



## Arlington Police Department

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**Theron L. Bowman, Ph.D., Police Chief**

March 15, 2006

Jim Ingram  
Treasurer and Corporate Manager  
The Innovation Groups

Dear Mr. Ingram:

In response to an e-mail dated March 8, 2006, from Texas Regional Director Froswa' Booker-Drew, I am attaching information about the Arlington Police Department's **Victim Assistance Program**.

Please consider this program for the *J. Robert Havlick Award for Innovation in Local Government*. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this award.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theron L. Bowman, Ph.D.'.

Theron L. Bowman, Ph.D.  
Police Chief

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Victims of crime, who come into contact with police, are at a crisis point. The trauma of the crime itself is exacerbated when dealing with the criminal justice system and not knowing where to seek assistance. Immediate on-scene intervention, along with in-person and telephone follow-up by victim service providers can make a big difference in the victim's experience after the crime.

The Victim Assistance Program is a unit of the Arlington Police Department staffed by nine salaried victim services providers, who are assisted by interns and community volunteers. Services offered by the Victim Assistance Program include crisis intervention, follow up in the first 24-48 hours, and information and referral based on assessed needs. Services provided after the crime may include criminal justice system support, referral for ongoing needs, assistance in obtaining financial assistance and/or with filing Crime Victim's Compensation claims, or other services aimed at minimizing the impact of the crime.

Arlington is a large city, boasting a population of 365,000. In 1987, as the City was experiencing a dramatic increase in population, the Arlington Police Department established a Victim Assistance Program.

In 2005, over 12,750 victims of crime, family members, and witnesses interacted with the Arlington Police Department during a crisis in their lives created by the criminal acts of another person. Involvement with the criminal justice system can aggravate this crisis as victims try to understand the complexities of the system and meet investigative expectations. In the aftermath, victims may not be able to easily identify resources that might assist them in recovery from the emotional, physical, and financial impact of the crime. Without this support, many victims feel re-victimized and may suffer more severe long-term negative effects.

The implementation of the Victim Assistance program as a part of the Arlington Police Department proved to be a crucial policy initiative that produced significant achievements in the areas of confidentiality, victim service, and team building. As police department employees, Victim Assistance staff creates the opportunity for maximum service to victims while protecting the agency from potential issues associated with contracting services from an outside agency. Confidentiality of records is maintained by having in-house staff that is familiar with applicable laws, thus protecting the department's subjectivity to liability for breach of confidentiality. Service to victims is maximized as a result of total integration through creating a team approach between Victim Assistance and sworn personnel. Policing has traditionally focused on apprehending suspects and enforcing laws, with the majority of officer training dedicated to these priorities. Since the inception of the Victim Assistance program, police officers have received training concerning victims' rights, effective intervention for victims of violent crime, and have observed Victim Assistance personnel providing services to victims. These efforts have resulted in a difference in how police officers do their day-to-day business. The Victim Assistance program also provides police officers with a unit of trained victim service providers available to respond alongside them in the field as a

resource, in much the same way officers utilize other resources like crime scene investigators, canine, or tactical units. Victim Assistance has become a tool that officers use in their day-to-day operations. The presence of victim services personnel serves as a reminder to officers of victims' important needs and priorities as well.

***Who has benefited from the innovation?***

Services are provided to all victims of violent crime that occur in Arlington, regardless of age, gender, sexual preference, race, or ethnicity. Victims are not required to cooperate with law enforcement to receive services. Types of victimization include homicide, robbery, kidnapping, assault, sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, DWI, harassment, stalking, terrorist threat, and other traumatic personal crimes.

Prior to implementation of this program, patrol officers and police investigators did not have an available and immediate resource for traumatized victims in need. Officers have come to rely on the program to address victims' needs and questions to keep victims informed. The availability of these services within the department has enabled law enforcement to focus on investigative and enforcement responsibilities while ensuring that the victims' needs are met. Officers have responded positively to the availability of these services and victims have reported high levels of satisfaction with the services the department has provided to them.

***How was the innovation initiated and implemented?***

The Arlington Police Department's Victim Assistance Program was initiated in August 1987, with two volunteers recruited through VIVA, the City's volunteer program. These volunteers acted under the guidance of the Sergeant of the Juvenile Division, who became the department's Crime Victim Liaison as specified by the Code of Criminal Procedures.

Volunteers were initially given a small office, a telephone, answering machine, typewriter, and basic office supplies. Outreach was done by using a form letter or by phone call. Volunteers were given media copies of all murder, kidnapping, aggravated assault, aggravated robbery, and assault with bodily injury cases and sought to inform victims of their rights and the availability of Crime Victim's Compensation. Although the volunteers had little training and were not professional counselors, victims appreciated the volunteer's emotional support and compassion. The Mental Health Association of Tarrant County later offered the services of a licensed counselor 20 hours a month, and the counselor provided training to the volunteers and services to some victims. The counselor introduced the volunteers to a number of community based services and the volunteers began attending workshops offered in the area. This knowledge and the records kept of the services that were provided helped in the application for grant funding.

After the first year, the department applied for a VOCA (Victims of Crime Act) grant through the Office of the Governor, Criminal Justice Division, and the first full time Coordinator was hired. The Coordinator was a licensed counselor. In 1989, a part time Administrative Assistant was hired, and in 1990, the position was converted to full time.

Staffing remained at two full time positions until 1995, when additional VOCA funds allowed the program to add another part time position. The program maintained a volunteer base of between 8-12 active volunteers, who provided services to approximately 1,000 victims of all types of violent crime (including DWI, FSRA, Hit & Run, and burglary of a habitation) each month. In 1995, the program became a Program Partner with AmeriCorps UTA, who provided an AmeriCorps member full time for one year.

In 1996, the Arlington Police Department received a grant through the U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services, to establish a Domestic Violence Response Team. The team included two civilian crisis counselors, a supervisor assigned to the Victim Assistance Program, and two civilian investigative aides assigned to the Domestic Crimes Investigations Unit. In 1997, the additional staff was funded through a VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) grant.

With the initiation of on scene crisis response, the program expanded the volunteer base to include volunteers who were available to sign up for ride outs with the Response Team who are on duty from 4 p.m. to 2 a.m., seven days a week. A staff counselor, paired with a volunteer, is available for patrol call out during Response Team hours. AmeriCorps UTA added additional part time members. The University of Texas at Arlington's School of Social Work provided additional student interns (supervised by the Victim Assistance Coordinator, a licensed social worker), and flyers were posted on the U.T. Arlington campus. Local newspapers ran stories about the new Response Team's Crisis Intervention program including information about volunteering. The Coordinator and other staff convey the need for volunteers at all speaking engagements, guest lectures, and community presentations (including officer training). These efforts continue to attract volunteers. The program currently utilizes approximately 36 active volunteers, and offers quarterly Response Team training for new volunteers.

***What risks were associated with planning and developing the innovation?***

As with any new program, there is the risk that the idea will not be well received. However, the program has been well received by officers and community agencies and continues to get referrals from, and make referrals to, a wide range of services and agencies in the community.

***What was the environment in which the innovation was created and sustained?***

The City of Arlington's Police Department has a long tradition of innovative delivery of services to its community. This tradition of service extended naturally to helping victims. The Police Chief, City Manager, Mayor and Council were supportive of the idea of piloting the Victim Assistance Program and have been satisfied with the results.

***What were execution costs and savings?***

The initial grants funded 100% of the salary and benefits for the Victim Assistance Coordinator. Since that time, the program has obtained continued grant funding for expansion and has gradually been absorbed into the City budget. Volunteers contribute more than \$60,000 in services each year. The program returned \$162,000 in patrol and

detective hours to the department in fiscal year 2004. This enabled officers to return to investigative and enforcement activities, while providing victims with professional services designed to help them cope with the impact of the crime.

***What lessons were learned that could be shared with other local governments?***

Too often law enforcement is called upon as first responder and is expected to deliver social services to the community. Partnering law enforcement with professional resources benefits the entire community. The program serves as a model for other statewide police departments.

***Which department and/or individuals championed the innovation?***

The initiation of the project was supported by the Police Chief, City Manager, and Mayor and Council. Supporters of the project, after implementation, include investigators, officers, program volunteers, the University of Texas at Arlington School of Social Work Department of Field Placement, and local victim services agencies.