

Ensuring every victim always has a place at our table.

Department of Corrections, Victim Services Program

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A table setting from Victim Services' display SAVING A PLACE AT THE TABLE" presented during Victims' Rights Week April 2007

Greetings From the Director

Amy Holloway

It was just about four years ago in October that I ran my first and, may I add, last marathon.

Now those of you who know me are probably thinking to yourself, "she ran a marathon? How is that even possible"? Well running a marathon had always been one of those things on my "list of things to do before I die"... why exactly, I am not quite sure. It just was. So on the day in the spring of 2004, when I got the flyer in the mail from Team in Training, which is one of the fundraising arms of the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society I decided to check it out. My Dad had died of leukemia in 1992 so the idea of raising money to help find a cure for leukemia while being able to check something off of my "to do list" appealed to me. During the Orientation Meeting, I looked around the room at all of the young faces eager to start the training process and a bit overwhelmed about raising the money required to participate in the marathon. I, on the other hand, realized that for me raising the \$2,500 dollars required to do the marathon was going to be a piece of cake. The hard part was going to be the training and actually running the 26.3 miles. We were a perfect match!

I trained for a solid six months. I trained in all kinds of weather conditions and with all kinds of physical ailments. Most of my training time was spent building up my endurance and much of it was spent contemplating. I am an exceptionally slow runner so you can just imagine how much time I had to "think" about stuff, much of which ended up in my weekly newsletters that were sent to my donors, i.e. friends and family members who I "shook down" for support and who helped me raise over \$5,000 in thirty days.

One of the more interesting observations I had during those six months of marathon training was the realization that usually things in the universe that are far away appear very small and become bigger only as you get closer to them. I found the opposite to be true,

however, when undertaking a large task. When looking at a task it always looms large as you are about to tackle it and gets smaller the closer you are to accomplishing it. When I first started thinking about doing the marathon it seems like a daunting task. The closer it got, the more doable it became.

I chose to run The Marine Corps Marathon, which is "a people's marathon" meaning that not only elite runners can participate but regular shlubs, like me, are allowed to run it as well. On that unseasonably warm October day in 2004 I was surrounded by over 16,000 runners, many of whom were running in honor and in memory of all kinds of different people: cancer survivors, 911 victims and Iraqi war casualties. My Dad's picture was on my running shirt right over my heart.

While it wasn't the prettiest of runs, I did manage to finish the marathon in under 7 hours, and I can safely say without equivocation that it was the most physically demanding thing I have ever done, and that includes climbing Mt. Sinai twice and giving birth to three wonderful children without the benefit of anesthesia.!

I bring this up not to brag, although I do have moments when I would like to slip it into casual conversation just to see what might happen, but because I have been thinking a lot about that marathon lately and the challenge of taking on something that big and so demanding of my time, strength and endurance.

Two years ago when we got the BJA funding to automate the Department's victim notification system, it seemed like an overwhelming project that would take an enormous amount of time, strength and endurance. It seemed like an overwhelmingly daunting task. Today, as we approach the launch date in April 2009 of the VAN Service, when the victim notification process in Vermont will finally be automated, it doesn't feel so overwhelming anymore.

Now, don't get me wrong, there is still plenty to do, but somehow the closer we get to

actually getting the service up and running it doesn't feel as impossible and big. It feels a lot like it did at mile 20, when most of the marathon run was behind me but there still remained the most significant amount left to do...the last 6.2 miles.... Many of which were up hill!

Some of the "hills" that will be coming up in the next few months include; staff training, getting survivors registered, changing attitudes and behaviors... to mention just a few.

Finally, as I think about these next few months and the great final effort that will be exerted to get us over the "finish line", I have come to realize a few important things. Like the marathon run, all the work that has been put into creating the VAN service has been totally worth it, the enormous size of the challenge has decreased the closer we get to completion and most importantly, these sorts of things are never accomplished without the help of a lot of people chipping in to do their part.

Amy



Governor Douglas To Participate in Annual Red Ribbon Tree Ceremony



Governor Jim Douglas Lights the “Red Ribbon Tree” in Memory of the Victims of Impaired Drivers.

Each year many Vermonters including members of the Victim Impact Panel and their families, law enforcement, SAP Counselors, prevention program students and advisors, and other community partners remember Vermonters who have been injured or killed as the result of alcohol or drug-related crashes. This year the Red Ribbon Tree Ceremony was held on **Wednesday, December 3rd at 4:00 p.m. in the House Chamber of the Vermont Statehouse.**

Attendees honored family members or friends impacted by impaired drivers by creating a personalized ribbon that was hung on the tree which was prominently displayed in the Statehouse throughout December. Prior to the event, members of the Vermont Victims Impact Panel and the Vermont Safety Education Center decorated the tree with hundreds of ribbons that had been placed on the tree during previous ceremonies. Additionally, silver and white ornaments have been added to the tree each year by organizations, groups or agencies who work to prevent alcohol and other drug related tragedies.

The red ribbon has come to symbolize the importance of preventing impaired driving and is a reminder to everyone to buckle up at all times. Wearing a safety belt can be the best defense against an impaired driver. Everyone is encouraged to participate in the annual “Tie One On” campaign to remind other drivers to avoid alcohol while driving and in so doing prevent needless tragedies on Vermont roads.

Now in its 18th year, The Red Ribbon Tree Ceremony was sponsored by the Vermont Victims Impact Panel Program, Vermont Safety Education Center and the Governor’s Highway Safety Program.

NEW Collaboration Seeks to Reduce Highway Deaths Among Youth in Vermont

The Department of Correction's Vermont Victim Impact Panel Program (VVIPP), which is run through the Department's Victim Services Program, is teaming up with Vermont's Safety Education Center to address the leading cause of injury and death for young people – automobile crashes.

In 2005 there were 21,800 crashes in Vermont. The highest rates for DUI and alcohol involved crashes were for persons between 18 and 24 years of age. Crash rates for all operators were highest among persons in the age range of 15-24.

Both programs recently received funding through The Governor's Highway Safety Program to support and expand their programs. This funding will increase the capacity of the Vermont Victim Impact Panel Program to recruit, train and support new volunteer impact panel speakers. Through the Vermont Victim Impact Panel Program survivors of impaired and/or unsafe driving have the chance to share their stories and potentially impact the behavior of others.

The Vermont Safety Education Center (VSEC) will focus its efforts to reduce traffic fatalities and injuries in the 15- 24 age group by working with Drivers Educators and School Resource Officers to improve parent and teen education for beginning drivers. There will also be a focus on preventing underage drinking and impaired driving. This collaboration will result in more victim impact panel volunteers being available to do presentations during youth focused, and community awareness and prevention programs.

If you know about a victim of a DUI or Impaired Driving crash who may wish to learn more about victim impact panels or if you know about an organization would like to host a panel please contact Ariel Brugger, Coordinator for VVIPP at 802-251-0007 or arielbrugger@verizon.net. Anyone seeking information about the Graduated Drivers Licensing Law or preventing underage drinking and impaired driving can contact Carol Rose at 802-229-2949 or crose@vtsafety.org.



“I Have a Question...”

where your questions get answered

When is the automated system going to be up and running?

The VAN Service, the Vermont Automated Notification Service is scheduled to “go live” in April. In late March and early April representatives from Appriss, the vendor for the Service, will be coming to Vermont to conduct mandatory training on how the service works. Casework and Security Staff will be required to participate in the training to understand how to register victims (and themselves) onto the system and to learn how to get victim contact information from the service. Be looking for the training announcements.

Once the VAN Service is officially “launched” all notifications will be done automatically. Staff will be required to contact victims to involve them in release planning activities, but staff will not be required to send notification letters or make notification calls except in some specific instances such as the death of an inmate or an out of cycle parole board hearing.



Will there be a new Victim Notification Directive?

A new Victim Notification Directive is working its way through the approval process. An interim Directive be ready for the March/April training.

Why would a DOC employee, a law enforcement officer or an advocate want to register for notification on the VAN Service?

The VAN Service has two distinct features: Information and Notification. The service allows anyone both to call the toll free number to find out where an offender is located and register to receive phone or email notification when there is a change in an offender’s status. Staff from the DOC, law enforcement or a State’s Attorneys advocate might want to register so that they can be informed when there is a change in an offender’s status, such as a release, or a new arrest.



How will victims know about the VAN Service?

As part of the “launch” there will be a press conference, public service announcements and media coverage. We will be receiving posters, tear off cards, and brochures that will be available to law enforcement and advocacy groups/agencies that will instruct individuals on how to register. Registration can be done over the phone or through the internet. All registrations will be operator assisted.

In addition, Victim Services will be sending letters out to all victims who are currently registered with the DOC to let them know about the Van Service and to give them instructions on how to register on the VAN Service. The registration process is very easy and straightforward.





VAN Service Update

Work continues to get the VAN (Vermont Automated Notification) Service up and running. In October a contract was signed with Appriss, the Kentucky based company that developed the automated notification technology known as VINE and who are building the VAN Service for the State of Vermont. The official “implementation launch” was held in Kentucky the week of October 13th where staff from Victim Services began work with the Appriss staff on the notification scripts and the technology interface. Work on the technology side began in earnest in early November when two Appriss integration engineers visited with the AHS IT staff to begin the interface process between the DOC database and the VINE system. Testing of that interface will begin in January. Live testing, where members of the DOC Workgroup will register and receive notifications, will be scheduled for late February. The official “kick off” press conference will be scheduled for April during Crime Victims’ Rights Week.

Printed materials, including posters, brochures and tear off cards, are in the draft approval stage and the finished products should be arriving in Vermont some time in late February.

Training of DOC staff and stakeholders will be scheduled for late March and two weeks in April. Staff will receive information on how the VAN Service works, how to register victims/affected parties and how to access victim contact information. Staff will also be trained on the Interim Victim Notification Directive.

Homicide Survivors Support Groups Meets to Celebrate the Holidays Together

On December 6, 2008, 15 members of the Homicide Survivors Support Group along with four DOC staff members met in Hardwick for a holiday celebration. For many surviving family members of homicide, Thanksgiving and the December Holiday season are difficult times. While the rest of the world is gearing up for family gatherings, many homicide families choose not to celebrate the holidays at all. Memories of holidays past and the reminder that the victim is no longer with them make it very difficult to feel joyful. Being with others who understand what it is like is one way for these families to cope. Over a lunch of “comfort food”, which included corn chowder, tuna casserole, cheesy potatoes, and cheesecake, the group shared holiday memories, talked about creating new traditions, and generally enjoyed each others company. The book, Tear Soup by Pat Schwiebert and Chuck DeKlyen, a lovely book on death and grieving, written for children but much appreciated by adults, was read amidst a mix of tears and laughter. This group may hereafter be referred to as the Tear Soup Group!

The plaques, which they had created in memory of their loved ones during the early fall gathering, were hanging in their final spot in the apple orchard. Some group members went out to see them.

The next gathering of the “Tear Soup Group” is scheduled for Saturday in February 7th in Grand Isle. For more information about the Homicide Survivor’s Support Group, please contact Amy Holloway at 241-2302.



A Revered Space for Victim/Survivors in Vermont

Nina's journey

A few years ago I attended a conference in Boston and heard about the construction of a garden for homicide survivors. Since that day I have been dreaming of a garden here in Vermont for all victims and survivors of crime.

My drive for this garden is a very personal one. I lost my mother in 1999 in a tragic crime. Now, as a part of the homicide survivors group, put together by Amy Holloway, Director of Victim Services at the Department of Corrections, I am determined to create a way for my mother's legacy to be remembered for who she was; I want a place that reflects her spirit for life, not only for myself, but also for my children. I want other survivors to learn about Courage in Bloom, a garden where they can remember their spirit for surviving, a place that we can all turn to for inspiration and knowing that we aren't alone.

Kristin Prior, former Coordinator for Victim Services at the Department of Corrections, crafted the affectionate name for the garden - Courage in Bloom. "Courage in Bloom" means to me, the strength needed to get up and begin every day anew. It is a reminder to me that crime impacts all of us personally but it should not define us. I became involved with the idea of a garden in Vermont after visiting two similar sites; one in Boston, Massachusetts and one in Albany, New York. I was so moved by the power and the message that these gardens displayed outwardly toward the community as a gesture of compassion toward victim/survivors, like myself, that I was driven to create a similar space here in Vermont.

When I had my mother's ashes sent to England, her birth country, I realized I needed a place to go to and remember her, a place to reflect, a place where I could remember her as a mother, grandmother to my four children and a friend, and finally, a place to celebrate my mother's life. I hope this Garden will be a place where all victims of crime can come to find comfort and strength. I hope the Garden will be a visible monument about the impact of crime on people in Vermont and a place for professionals to educate our communities.

A garden, to me, is a place to remember that life continues. I have found that strength comes from a place deep inside me, with love and support from my family, friends, and my Vermont community, that strength blooms everyday. I hope the "Courage in Bloom Garden" can be that reminder for everyone.

The Garden

This dream is becoming a reality! Working with other Victim/Survivors, who have been just as determined and excited about the idea of a garden, we worked with the Center for Crime Victim Services, the Victim Advocate at the U.S. Attorney's office and the Lamoille States Attorney Victim Advocate, among other victim service providers and, with the help of Governor Douglas and the Department of Buildings and Grounds, secured the site for the Garden, close to the State Capitol in Montpelier, just two years ago.

Together we have raised funds for "Courage in Bloom," secured the land donated by the State, and worked with a phenomenal team of landscape architects Jean Vessering and Milford Cushman. They fashioned a compassionate design for all to enjoy. Nationally renowned sculptor, Chris Curtis, from Stowe, in collaboration with his wife, Tari Swenson created a poignant sculpture entitled "Keeping Heart" which is the focus of the garden. Currently, we are thrilled to be working with the Association of General Contractors which is pitching in to help us secure material donations through its membership.

Garden description

The Garden is an inspired spiral design. Located between 10 and 12 Baldwin St. in Montpelier, the path begins at a beautiful 35-year-old Norway maple. Plantings gently cascade along the curved physically accessible stone pathway, which descends toward the walls of the center plaza. Curved seating height walls frame this center plaza, which gently invites a visitor to gaze at or lay a hand on the "Keeping Heart" sculpture.

This lovely site will be used for reflection and will stand as a visual testament that Vermonter's care about the impact that crime has on victim/survivors, and also for bill signings, vigils and speak outs.

Those interested in making a donation to the Courage in Bloom Garden should make the check to: **COURAGE IN BLOOM** and send it to Sharon Davis, Center for Crime Victim Services, 58 Main Street, Waterbury, Vermont 05676

Caught Ya Doing Something Good !

*Where we highlight those in the Department who go
"above and beyond"*



On Wednesday December 17, 2008 members of the Central Office staff participated in a Tea and Silent Auction sponsored by the Victim Services Program to raise money to support Brooke Bennett's family for Christmas and to support the Victim Services Homicide Survivor's support group. Thanks to the generosity of the DOC Central Office staff, the event raised \$800.

The Victim Services Program staff solicited items from Central Office and DOC staff and expected to raise about \$100-\$200, according to Amy Holloway, Director of Victim Services. **"We knew we had some talented co-workers, but who knew they were that talented!"** Holloway went on to say. Over fifty five (55) items were donated, including wooden bowls, jewelry, hand knit scarves, handbags and socks, baked goods such as cheesecakes, brownies and cookies as well as an assortment of items for the home and for hiking and travel. Fortified by an assortment of homemade holiday cookies, hot cider and cocoa, the auction guests commenced to bidding on their favorite items at 2:30. Over the next hour and a half they employed a variety of strategies to ensure that they were the highest bidder on their chosen item, including coming and going to check on the progress of their bid, calling in from remote locations to proxy bidders and lurking in the corners casting "stink eye" looks and making veiled threats to the competition. In the end it was all in good fun and for a good cause.

"The silent auction was anything but silent. Think full tackle EBay" Tom Lamson said.

Lamson went on to describe the afternoon. **"CO staff gathered even before the bidding opened. There was much conviviality and the superb cookies were eagerly consumed. A great spirit of taking filled the air! The bidding was friendly, yet ferocious. Each and every item had names of eager givers under it. As Cheryl Gates shouted and counted down the clock as 4 approached, bidders stood by like vultures to get their last bids in. Gary Dillon actually kept his pen on the sign up sheet of one item till the last 30 seconds of bidding to keep competitors at bay. This was a great team- building event. Everyone was ultimately magnanimous to each other and generous to the victims of crime."**

A special thanks goes out to Cheryl Gates who donated her work area so that the items could be spread out and who helped set up. Thanks too to the many generous and talented donors of items including: Wilhimena Picard, Jill Ryan, Ashley Fisk and Friends, Rose Jackman, Susan Shonelle Smith, Keith Tallon, Kata, Elaine Davis, Leanne Garland, Amy Holloway, Lynne Walther, Cindy Griffith, Bill Lawhorn, Ira Solace, Kathleen Patten, Gary Dillon, Cheryl Gates, and Mo MacIntire. (Sorry if I missed anyone)

A Big Thanks to everyone who helped to make this a very successful fundraiser.

Way to go Central Office Staff! Be Looking for the next event in Spring or early Summer to help the Courage in Bloom Victims Memorial Garden!