

VISION FOR VICTIM SERVICES

Pennsylvania Crime Victims' Website

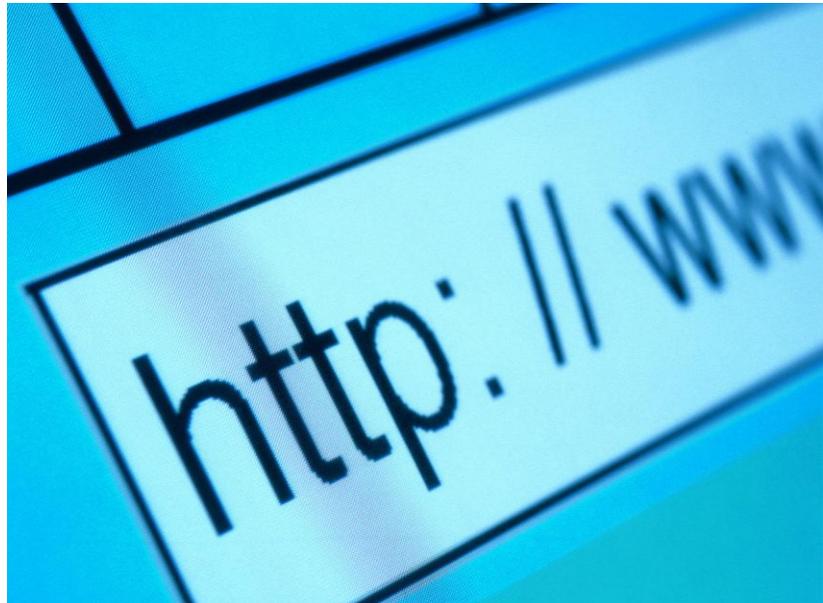
Problem

A recent Penn State University poll showed:

- 48% of Pennsylvania's population was not aware of how or where to access services for crime victims where they live;
- 74.5% of our population was not aware that the Victims Compensation Assistance Program exists.

Victims, many times, experience trauma when they have been victimized—raped, stabbed, beaten, family member murdered. Their sense of safety and well-being can be so damaged that normal ways of coping with things cannot be maintained, or simply no longer work. Victims are often thrown into the criminal or juvenile justice system without a choice and have a hard time understanding even the simplest facets because of the trauma they have experienced. Add to that, understanding where to go for help, their rights, how the trauma is affecting them and their families, needing financial assistance, and the list goes on and on.

Victims have to know what agencies are available to assist them, how this agency fits into the criminal justice process, the offerings



provided by each agency, how to find this agency, and how to work through the internal bureaucracy of each agency. This can be difficult enough for anyone, but for an individual in the midst of trauma, it can be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Providing consistent, easy to understand and easy to locate information on the rights and services available to almost one-half million crime victims annually is challenging at both the state and local level.

Solution

Information is power. Develop a website that meets the needs of crime victims.

Crime victims wanted a site that provided information, in small doses, in a way that is easy to understand, user friendly, and helpful in different facets of their journey whether it's looking for counseling, seeking answers to the court process, how to get bills paid, validating their feelings, understanding their rights, or understanding post sentencing events and offender movement.

Because Pennsylvania contains great victim advocates and victim service agencies, we have the opportunity to direct victims to those resources to learn more about their programs and services offered. OVS's goal was to create a website that is an access point to information and services and guide victims to the appropriate resources/experts to obtain more extensive information and assistance.

The site, www.pacrimevictims.org, provides victims with information on their rights, services available to them in their community, information on how to apply for victims compensation, and resources to help victims and their families navigate the criminal and juvenile justice systems. Information on how to sign up for PA SAVIN, the statewide victim information and notification system, is also provided on the new website.

The website also offers a glossary as well as valuable information on the effects a crime can have on the victim, family members and loved ones, including information on understanding trauma, and how to help others, particularly children, deal with grief and trauma.

Business Issues

Meet the needs of victims. OVS's input from crime victims was an

invaluable part of the process. The site's format and content was developed with input from crime victims, victim service providers and experts in the criminal and juvenile justice fields – with the overall goal of empowering victims of crime and providing them with vital information in an easy-to-read, easy-to-digest, easy-to-use format.

Creating awareness was critical to the success of the website. OVS has included the website in material that is provided to crime victims by law enforcement, the Victim's Compensation Assistance Program, registering through PA SAVIN and most recently through a public awareness campaign. The public awareness campaign was designed to create greater awareness of services to victims of crime in their community. Through the public awareness campaign, the OVS was able to purchase billboards, gas pump toppers and bus ads publicizing the new www.pacrimevictims.org website.

Results

The website was created to help those whose lives have been forever changed by violence and crime. Information is power. The primary focus of this web site is to let crime victims know they are not alone and

help is available.

Since its recent launch in March 2010, the Pa Crime Victims website has garnered positive responses from other states and federal agencies, including the national Office for Victims of Crime and the National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards. The victim service programs, law enforcement, media, prosecutors, judges, probation officers, corrections officers, public defenders, and most importantly crime victims have been unanimous in their support and praise of this web site. The website is receiving an average of 7,000 visits per month.

Next Steps

The Pa Crime Victims website has been a collaborative and cooperative project – while always keeping the needs of victims of crime in the forefront. It will remain a work in progress, as responses from users - including victims of crime, victim service personnel, law enforcement and others - will help us in our continued efforts to provide timely, accurate and useful information to victims.

