

What Are Crime Victim Service Providers and What do They Do?

Victim service provider organizations that are members of the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) and the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault (IowaCASA) offer support services to victims of violent crimes, including domestic and sexual violence, rape, child abuse, stalking, human trafficking, and homicide. Victim service providers work with law enforcement, county attorneys, defense attorneys, and community service providers to support victims in crisis and they specialize in providing post-crisis services that help victims recover physically, financially, and mentally from violent crime. Organizations offer a range of victim services that vary by agency and available funding: counseling and safety planning, help finding safe housing, replacing identity documents, understanding rights, navigating legal and criminal proceedings (protection orders, victim witnesses), applying for victim compensation, finding jobs, and regaining financial security. Specific services provided may include:

CRISIS SERVICES

- Crisis intervention: 24/7 crisis helplines (phone); in-person; chat line (texting)
- Crisis accompaniment, e.g., support rape victim at hospital during forensic exam, or at crime scene if requested during law enforcement investigation of murder or assault
- Safety planning (including children and pets)
- Culturally specific services and/or referrals to culturally specific programs

LEGAL SYSTEM RELATED SERVICES

- Help victims understand and access legal rights and access victim compensation funds
- Legal/court advocacy and accompaniment to court hearings, meetings with lawyers
- Civil legal assistance to sexual assault victims in middle school, high schools, colleges and universities including support changing classes, housing, negotiating schedule change, or safety
- Assistance with protective orders: filing, explaining process, hearings, and enforcement
- Witness trial preparation, and assistance securing transportation and childcare
- Assistance with translation/interpretation services for immigrant and Deaf survivors
- Assistance accessing support and legal protections for immigrant assault & trafficking victims

HOUSING and SELF-SUFFICIENCY

- Shelter/Housing assistance: emergency shelter/housing, obtaining & maintaining permanent housing, eviction prevention, enrollment in housing support programs
- Childcare assistance/referrals
- Assistance replacing identity documents; enrolling or accessing food, health, and basic support services including support documenting abuse to meet program requirements.
- Financial literacy education; Matched savings services
- Transportation assistance: provide or facilitate public transport to shelter, jobs, court, school, appointments; arrange/fund car repairs
- Arranging foster care for pets for victims experiencing homelessness or fleeing abuse

EMPLOYMENT and WORK-RELATED SERVICES

- Consulting and training for employers to decrease domestic violence in the workplace and increase safety for specific situations

- Assistance applying or enrolling in education or training programs; support searching/applying for jobs
- Assistance for victims needing specialized clothing or equipment for workplace or job searches (i.e. safety goggles, boots, an interview outfit)
- Connection to brain injury or vocational rehabilitation programs, ADA requirements

PARENT/CHILD SERVICES

- Support and services to parents engaged with the child welfare system to reduce foster care placement and increase child safety
- Information and support for parents whose children are crime victims, including healthy parenting and coping with trauma behaviors
- Support for child and adult survivors of child sexual abuse

HEALTH CARE

- Mental health services including counseling, support groups, referrals to long term supports
- Medical care referrals, assistance accessing care, getting prescriptions filled
- Appointment accompaniment for victims receiving potentially re-traumatizing care
- Collaborating with local case managers and service providers to provide victim services to clients with mental illness, developmental disabilities, or other cognitive impairments
- Hosting well-child, immunization, and other pop-up clinics

BUILDING SAFER COMMUNITIES

- Training and support to other community professionals including law enforcement, courts, DHHS staff, health care providers, substance abuse treatment providers, and community groups
- Participation on community boards and action committees related to housing, safety, drug-affected children, trafficking, domestic abuse, violence prevention, etc.
- Community education including healthy relationships and sexual violence prevention programs in schools, youth-based organizations and presentations to community groups
- Participation in community events, job fairs, celebrations, etc, to inform the public about victim services, healthy relationships, and violence prevention
- Participate in targeted training initiatives for professionals in key community roles to educate re how to recognize signs of victimization and how to respond appropriately.

AND MUCH MORE!

Services available vary according to need, resources available in local communities, and most of all FUNDING available to provide services and to hire and maintain trained staff. The amount of victim services funding impacts not only the number of victims organizations can serve, but also the type of services available and where victims can find support. Post-crisis support services are critically important to violent crime victims because they need support beyond what family and friends can provide. Access to post-crisis support services and access to services in rural areas is most threatened by insufficient funding because offering these services is resource intensive.

For more information contact Laura Hessburg at Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence; laurah@icadv.org

DESCRIPTIONS: SPECIFIC SERVICES

Crisis intervention: encompasses all actions performed over the telephone (24/7 crisis helplines), online (text 'chat' lines) or in person with an individual in crisis to stabilize emotions, clarify issues, provide support, and explore options to meet immediate needs. This can include assessments of risk/danger, assessment of needs, safety planning, referrals, information about legal rights/remedies, formulating action plan.

Culturally Specific Services: Survivors are more likely to seek services from providers and organizations familiar with their culture, language and background. Service providers in Iowa's 7 culturally specific programs and culturally competent services offered in mainstream programs address the diverse and unique needs of survivors from specific communities because they understand the complex, multi-layered challenges and obstacles these victims face when attempting to access services.

Housing assistance: includes 24/7 emergency shelter, placement in safe homes or hotel/motels, financial assistance in obtaining and maintaining permanent housing, assistance with moving and negotiating with landlords, or assisting victims in staying safe in their homes. Victim service providers conduct both housing stability and lethality assessments when assisting victims with housing solutions. Victim service agencies are also enrollment sites for Iowa Secretary of State's "Safe at Home" address confidentiality program.

Safety planning (including children and pets): A safety plan is an individual plan to address the barriers to achieving safety and well-being faced by survivors of abuse. Victim advocates work with survivors on a detailed plan to stay safe and to obtain the services needed/requested by the survivor. Safety planning is an ongoing conversation, e.g. developing plans for fleeing an abusive relationship, for remaining in the relationship, for safety during court proceedings, or for situation specific occurrences (child visitation, partner violating protective order, workplace situations, maintaining housing).

Legal/court advocacy: purpose is to ensure fair treatment and accessibility for victims within formal court systems; includes basic information about legal rights, options, and processes; information and assistance in obtaining a civil protective order; accompaniment to depositions, and hearings for criminal and civil cases; referrals for legal representation; assistance with translation services, faxing documents to another county, etc.; assistance preparing immigration paperwork to enable survivors to access legal protections available under federal law.

Education/Employment assistance: includes an array of activities including assistance identifying and applying for educational courses or training programs; connecting clients to programs for adult learners, life-skills training, job training; assistance with job searches, filling out applications, practicing interviewing skills, etc.

Financial and economic independence education: The Survivors Achieving Financial Empowerment Program (S.A.F.E) offers financial literacy and matched savings accounts to assist survivors in healing from economic abuse. Economic abuse or controlling a partner's ability to earn/access money or maintain housing/employment is very common in abusive relationships. Escaping violence often means losing economic independence and the means to regain it. This work is supported by many community foundations including the Green State Credit Union Foundation, The Allstate Foundation, The Principal Foundation, and the Iowa Credit Union Foundation.