to all populations and, as such, is difficult for many crime victims with disabilities to read. Also, due to previous/current institutional abuse/neglect, etc., many crime victims with disabilities do not trust the

CVCP to provide the help outlined in the brochure/application. Historically, the criminal justice system has not provided comprehensive, culturally specific crime victim services and accommodation to people with disabilities.” Across the state in rural, Southeastern Malheur County, the Director of the Victim Assistance Program states that a major barrier is their difficulty in “communicating with non-English speaking victims.” Further still, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, state that “Russian speaking victims usually do not report to police within 72 hours.”¹ In addition to the above considerations, grantees across the State report many other issues that inhibit culturally specific victims from seeking the relief offered by the CVCP. Catholic Charities, El Programa Hispano in Portland, states that, “Oregon’s law to limit driving licenses to those who can provide legal residency is further driving our community to the extreme margins of society. This promotes further isolation which in turn makes our community at greater risks to be victimized.” Project Dove and the Union County District Attorney Victim Assistance Program in Eastern Oregon add that fear of deportation or fines and fees owed to the court system prevent many Latino/Latina victims from reporting domestic violence.

VICTIMS’ FEARS, ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS CONCERNING CVCP

The Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) located in Portland reports that “some barriers stopping VOCA clients applying for CVCP are family pressures, fear of the offender, cultural values, language barriers, and fear of the police.” Also in Portland at Bradley-Angle House, staff report that, “fear of reporting or involvement with the criminal justice system on the part of survivors [inhibits their applying to the CVCP]. CVCP money may not always be usable for pressing needs that survivors demonstrate. Funds for housing and transportation remain a primary need.” In Hood River County along the Columbia River Gorge, the District Attorney’s Victim Assistance Program finds that they “rarely see victims present at hearings. There is typically too much fear.”

GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION, MOBILITY AND OTHER CONSTRAINTS

As resources continue to be stretched, grantees report that victims who are geographically isolated from their agencies are seeking services even less than before. The Willowa County District Attorney’s Victim Assistance Program in Northeastern Oregon state that they continue to struggle with, “clients who have difficulties getting to the office due to geographic distance, lack of transportation, lack of childcare or lack of ability to cover the expense of getting here.” Across the State in Portland, Parents of Murdered Children reports that they would appreciate “having funds so members can attend meetings, while others do not have money for transportation. Some members do not even have money for postage stamps.” In Southern Oregon, Illinois Valley Safe House Alliance finds that, “most victims do not need the assistance that crime victim compensation offers. They need a home and an income.” In the central part of the State, the Jefferson County District Attorney’s Victim Assistance Program reports that victims suffer from, “isolation due to a lack of transportation options in the area.”

¹ This requirement can be waived for good cause and CVSD continues to work with grantees to address this barrier.

GRANTEE FEEDBACK ON THE APPLICATION PROCESS

CVSD receives a considerable amount of feedback regarding the CVCP application process that is as varied as the programs it funds. For instance, CARES Northwest, the Metropolitan Regional Services Provider for Child Assessment Centers, reports that, “children who may have been victimized are often in the legal custody of the alleged offender. CARES Northwest is frequently faced with having to obtain authorization for our services and making an application to the CVCP from the person who may have harmed the child.” Lake County Crisis Center indicates a disconnect in getting information out to the community as, “local law enforcement often does not give victims the cards explaining their rights and access to crime victims’ assistance.” The Columbia County Child Abuse Assessment (Amani) Center states that, “over the 2007-2008 grant period, the Amani center has had difficulty obtaining CVCP paperwork in two situations. At times there are barriers when children are in the legal custody of the state. Karly’s Law has created a barrier to completing paperwork.” (See a further explanation of Karly’s Law in Section F). In Northeastern Oregon, the Umatilla County Victim Assistance Program reports that, “postage free envelopes were previously provided with the application and are no longer available due to the anticipated budget cuts in the federal money normally received.”

CVSD EFFORTS TO ALLEVIATE BARRIERS

Despite the efforts of the Crime Victims’ Services Division to improve service delivery and accessibility, barriers remain to victims accessing CVCP benefits. The Crime Victims’ Services Division, in conjunction with community partners, will continue to address these barriers to service until all eligible victims of crime have the ability, should they choose, to apply for assistance through the CVCP.