

# CODE OF ETHICS

## Preamble

Clients of Victim Support Service have experienced injustice in terms of a violation of their personal rights during a crime. For many people, the injustice they experience may continue in the following ways:

- Lack of power and control throughout the Criminal Justice System;
- Lack of accurate information about the Criminal Justice Process and victims' rights;
- Community attitudes which foster victim blaming;
- Discrimination due to age, gender, sexuality, race or culture.

One of the roles of Victim Support Service staff is to assist clients to regain a sense of control and power over their lives. Every worker will bring to the organisation their own thoughts, beliefs and philosophies which will impact on the way they work with clients, colleagues and other agencies/organisations. This Code of Ethics is aimed at providing reference points to gain information about the values, ethics and beliefs of Victim Support Service, which provide guidelines for practice.

Social Work as a profession is constantly evolving and taking new directions. Victim Support Service is a dynamic organisation that has changed greatly over the years since its beginning and which will continue to change. It is important that the organisation constantly evaluates its practice, policies and procedures (including its Code of Ethics) to better meet the needs of all victims of crime.

## Ethical Guidelines

Victim Support Service Inc. is committed to providing a professional and ethical service that advocates strongly for crime victims' rights and upholds client self determination. It is anticipated that this Code of Ethics will be used as a guideline for practice by staff at Victim Support Service. It should also be used as part of the induction process of new staff, students on placement and volunteers. It should be used in conjunction with the following documents:

- The Mission Statement, Objectives and Values of Victim Support Service (*Appendix 1*);
- Existing policies on:
  - Client Confidentiality
  - Complaints;
  - Grievances of Staff;
  - Training and Development (*Refer to Policy Manual*);
- The Declaration of Principles Governing the Treatment of Victims in the Criminal Justice System (*Appendix 2*);
- The Australian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (*Appendix 3*).

## **Code of Ethics of Victim Support Service**

### **Confidentiality**

Victim Support Service is committed to maintaining client confidentiality by ensuring that information is only shared with others in the interests of the client. Information will only be given out following the appropriate consent processes, whenever possible, and on a 'need to know' basis. The specific process for this can be found in the Victim Support Service Client Confidentiality Policy.

### **Self Determination**

People who are victims of crime may feel they have lost power and control over their lives. Firstly, during the crime by the offender(s) and secondly, in their contact with the Criminal Justice System.

Victim Support Service embraces the AA SW Code of Ethics, which states that, *"The social worker will make every effort to foster maximum self determination and social responsibility on the part of clients."* This includes:

- Encouraging clients to self-refer; and
- Providing accurate and timely information to enable clients to make informed decisions.

### **Advocacy**

Victim Support Service recognises that the Criminal Justice System, community and other agencies/organisations do not always acknowledge and/or meet the rights and needs of victims. Therefore, Victim Support Service has a key role in representing victim's views and rights on an individual and community level. This may involve negotiations with individual organisations including Police, Courts, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP) etc to provide the best possible outcomes for clients. Advocacy also involves representing victims on a community level by speaking to the media, contributing to government legislation, policy and procedures and commenting on current practices.

### **Acknowledgment and Respect of Vulnerable Groups**

Victim Support Service acknowledges that particular groups within the community may have even more difficulty as crime victims in accessing services to meet their needs. These include:

- People of non-English speaking background;
- Aboriginal heritage;
- Women;
- Children;
- People with intellectual and/or physical disability; and
- Mental illness.

Victim Support Service has a responsibility to provide appropriate and sensitive services for these client groups. This may incorporate:

- The use of an interpreter;
- Consultation with other professionals, organisations and communities who specialise with that client group;
- Referral to a specialist service (eg Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Adult Mental Health Services, Nunkuwarrin Yunti etc.); and
- Consulting case conferences with other agencies involved.

Victim Support Service has a commitment to providing professional training to enable staff to better address the specific issues/needs that these client groups may have.

### **Inter-Agency Relationships**

Victims of crime may have contact with many agencies and organisations as well as with Victim Support Service. These may include the DPP, Police, Homicide Victim Support Group etc. Victim Support Service recognises that these groups may have a valuable contribution to the client's wellbeing, although they may come from a different philosophical base. Victim Support Service values a positive relationship with these agencies/organisations that is facilitated through:

- Communication (both formal and informal) which may include sharing information about clients within the client confidentiality guidelines;
- Constructive feedback;
- Timely resolution of difficulties; and
- Working together.

### **Intra-Agency Relationships**

The work undertaken at Victim Support Service can be stressful at times and healthy office morale is essential in supporting workers and volunteers. This service strives towards:

- Open communication;
- Constructive feedback through informal and formal supervision and the performance management review process;
- Mutual respect;
- Non-judgemental attitudes;
- Teamwork between volunteers, staff, management and council;
- Regular review of staff morale;
- Acknowledgment of individual staff feelings, thoughts and beliefs.
- Rewarding innovative ideas and excellent practice;
- Equal opportunity; and
- Fulfilling the requirements of Occupational Health and Safety Legislation.

## **Role of Volunteers**

Victim Support Service highly values the dedicated work done by volunteers. We recognise their contribution to the service, crime victims and the community. To continue to provide a quality service volunteers need:

- The support of all staff in the organisation;
- Regular supervision;
- Constructive feedback;
- Acknowledgment of their skills and experiences; and
- Clarity of roles between paid staff and volunteers.

**Reviewed by Michael Dawson July 2006**