

Collaborations

The Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, Inc.

Volume 5, January, 2004

Relationships are the Cornerstone *by Scott Beard*

I recently attended a meeting of a small church in the gymnasium of a school. My wife and child and I arrived not knowing one person. Three hours later we had enjoyed several substantive “one on one” conversations, were treated to a spirit filled worship service, and were invited to share a meal. Each person we spoke with seemed genuinely interested in our lives and openly shared personal insights about their own lives.

One thing that struck me was the emphasis each person placed on “relationships” as one of the most important aspects of their spiritual journey. First and foremost is a relationship with their God. But, as part of that relationship, they also value personal and intimate relationships with other people. I wonder why such a simple and powerful understanding of priorities is not recognized and manifested more in our society.

When applying these priorities to our project I thought about the many people living in urban areas who are isolated and disconnected from their fellow human beings. Fear and insecurity lead to isolation and disconnection making one more susceptible to crime. In essence, whole communities are suffering emotional injuries experienced by isolated (cont. p. 2)



Highlighted Program: The Furnace Street Mission in Akron, Ohio was started in the 1920's as a Christian mission, but today is open to all faiths. The Rev. Bob Denton is well known for his work on behalf of crime victims. The Furnace Street Mission provides crisis intervention, support groups, criminal justice support, community education, crime prevention programs, and 3rd shift support for law enforcement. The Mission is currently working with a battered women's shelter and a Children's hospital on a program for children who witness violence. Website: www.VAP1.org.

“One person can make a difference—and every person should try.” Stephanie Roper

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victims of crime.

Faith communities are one of the few sources of connection for many of these isolated individuals. This may be especially true for ethnic populations, the elderly, and disabled individuals whose entire social lives may be centered around their faith community. Faith communities offer a safe haven for human companionship. Their connections to the lonely, the disenfranchised and hurting of our society are key to reaching a significant population in need of basic victim services.

Building relationships within the project's advisory groups will be the key to establishing a victim service component encompassing the faith community. The moderators of each of the advisory groups must encourage relationship building. One of the first steps in this process is to make the meeting environments safe for the expression of all viewpoints. Each member of the advisory group should be valued and their views should be recognized and validated. The meetings should have ground rules to assure that all members feel included and that the potential for hurt or misunderstanding is minimized.

The members of each advisory group should feel a sense of ownership. Not only are they breaking new ground in their own community, but their work will eventually become a model for other communities hoping to address these same issues. *The group itself must come together as a microcosm of the community.* These leaders must work together and trust each other, seeking the same overall goals. Only then can the broader faith community and victim assistance community work together.

A valuable outcome of this project will be relationships that will persist beyond the bounds of the project. I envision bridge building to cross all boundaries including: faith leader with faith leader, victim service provider with faith leader and victim service provider with victim service provider. The result can only mean better understanding among disciplines and faiths with an ultimate goal of improved responses to crime victims.

Bibliography—Websites of interest

(Views expressed by the authors in the following articles and websites do not necessarily reflect the opinions of OVC or MCVRC)

- The National Ten Point Coalition - The National Ten Point Leadership Foundation (NTLF) is the national coalition that organizes clergy-law enforcement-community partnerships for youth development and against violence among inner city youth. <http://www.ntlf.org/>

This Project was supported by Grant No. #2002.VF.GX.K017 awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

