



# National Association of Victim Service Professionals in Corrections

P. O. Box 3163, Lacey, WA 98509-3145

[www.navspic.org](http://www.navspic.org)

FALL/WINTER 2009



## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

NAVSPIC Members,

What a great conference we had in Austin!!! I know it was an especially trying year for most participants to come. Given budget cutbacks most states are experiencing, many of our NAVSPIC members were not even able to join us!

As I was leaving the conference, it was clear to me that now, more than ever, it's critical that we remain a strong network nationally...to literally survive. Story after story was shared at the conference about the struggles many of us are facing within our agencies. Unfortunately, in addition to line staff, if there were any existing to cut, there was news that at least two of our victim advocate colleagues had lost their positions as administrators over this past year due to budget cuts. These are incredibly difficult decisions corrections administrators are being forced to make.

As we look forward to 2010, I can't help but wonder how we will all be doing. Will be starting to emerge from budget cutbacks survivors, still be struggling to maintain or be recovering from even more layoffs and furlough days?

I remember when I first started working for corrections nearly 15 years ago. The environment was totally different then. State government positions were considered the most secure. It was not uncommon, at least in Ohio, to find employees who had been working 30, 35 or even 40 years!! Several of our Parole Board Members had worked 42+ years. Corrections was always described as 'recession-proof'. As long as there was crime, job security was not only a given, but growing and growing! Back then, we had built and opened 4 new prisons within a few short years and seemed to be expanding programs every day.

Who could have imagined back then, or even just a year ago, that most of us would be working for agencies that used the terms 'furlough days' or 'job abolishment' regularly? Staff who once felt that they had their positions as long as they wanted now feel insecure and uncertain if they'll even

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Alabama  
Alaska  
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California  
Colorado  
Dist. of Columbia  
Florida  
Idaho  
Iowa  
Kansas  
Louisiana  
Maine  
Maryland  
Massachusetts  
Minnesota  
Mississippi  
Missouri  
Montana  
Nebraska  
Nevada  
New Hampshire  
New Jersey  
New York  
North Carolina  
North Dakota  
Ohio  
Oregon  
Pennsylvania  
Rhode Island  
South Carolina  
Tennessee  
Texas  
Utah  
Vermont  
Virginia  
Washington  
West Virginia  
Wisconsin

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# In a Victim's Words ...

By Vicki Mercado, Kansas

**T**ime travel back with me to October 5, 1996. Life was good and things were pretty normal at our house. Our 18 year old son, Justin, had graduated from high school earlier that year. In four days he would be moving to Arizona. On that Saturday night Justin had finished his last night working at the Pizza Hut. Andrea, our 16-year-old-daughter was out with her friends, and our youngest son, Jeremy, was home with my husband, Johnny and me, watching a movie.

Justin's cousin called to say that Justin had been shot at Boot Hill parking lot. We rushed to Boot Hill but the police would not let us enter the parking lot because it was a crime scene. We were instructed to meet him at the hospital. Justin arrived by ambulance and we watched as the doctors worked with him in the emergency room. He was taken to surgery but was pronounced dead during surgery.

Our whole family was suddenly forced to live through this horrible nightmare. We learned that Justin was standing in Boot Hill Parking lot, talking with friends, when a group of five gang members walked through the parking lot. There was a lot of shouting and one of the gang members pulled out a .22 pistol and began shooting. Justin wasn't even aware of what was going on. He was in the wrong place, at the wrong time. A bullet entered his chest, bounced off a rib and went through his heart. We suppose he would not have been hit had he not leaned over to see what was going on. The gang member who shot him was a 14-year-old named Rafael.

Rafael was soon certified as an adult and after six months of court hearings he agreed to a plea bargain and was sentenced to life in prison for first degree murder. But a life sentence in Kansas is only 15 years. He will be eligible for parole in the year 2011.

My grief, anger, hatred, and bitterness were very intense. I hated that boy with every ounce of energy that I had for what he took from Justin and from my family. I spent time thinking about what I wanted to do to that boy to make him hurt as much as he hurt us. I was even angry

with people who thought I should forgive Rafael. How could I forgive him when I hated him so deeply? I was angry with people who thought I should get over it in a few months because it was an accident, and I dwelled on the heartless, judgmental things people said.

I knew some people whose lives were filled with bitterness and I didn't want to be like them. So I began to pray for God to change my heart. I prayed for God to help me to WANT to forgive Rafael so that I could find healing. I even prayed for Rafael because I was convinced that he had no remorse for what he had done. Through the years I continued to pray those prayers and I worked hard on my anger and grief. Slowly I could feel my prayers being answered. In God's timing, life was becoming good again and I experienced many joys, but I knew I was still angry. I sure didn't know that some very hard struggles were about to pounce down on me.

One day I grabbed the mail, and found a letter with Rafael's name on the return address. I sobbed as I read this letter filled with remorse and regret for what he had done and for the pain that he had caused us. Even though I doubted his words, I answered that letter and we began writing back and forth for over a year. With each letter I felt my heart soften and I began believing his words. Strangely, I wanted to see into his eyes.

I talked to people in the justice system and told them about our letters and that I wanted to meet with Rafael. They all said the same thing. "You should never have received those letters. He is not supposed to be able to contact you."

I was referred to the Department of Corrections Office

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of Victim Services and began the process for Victim/Offender Dialogue Program. They advised me to have a friend or a support person to go through the process with me. Rafael and I were both interviewed by trained personnel who walked us through the process. A date was set up for me and my friend to tour the prison in which Rafael was held and the following day we were to meet with him. I decided that I would not tell Rafael that I forgive him because I wasn't ready for that and I definitely did not want to touch him.

Those two days finally came. I was very nervous and filled with anxiety, but the next morning I woke up completely calm. At the prison, we went through the screening process and into the conference room. Rafael was already in the room when we arrived and it was obvious that he was very nervous. I began with the series of questions that I had written out and everything went very well.

I wanted him to feel the hurt that he has caused me and my family. I told him what it was like sitting at Justin's funeral, or in a chair beside a hole in the ground, knowing they were going to put my first born down in that hole and that it took everything I had, to stay in that chair. I told him what it was like going to the cemetery every day for weeks and years, sitting on the ground beside a pile of dirt, knowing that my baby was under all of that dirt. I even told him about a cat that we had when I was a kid.

That mother cat accidentally laid on one of her kittens and smothered it. We buried the kitten but the momma cat found where we buried her baby and dug it up, twice. I told Rafael how badly I wanted to dig up my boy and take him home.

Rafael put his face in his hands and began to sob uncontrollably. He asked if he could have a break because he had something he wanted to say to me. My friend and I were taken out of the room to give Rafael some time. When we went back in the conference room, he told me how very sorry he was for all of the pain and hurt that he caused me and my family and that he knew he could never bring Justin back to me. He said he felt so worthless and so ashamed and asked for my forgiveness. I then told him that I forgive him and then I hugged him. I felt him trembling as I held him. I felt a huge weight lifted off of my heart – one that I had put there myself.

There was a Department of Corrections counselor in

the room with Rafael and when the meeting was over, he said he had worked at the prison for 35 years and had never witnessed anything like it. God gave me strength that day.

By A Survivor in Wisconsin

I clearly remember the sense of fear that gripped me the first time I stood in the small holding area. The iron gates closed behind me with a thud. After what seemed like an eternity, the iron gates in front of me finally opened.

I was at Green Bay Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison - a fortified place that houses men convicted of committing violent crimes. Certainly not the kind of place I ever thought I'd be or the type of individuals I ever envisioned interacting with. I was here to tell them about the murder of my son Bryon and how it has affected my life.

And so we sat in a circle: forty men sentenced to a maximum security prison, a former State Supreme Court Justice acting as our moderator, a group of law students, visiting dignitaries and three survivors of violent crime.

When it was my turn, I told them about Bryon, who he was and what he had done. I glowed with a mother's pride as I described how Bryon had matured into a remarkable young man and cried when I described how he was murdered by a man so drunk he thought his truck hit a bird when what he actually struck was Bryon on a bicycle.

The next day was my turn to listen as the men, one by one, responded to what they heard. Some gave me art work they had created in their cells the previous evening. Others sang songs they had written. Several related stories of the murder of family members. A few talked about their crimes, divulging information too dangerous to talk about in the general prison population. Some chose to sit silently.

What happened in that room was magical. I had gone as a teacher, as part of a team to help the men understand the consequences of their actions. My life circumstances were the lesson.

But as I listened I realized I was not the only survivor. We met as perpetrators and survivor. We parted as individuals supporting each other in our journeys through life.

## Victim Services in Corrections Around the Country

### Iowa



From the Sixth Judicial District  
DCS Victim Advocate Office

On May 22, 2009, at the Iowa Corrections Association 2009 Spring Conference – “Rising Above,” The Victim Assistance Award was given to members of the Sixth Judicial District, DCS Victim Advisory Committee.

**VICTIM ASSISTANCE** – (This award was originally established through the generosity of a gift by an ICA conference presenter, Scotia Knouff.) An individual or group of individuals who has had a significant, positive impact on victim’s issues, including but not limited to length of service, volunteer work, accomplishments and recognition by the community, particularly victims’ groups. Recipient may be a paid corrections employee.

Separate Victim Advisory Committees have been operating informally in Linn and Johnson Counties since 1999. The committee members encompass victims, professionals, and individual community members who volunteer to support a common mission: to develop a seamless system of support and services for victims of crime. Both

committees have worked diligently to represent the best of the Restorative Justice philosophy - making victims as whole as possible by involving them in the process of how corrections does business.

The Johnson County Victim Advisory Committee and the Linn County Victim Advisory Committee joined forces in 2007 and became an “official” Victim Advisory Committee for the Sixth Judicial District of the Department of Correctional Services; they now have an official seat of the Board of Directors. As part of the change, the decision was made to have Victim Advisory committee members serve as liaisons on each of the District’s five Advisory Committees, thereby ensuring that victim’s voices are represented in all areas (Client Services Advisory Committee, Law Enforcement Advisory Committee, Northern Advisory Committee, Southern Advisory Committee, and Cultural Competency Advisory Committee).

They are strong voices for victims. Just a few of their activities are:

- They advocated against the 2000 foot rule for sex offenders. They authored an editorial that was published in the Cedar Rapids Gazette, quoting that it gives victims a superficial sense of security;
- They advocated to the judiciary (about such things as victim impact statements and how victims are treated in the court rooms)

and have received favorable responses;

- They have assisted in providing staff and offenders training on victim issues;
- They help recruit victim participation in victim impact panel presentations;
- They raise their own funds by holding yearly fundraisers, including networking with community businesses to donate items for a silent auction. They also get donations from Anamosa inmates. These funds provide the resources to fund unmet victim needs as well as supporting travel and child care for victims who travel to court or sit on victim impact panels in prisons and community corrections. Funds also used to provide scholarships for victims to attend conferences to receive training;
- They advise on policies, particularly as they apply to staff (Ex: how to work with victims, the referral process to the department’s Victim Advocate, the victim notification process);
- They developed a resource guide for victims;
- They’ve helped develop brochures for victim services;
- They help develop activities and trainings during National Crime Victims Rights Week;
- They’ve held an art contest on bullying for teens at an alternative high school which received great TV coverage;
- Victims on the Committee have



provided training to schools, college criminal justice classes, and other agencies in the community;

- They participated in writing workshops that involved inmates, other offenders in the community and college students.

Per Linda Sorenson: As the department's victim services representative, I have had the honor to know all these people individually and I strongly believe they are the true heroes that help drive our system to be the best that we can be. They are our Victim Advocates. The Victim Advisory Committee of the Sixth Judicial District Department of Correctional Services.

Although this is not a support group, you will see them doing just that, as they bring other victims into the group and offer support, as well as a voice, in the criminal justice system. They won the Governors Volunteer Award in 2003 for their outreach and growth from victims to survivors to victors. You will see them at conferences, soaking up education to share with others; they are the sea of blue sitting in the room. Proudly wearing their blue sweatshirts with the gold embroidered justice scales, they are working hard to embody what is written under the scales, "Fulfill the Promise."

### **Message; continued from front page**

be working next week! Ohio, like most state correctional agencies, has struggled through abolishing over 700 positions at once and even paying bills on a daily basis. I've heard many stories across the nation. Some of you, who are lucky enough to still have a job, have faced working, but not receiving paychecks because your state budgets didn't pass on time. Some of our colleagues' positions have been totally eliminated. Victim services abolished! While that seems incredible...it's true!

How can we survive? How can we continue to provide effective services to crime victims when we are not even certain about our own futures? The answer is, "we must, for the sake of those survivors counting on our services!" As you all know, it is crucial that we prove the importance of our role within correctional agencies everyday. Making sure we are institutionalized through policy, statute and daily practices as much as possible, in order to remain on the radar. When Commissioners or Directors are forced to make decisions that cut their workforce to the bone, what measures should we take to validate our existence?

The one thing I know for sure is that if we as an Association do not remain connected, we will lose strength within our own agencies. Correctional administrators talk and learn from each other, just like we do. If some begin to see victim services as dispensable during hard budget times, the voice of the victim within our states will begin to deteriorate. We must refuse to take one step back and continue to be the voice to keep our agencies informed about the importance of including crime victims in everything we do. While times are challenging, offenders are being released, staff being laid off and budgets continue to be reduced, the one thing that cannot be forgotten is our responsibility to support victims. There are some states that truly understand this and live it every day, even during these extremely difficult budget times. It is important that they serve as mentors to others who are struggling. So, supporting each other nationally is one step.

I know I discussed this in the Winter 2008 newsletter, but it is worth repeating. In order to survive budget cuts, you need to be proactive. Take a look at your state. What laws are on the books that validate your operation? Can they be strengthened? Next, look at ACA (the American Correctional Association). Does your agency meet the Victim Standards established through ACA? While we know the first standards that were developed need to be tweaked, but even having existing standards is a great start. You should then look over your policies. Have you incorporated crime victims into the daily operations that are outlined through policy adequately? Do you have a current strategic plan? While each department of corrections creates their overall strategic plan, do you have one specific for your victim

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# 3rd Annual NAVSPIC Conference

## VOD Summit



YOU BETCHA!



Are the ribs good in Texas?



### Conference Rundown

This year's Victim/Offender Dialogue Summit & NAVSPIC national conference in Austin, TX were both a great success! Although the group was a bit smaller this year, there were abundant opportunities to learn from each other and the phenomenal speakers sponsored by the Office for Victims of Crime.

The VOD Summit was facilitated by Jon Wilson and Karin Ho, and topics discussed included the roles of facilitators and program directors, funding/budget issues, single versus co-facilitation, and continuing support for survivors and offenders. Diana, a survivor of sexual abuse and a VOD participant, talked with the group about her experiences and advice for facilitators. Marilyn Armour from the University of Texas School of Social Work also provided information about the latest VOD research.

The NAVSPIC conference brought in speakers David Doerfler, Janice Harris Lord, Angie McCown, and D'Ann Anders from Texas, Trudy Gregorie from Justice Solutions in Washington, D.C., Jill Weston from California, Jennie Marsh from Kansas, and Bill Stutz with First Thoughts in Washington state. Topics explored by these speakers included:

- Healing through Victim/Offender Dialogue
- Victim Impact programming
- American Correctional Association standards
- Enhancing Resiliency in yourself and your program
- Public/media awareness for victim services in corrections
- Wrap-around safety planning
- Protection Orders

We also had the special treat of hearing two authors speak about their experiences. Sunny Schwartz, author of *Dreams* from the Monster Factory and creator of the Resolve to Stop the Violence Project in California, spoke about her work with violent offenders



and victims. Robin Fudge Finegan, co-author of *Hope Gets the Last Word: Stories that Heal* and expert in crisis management, disaster mental health, victim services and public information, spoke about surviving and thriving while providing services to victims.

The 2009 conference was an exciting opportunity to connect with other states, and the 2010 conference promises the same! Thanks to Apriss for sponsoring our luncheon this year, and a huge thanks goes out to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Victim Services Division for the work they put into making this year's conference so successful (and for the awesome door prizes)!



## SCENES FROM THE 2009 CONFERENCE ...



Upper left: Jon Wilson; Above: Mark Odom, Jon Wilson and Karin Ho; Left: Karin Ho, Peter Michaud, Mark Odom, and Dan Guerra.



## MORE SCENES FROM THE 2009 CONFERENCE ...

Clockwise from right: David Doerfler; Peter Michaud; Stacy Steck; Robin “Double Fudge” Finegan; Chairman of the Texas Board of Criminal Justice Oliver J. Bell; Ellen Halbert and Sunny Schwartz; and participants in a workshop.





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services operation? While we are all extremely busy with the everyday work of being a victim advocate, taking these steps will help to increase your ability to sustain victim services within your agency.

Mentoring has always been a trademark of NAVSPIC. Our ability to share best practices and help resolve issues together is one of biggest benefits we can offer. We have the policy repository available on the NAVSPIC website which is a great resource as a starting point to benchmark with other states to find out how they are handling similar situations that you're facing. I've seen a transition in the type of questions mentors are facing move from more technical questions about "how can I build a victim services operation" to "how do we begin to rebuild after losing so much!" We have all had to reprioritize our work to make sure we are providing the most cost effective and meaningful services to crime victims. Let's work together to make sure we are collectively having the strongest impact to insure victims rights within each of our states.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to be together in Austin were able to energize each other and learn about such vital services as Victim Notification, Victims and the Media, Resiliency in Ourselves, ACA Standards and Victims' Rights, Victim Impact Programming and many other issues. These are issues that are core to many of our operations.

I know how hard it is to travel, given restrictions we're all facing and respect those of you who paid to come to the NAVSPIC Conference out of your own personal pocket, taking vacation time. While not everyone is able to do that, I also know that we did not fully take advantage of all the scholarships available through OVC for participants either. As I look ahead, I think one of the most important recommendations that came out of our business meeting was to market the scholarships even before they become available next year! Just being able to network is not only motivating personally and professionally, but truly does allow us to demonstrate to the entire field of corrections the

importance of our work. Something we are not willing to give up on!

We also discussed while we were in Austin how to better explore alternative ways to communicate and share information through our website. While everyone was in agreement that we should plan a conference in 2010, there are also clearly other ways we can stay connected that we should try.

I'm very excited about our future. Despite budget cutbacks, there are still many great activities going on around the nation! I have learned so much from everyone and look forward to seeing even more creative ways you all are working within your state to improve the lives of crime victims!!

Karin Ho

## 2010 NAVSPIC ELECTION RESULTS



2010 NAVSPIC Election Results

Congratulations to our new Board!!!

Chairperson - Karin Ho  
Vice-Chairperson - Jennie Marsh  
Secretary - Peter Michaud  
Treasurer - Erin Gaffney

AND our 2010 Conference Location is....  
**Maine!**

# SAVIN Project Update

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) is pleased to announce the transition from Phase One to Phase Two of the SAVIN Training and Technical Assistance Program with the award of a cooperative agreement to the National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA) and its partner Justice Solutions (JS). Phase Two will continue and expand on the work completed by the IJIS Institute and will leverage the expertise of all participating organizations to provide training and technical assistance to support state grantees in the implementation, enhancement, administration, and of state-wide victim notification systems.

During Phase One the IJIS Institute convened and managed the work of the Project Advisory Board comprised of victim services providers, technology experts, and SAVIN administrators; presented a national conference for SAVIN administrators, provided technical assistance to support the development and implementation of SAVIN systems, and developed a proto-type of the SAVIN On-line Community. During Phase Two the IJIS Institute, working in close collaboration with NCJA and JS, will continue the development and launch of the SAVIN On-line Community, provide support for a national conference of SAVIN administrators, and participate on the Project Advisory Board.

During Phase Two, the NCJA and Justice Solutions will provide training and technical assistance to SAVIN practitioners in the implementation, enhancement, administration, and evaluation of statewide victim notification systems. Headquartered in the same physical location, NCJA and JS leadership and staff have worked closely on issues related to federal funding support for victim assistance as well as victim rights compliance and services. NCJA and JS will work closely with the IJIS Institute and project co-sponsors including the National Association of Victim Service Professionals in Corrections (NAVSPIC) whose membership includes a majority of state SAVIN administrators, the American Correctional

Association (ACA), American Probation and Parole Association (APPA), and the National Sheriff's Association (NSA), all of which work in the area of victim notification and information regarding incarcerated offenders.

NCJA and JS will convene a Project Advisory Board, conduct a needs assessment, and develop and maintain a SAVIN Technical Assistance Component on the SAVIN On-line Community. The National SAVIN Training and Technical Assistance strategy will consist of four components:

- Virtual library that will house all resources collected from the field and all publications, tools, resources, sample documents, curricula, and other deliverables developed during the project.
- SAVIN Technical Assistance Request Response System (STARRS) to provide a user friendly, "one-stop shop" to meet the TA needs of SAVIN practitioners, regardless of the nature or scope of the request.
- Training and Education Program that not only directly educates SAVIN grantees and non-grantees about all aspects of SAVIN systems, but also gives them tools to educate themselves, their criminal justice colleagues, allied professionals and the general public.
- Program Support and Development to help SAVIN grantees enhance their service delivery (particularly with respect to collecting and reporting on required program performance measures), to support the efforts of SAVIN national and federal partners, and to develop a strategy and implementation plan for universally integrated, single point accessible system to ensure notification to all victims nationwide regardless of location.

The Bureau of Justice Assistance looks forward to working with the National Criminal Justice Association, Justice Solutions, and the IJIS Institute to continue to meet the needs of SAVIN administrators and practitioners to support and protect victims of crime nationwide.