

## Victim Support Services Available in Country Areas

This is the first column for Victim Support Service so I would like to take this opportunity to welcome readers.

For those who are unfamiliar with the organisation, the Victim Support Service is a South Australian service and was established in 1979 by the families of the 'Truro' and 'Family' murder victims. Previously there had been no support groups available for victims of crime.

The Victim Support Service (VSS) has certainly grown over the years and currently consists of over 18 staff based at the Adelaide office and country Regional Coordinators in Port Lincoln, Whyalla, Port Augusta, Port Pirie, Murray Bridge, Berri and Mount Gambier. Each regional office has one part time worker.

Trained volunteers contribute to the work undertaken by the service and they fulfill important roles such as court companion work.

VSS is a service which has a strong connection with the police, however we are an independent non-government organisation. People access our services in many different ways. Some are referred to VSS via police, but others contact us directly or via a family member, friend or another organisation. We are mainly, but not completely, funded through the Attorney-General's Department and are a not-for-profit, confidential organisation. People who seek our help are not charged for appointments.

Some areas we assist people who have become victims of crime are:

**Counselling:** sometimes people simply need someone from a confidential service they can talk to. Counselling may often just be one or two sessions, or we may refer to another professional counselor if ongoing counselling is requested.

**Court Companion:** when a victim of crime needs to appear in court, it can be overwhelming. Part of our role is to help prepare people for court and to be with them on the day if they request this. A court companion can be arranged who will stay with the victim and provide support.

**Victim Impact Statements (VIS):** When someone is a victim of a crime, they are usually given a **VIS** by police. This document is used in court and is read out at the time of sentencing. It allows the judge and the court to gain a greater understanding of the impact of the crime on the victim/s. Part of our role is to assist people in completing this document.

**Victims of Crime Compensation:** this is another area in which we can offer assistance. We provide information about Criminal Injuries Compensation and contact details for lawyers. We do not pay the compensation but merely get the ball rolling in the right direction for victims.

We also provide advocacy, community education, training and consultancy for other agencies and service providers.

Crime takes on many forms and regardless of the seriousness, it has the ability to impact upon the lives of those affected by it. The impact can be short term, however many effects can also remain with the victims, their families and the community for many years.

Each month, readers will have the opportunity to learn more about the ripple effects and impact of crime on the individual, their families and the community. I look forward to sharing this column with you.

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