

Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services

**EMERGING ISSUES/NOTABLE TRENDS FFY18
(Question 17)**

12/21/2018

A number of emerging issues and notable trends have been identified during the reporting period.

One disturbing trend has been an upswing in recent firearms/shooting incidents. During the week of September 20th, there were three workplace shootings that happened within 24 hours. This is a good reminder of just how important crisis response is and illustrates the importance of our services.

The Virginia Victim Assistance Network (VVAN) Helpline has had several calls from people who presented as suffering from mental health issues. Often callers will report that they are being stalked or harassed but are unable to produce any evidence that would indicate a real threat to law enforcement. Callers will report that the government is trying to kill them or that a former friend or partner is hiring people to gather information on them or have them committed to a psychiatric hospital. In those cases the Victim Assist Helpline Coordinator will often reach out to local agencies that have already worked with the callers to identify whether or not there is a legitimate threat, and will then provide crisis intervention and encourage callers to receive treatment for the anxiety caused by the stalking/harassment.

Programs have reported emerging issues regarding lack of access to low-cost psychiatric care for clients. The vast majority of program participants are denied Medicaid. While they have access to community psychiatrists and mental health counselors, the cost of medication and medication management is not sustainable without health insurance or funding.

During Federal Fiscal Year 18, VOCA-funded, victims' services programs based in southwest Virginia identified various trends and emerging issues that influenced the delivery of crime victims' services. A significant challenge includes limited access to transportation. A large portion of the geographic scope of Southwest Virginia is comprised of rural mountainous territory. Data from the Census Bureau indicates that many residents within the region do not have access to personal or public transportation. This creates barriers to accessing vital resources needed in periods of victimization, treatment, and recovery. Delays in services, extensive waiting lists, lack of community knowledge of services, and failure to seek services have been reported outcomes resulting from limited transportation. Due to the large geographic area that many agencies cover within the region, some VOCA-funded organizations do not have the adequate mileage funding, vehicles, or staff to commit to the extensive travel to deliver services in neighboring localities. Having limited access to adequate transportation for victims of crime continues to be an ongoing barrier in service delivery for victims located in southwest Virginia.

There have also been reports of seeing a high number of senior victims of abuse, who oftentimes do not want to report the abuse for various reasons. It is difficult to determine if it is an actual trend or if we are becoming aware of it due to new efforts to help victims of unreported crimes. During the VOCA New Initiative FY18 grant cycle, Norfolk, Virginia reported a 30% increase in victims over 60 years of age in

one quarter, and a 40% increase in victims over 60 years of age in another quarter. Many of these victims are reporting victimization that has either been going on for an extended period of time or happened months before coming in.

The Sexual Assault Resource Agency (SARA) of Charlottesville's Inmate Outreach Advocacy Project has noted that nearly all of its recent client referrals have substance abuse issues, which is a common coping mechanism for people with a history of trauma. The Outreach Advocate has seen improvement in jail staff involving mental health counselors, but the jail is now short-staffed again, and it is affecting the Outreach Advocate's ability to access clients and the length of time it takes for clients to meet with the Outreach Advocate and get back to their cells. The advocate has noted an increase in referrals who are declining to meet with SARA, as they are not ready to deal with their past trauma. This is an example of substance abuse being a constant obstacle in the recovery process. This example also highlights the lack of professional staffing levels in state institutions such as prisons, but is also the case for mental health facilities, legal aid organizations, and sexual assault forensic examination programs.

Trends around victims who identify as LGBTQ include:

- LGBTQ Spanish Speaking Victims of Crimes in our service area struggle to access services because of language access barriers and the struggles to find places that are safe and accessible to their diverse and specific needs.
- Black transgender women continue to be a population that suffer some of the most dramatic and violent crimes, in our service area, and across the country.
- Transgender and gender non-conforming victims are fearful of being forced to identify as a gender that they are not in medical, legal, and government systems, with an increased feeling of an urgency to get gender marker changes up to date.
- Some LGBTQ people of color victims are feeling enhanced fear of law enforcement and apprehensive about even greater militarization of local law enforcement in the future.

Immigrant survivors who were served through our VOCA-funded project continue to experience uncertainty and fear due to the current immigration climate; continued media reports of increased raids and deportations across the country, but also efforts to curtail access to public benefits, exacerbate these fears. In particular, VOCA-funded staff have spent time addressing survivors' concerns about signing up for benefits (desperately needed by survivors and their children), though many survivors now fear negative impacts. We are finding that many crime survivors we serve are hesitant about signing up their children for services, even when their children are U.S. citizens. Given these concerning trends, VOCA-funded staff continue to provide accurate information through one-on-one check-ins with clients, and to conduct outreach to community members and service providers to inform them of their rights and/or how best respond to the needs of immigrant survivors of crime in our community.

Another significant area affecting crime victim services is the ongoing issue of substance abuse among victims of crime within the southwest region of the state. Subrecipients have noted that many victims of crime are not only accessing victims' services, but also warrant treatment for various addictions. Substance abuse has been identified as a method by which some victims cope with their victimization or past traumas. Many shelters do not permit these individuals to become residents due to their substance use and there are limited trained professionals to adequately provide sufficient and affordable services to these individuals on an ongoing basis. Often times it is reported that the substance abuse results in denial

of services or returning to a violent situation.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs are reporting the following trends:

- There are not enough volunteers to serve the child victims of abuse and neglect referred to the CASA programs
- Not enough foster homes or therapeutic placements when children are removed due to abuse and neglect
- There are not enough Spanish speaking volunteers
- Increase in complexity of cases and demand on volunteer role
- Lack of transportation (for families and children)