

## **Backgrounder for Victim Services of Bruce Grey & Owen Sound**

What is Victim Services of Bruce Grey & Owen Sound?

Why is there a need for Victim Services of Bruce Grey & Owen Sound?

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### **What**

Victim Services is a provincially mandated service that is partially funded by the Ministry of the Attorney General (formerly the Ministry of the Solicitor General). As is seen in Bill 23 "An Act respecting the victims of crime", or more generically known as the "Victims' Bill of Rights",

"Victims should be treated with courtesy, compassion and respect for their personal dignity and privacy by justice system officials. Victims should have access to information about i) services and remedies available to victims of crime..."

"2) The principles set out in subsection (1) are subject to the availability of resources and information ... to ensure that the resolution of criminal proceedings is not delayed."

This bill had its first reading on November 23, 1995 and Royal Assent on December 14, 1995.

During the time that work was being done in parliament regarding this bill, work was also being done in communities that recognized the needs of victims. In 1987, at the urging of police services and victims of crime, the Ministry of the Solicitor General piloted three Victim Crisis Assistance and Referral Services (VCARS) projects in Ontario. These volunteer-based services operated twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and offered short-term emotional and practical assistance to victims of crime, tragic circumstance and disaster. With the consent of the victim or victims, emergency services contacted the VCARS Service and two VCARS volunteers were dispatched to work with the emergency service in providing immediate victim assistance as well as referrals to longer-term support through existing community agencies. These three pilot projects were deemed a success by the Ministry and to date monies have been made available to fund VCARS in over 35 jurisdictions throughout Ontario.

Service for victims in Grey and Bruce counties originated as a project of Owen Sound Police Services in 1992 and was funded by local community groups. The service was volunteer-based with two Owen Sound police officers, John Stekli and Ralph Schmidt, overseeing the project. Funding for a local VCARS site from the Ministry of the Solicitor General through the Victim's Justice Fund became available in 1995 and the program expanded to include North Grey County. Further expansion to all of Grey county and incorporation as the Victim Assistance Program Grey/ Owen Sound soon followed. Funding for service to Bruce County was obtained in 2001 and the service was renamed Victim Services of Bruce Grey & Owen Sound in June 2002.

## **Why**

Why is there a need for Victim Services of Bruce Grey & Owen Sound?

Municipal police services and the OPP in both Grey and Bruce counties indicate that officers do not have the time or the training to deal properly with the emotional and practical needs of victims of crime and tragic circumstance. In many instances, their workload does not allow them to spend time helping victims as the criminal investigation needs their immediate attention.

It has been proven that people who receive immediate support after victimization make a fuller recovery from trauma and also make better witnesses, as their recall of events is clearer. Immediate emotional support and practical assistance can help people cope effectively with intense mental and physical distress that may be experienced during a crisis.

Victim Services of Bruce Grey & Owen Sound is a free confidential service that can be activated by police and emergency services upon consent of the victim. Victim Services responders assist police officers and emergency services by immediately providing emotional support and practical assistance to victims. VS responders create a safe, secure environment where victims can express their emotions and reactions without fear of judgment. VS responders can help normalize victim reactions and will also help victims predict emotional, physical and practical needs and then provide them with, or refer them to, appropriate resources.

The objectives of Victim Services are to: lessen the trauma of being victimized; help people cope with the impact of crime or tragic circumstance; assist in accessing appropriate support services in our community; provide an opportunity for community members to become more involved in dealing with the effects of crime; and to educate Bruce and Grey county community members in relation to victimization.

Any family or individual who has been affected by a sudden death, a domestic violence situation, elder abuse, property crime, a fire or any other traumatic or tragic event can benefit from our services. We maintain a complete library of educational brochures and handouts relating to a wide spectrum of victim issues and these are provided to victims free of charge. We have strong working partnerships with many other agencies in the community and we are constantly looking for ways to help educate our community members about victimization and provide them with various crime prevention strategies.

## **Who**

Who is Victim Services of Bruce Grey & Owen Sound?

The service is coordinated by a staff of six and delivered by approximately 60 volunteers throughout Grey and Bruce Counties. The staff includes: a Managing Director who reports to a volunteer Board of Directors and is responsible for the overall program; a Financial Administrative Assistant, who is responsible for the daily finances and the day to day administrative work; a Scheduler who is responsible for the volunteer schedule; and three Program Coordinators who are responsible for the volunteer program, community liaison and public awareness.

Victim Services is a non-profit corporation governed by a volunteer Board of Directors that provides direction for the program. Local police and emergency services, community partners and the public are all represented on the current board.

Over 60 volunteer Victim Services responders each donate at least 12 hours of their time weekly so that we can respond to calls in any area of Bruce and Grey at any time. That means over 4000 hours per month are volunteered to ensure that people who have experienced victimization have access to resources and information pertinent to their particular situation. Volunteer responders are carefully screened and must complete 40 hours of initial training mandated by the Ministry of the Attorney General before providing service and must also attend regular monthly training meetings thereafter. Each volunteer responder swears an oath of confidentiality before a Commissioner of Oaths as confidentiality is crucial when providing service to victims. VS volunteer responders represent a good cross section of our population. They are: male and female; students and seniors; labourers, professionals, business owners and retirees who all share a desire to make a difference and a wish to serve their communities.

## **Where and How**

Where we are:

Our main office is located at 611 9<sup>th</sup> Ave. E. in Owen Sound. We have satellite offices in Hanover at Hanover Police Service and Saugeen Shores at Saugeen Shores Police Services. We also have use of space in Durham at West Grey Police Services, Kincardine at the SBOPP Community office, Chatsworth at the Grey OPP detachment,

Sauble Beach at the BPOPP detachment and Owen Sound at Owen Sound Police Services.

Our volunteers reside as far north as Tobermory, as far south as Point Clarke as far east as Meaford and as far south as Dundalk and in most of the communities in between. That's an amazing number of telephone exchanges to remember!

### **How people can get involved**

Of course our first priority is to make sure there are enough scheduled volunteer responders to ensure adequate coverage of the two counties so we are always seeking people willing to make this commitment to their community.

We recognize that front line service does not appeal to or suit everyone, so we encourage monetary donations from community members that are used to serve victims by providing purchase of practical items for victims (like transportation, clothing, personal care products – soap, shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, toothbrushes, razors, shaving cream, diapers etc.) We also accept donations of personal care items.

Another very important way the public can help is to encourage education about our service. We will happily attend any service club or community group meeting to explain our services and provide education about victim issues.

Most people do not want to think about tragic circumstances like death, fire, or safety issues. But bad things can happen to anyone and most of us will be affected by a crime or tragedy at some time in our life. You now know that there is a confidential service available free of charge, 24 hours a day to offer emotional support, practical assistance and information to people to help lessen the impact of traumatization in their life.