Colleagues Explore New World in Victim Services at 2007 Conference

The biggest conference in the Association’s 30-year history took place in Williamsburg, Virginia, September 17-21, as more than 300 representatives of compensation and VOCA assistance programs joined in exploring A New World in Victim Services. With grant support from the Office for Victims of Crime in the U.S. Department of Justice, conferees enjoyed close to 50 workshops, general sessions, and discussion groups spanning five busy days. Outstanding guest speakers with a wide range of expertise lent their ideas and experience to our group, and networking opportunities abounded in one of America’s most historic settings.

Highlights included motivational speaker Dr. James Reese; a presentation on an updated Rape in America study by Dr. Dean Kilpatrick; and trainers from the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Network to End Domestic Violence, and the National Center for Victims of Crime. Dr. Cameron Crandall, chair of the New Mexico Crime Victims Reparation Program, did his ever-popular “Medical Claims” workshop, and NACVCB President Frank Henderson, Jr., led a lively discussion on contributory conduct issues. Dental claims, outreach in schools, elder abuse, staff management, immigration and trafficking, international victims, and conflict management also proved interesting for a large number of conferees.

The Association celebrated its 30th anniversary during a reception on the opening night of the conference.

Marie Bibus of Minnesota, Judy Farley of Rhode Island, Julie Tennant-Caine of Wyoming, Tony Vidale of Arizona, and Janice Carmichael of North Carolina were named to the NACVCB Board of Directors. We welcome their talents and enthusiasm to our organization’s leadership.

Virginia Compensation Director Mary Ware and her dedicated staff graciously hosted conferees and performed numerous tasks to keep the conference going. They were ably assisted by Virginia VOCA Assistance Director Mandie Patterson and her staff.

We appreciate the hard work of our OVC grant monitor, Linda Rost, as well as Toni Thomas, director of the State Compensation and Assistance Division. OVC Director John Gillis joined us in Williamsburg and spoke about his office’s priorities and plans.

Thanks to all our member programs that took time to join us and participate so actively. See you next year in San Diego!
President’s Message

Our 2007 National Training Conference in Williamsburg was a great success, thanks to the active participation of our members, and to the dedicated work of our Virginia hosts and our Planning Committee. Mary Ware and her staff, along with Mandie Patterson, did an outstanding job handling many of the logistical details, and they welcomed us with wonderful Southern hospitality. We had some excellent speakers, and many productive discussions. Our opportunities for networking were very enjoyable, and we appreciate all of you who took time to join us and to give us the benefit of your experience and expertise. I especially want to thank OVC Director John Gillis and his staff for their support. Toni Thomas and Linda Rost were particularly important to the success of this event. We now turn our attention to our training opportunities for the coming year. We have two Regions lined up: the Southern and Western Regional in San Antonio, February 17-20; and the Eastern Regional in the Northern regionals lined up: The Southern and Western Regional in San Antonio, February 17-20; and the Eastern Regional in the Northern regionals lined up: The Southern and Western Regional in San Antonio, February 17-20; and the Eastern Regional in the Northern

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A record year for VOCA deposits! Collections of federal criminal fines and assessments into the Crime Victims Fund in FY 2007 topped $1 billion for the first time in the more than 20-year history of the Victims of Crime Act. However, as has been the case in the past seven years, only those amounts released by Congress will be available to the states for compensation and assistance programs.

The record amount of deposits resulted from the payment of a $300 million criminal fine by British Airways, as well as $180 million paid by Schering-Plough (a pharmaceutical company) and $50 million by Korean Airlines for federal-law violations.

The previous VOCA-collection high of $985,000 was set eight years ago. At the time, it was an unusually high amount, and caused Congress to set a cap on spending to mitigate fears that states would be overwhelmed by a one-time windfall in funding.

Updating current Congressional action on VOCA funding, a concerted effort by victim advocates and national organizations resulted in the House of Representatives setting a spending limit for VOCA in the coming fiscal year of $635 million, up $10 million from the President’s budget request. The increase, if agreed to by the Senate, would bump VOCA spending up slightly from the past several years, and help ensure that VOCA assistance grants remain at their current level. Compensation grants will once again be at their usual 60% of-state spending level, as stipulated in VOCA. Action in the Senate and final approval may not occur until early next year.

The following chart shows the VOCA cap set by Congress for each fiscal year, as well as the VOCA collection amounts for the previous fiscal year. Traditionally, prior-year deposits are used for each fiscal year’s spending.

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Compensation Programs Help States Meet New VAWA Condition

A number of states are using their crime victim compensation programs to meet a new condition for grants under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). The new condition requires VAWA administrators to certify that all sexual assault victims receive forensic examinations free of charge, regardless of whether the victim reports to police or cooperates with law enforcement. While in many states, victim compensation programs are not primarily responsible for payment of these exams — police or prosecutors generally cover the costs — in about half the states, victim compensation programs operate these special procedures outside of their regular compensation applications to pay facilities for the exams. And most of the compensation programs that operate these special procedures do not require victims to report or cooperate in order for payment to be made.

One advantage to states that pay for forensic exams through victim compensation programs is that the amounts paid can be included as part of the compensation programs’ annual certified payout for VOCA grant purposes. This means that VOCA provides a 60% grant reimbursement on VOCA payments. Contact us for more information.

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Compensation Manager’s Guidebook Released

With the release of the *Crime Victim Compensation Manager’s Guidebook*, the Association has provided every manager of a comp. program with a rich assortment of ideas and tools to improve the operations of his or her program — and to understand and meet VOCA grant requirements.

Developed with grant support from the Office for Victims of Crime, the Guidebook spans two volumes. The first is devoted to primary responsibilities of program managers, and the second is a compendium of “tools” and resources. The Guidebook is available in two versions, print and CD. The CD allows users to “jump” easily to desired portions of the text. Volume I starts with an introduction to crime victim compensation and the Victims of Crime Act. It provides a history of the development of victim compensation in America, as well as background on the organizational structure, funding sources, benefits, and requirements of the various state programs. A legislative history of VOCA also is included, along with a description of the federal agencies and units involved in VOCA management, and an explanation of how the VOCA Crime Victims Fund works.

Chapter 2 discusses Federal grant management. Grant allocations, project periods, the application process, and required reports are covered. This chapter is intended to guide managers through the grant process, from beginning to closeout.

Chapter 3 explains the different VOCA requirements that must be met by compensation programs to remain eligible for grant funding. These include compensable crimes and victims, exclusion of property damage, mandated and allowable expenses, victim cooperation, nonresidents and federal crimes, and the relationship of state benefits to Federal benefit programs.

Chapter 4, the longest in the Guidebook, explores many of the ideas and strategies that have proven successful in operating victim compensation programs. Outreach, training and communication; claims processing; decision making; and funding are discussed in detail. Trends in program operation also are described, including new types of benefits, cost controls and fund recovery, changes in eligibility requirements, and automation. Special issues, such as the taxability of victim compensation, confidentiality of files, and staff health and well-being, also are covered.

The final chapter provides background and a variety of action steps under the rubric “victim advocacy.” The history and current status of victim rights are described; along with their relationship to the criminal and juvenile justice systems. The dynamics of victimization; community crisis response efforts; restitution and legal remedies; mentoring; conducting effective meetings; training and credentialing; and public awareness and education are discussed.

Volume II is a rather thick collection of resources and materials that should serve as a reference for compensation managers. Basic comparative program information from the various states is provided, such as reporting requirements, filing periods, and maximums. The VOCA statute is included, along with current OVC Guidelines. The primary VOCA grant forms are there, along with the OVC-FBI memo of understanding on accessing federal-crime information.

Examples of brochures and posters, letters to victims, surveys, training plans, and statutes protecting confidentiality are included as tools. The IRS Revenue Ruling declaring compensation nontaxable is provided, as well as a suggested approach to contributory conduct cases.

The Association hopes that the Guidebook proves a valuable tool for all compensation managers. Contact us if you have any questions.

Fewer Americans Get Health Insurance at Work; Political Debate Grows

A trend with ramifications for crime victim compensation programs is the continuing decline in the number of American workers receiving health-care benefits through their employment. With compensation programs paying roughly 50% of their total awards for health-care costs, any increase in uninsured Americans means that more crime victims will not have these vital third-party payment sources for bills.

Only 60% of U.S. employers offer health insurance, a decline from a peak of 99% reached in 2000, according to a survey by the non-partisan Kaiser Family Foundation. Almost 19 million workers, or 17% of the employed were uninsured in 2005, according to the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured.

About 60% of people who have health insurance get it through their jobs. Approximately 47 million Americans lack health insurance.

As the Presidential primary season heats up, candidates are discussing various solutions to what many believe is a health-care-insurance crisis. One solution being proposed is drawn from a recent Massachusetts law that requires everyone in the state to have health insurance, under penalty of a fine. (Only half of the 500,000 uninsured people in the state have so far complied with that law, however.) The Massachusetts approach (championed by Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney when he was governor there) also increased the number of low-income people covered by Medicaid, offered financial assistance to middle-income people in buying insurance, and regulated the insurance market to make it easier for people to purchase insurance. Democratic candidates Hillary Clinton, Barak Obama, and John Edwards generally are supportive of this approach, though they differ on some details, such as whether to require purchase, and whether to raise taxes on high-income families to pay for more Medicaid coverage. Republican candidates, including Mitt Romney, Rudolph Giuliani, and John McCain, favor encouraging people to purchase insurance through the private market, through either tax deductions or credits. Currently, only 15 million people receive health insurance through the private market, while 150 million get insurance through their employers (this includes family members of workers).

Rodney Doss Retires . . .

After a 30-year career in law enforcement and victim services, Association First Vice President Rodney Doss is retiring in December. Rodney was a long-time NACVSB Officer and Board member, and led training sessions and other events at many of our conferences. He will be deeply missed, and all of us wish him well in what surely will be an active retirement.

In 1995, Rodney began as director of the Florida Attorney General’s Division of Victim Services and Criminal Justice Programs, where he supervised victim compensation and VOCA assistance for the state. Previously, he served as a deputy sheriff and as assistant executive director of the Florida Sheriffs Association; as executive director of the Office of Statewide Prosecution, responsible for the prosecution of organized crime in Florida; and executive director of the Florida Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Authority.

Some of Rodney’s appointments and honors include service on the Florida Highway Patrol’s Statewide Promotional Assessment Board, the Community Oriented Policing Institute Advisory Council, the Florida Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission, the Florida Interagency Consumer Council, the Florida Safe Schools Task Force, the Attorney General’s Elderly Crimes Task Force, and the Governor’s Commission on Administration of Lethal Injection.

We’ll all remember Rodney’s cheerful attitude and positive spirit, his devotion to helping crime victims, and his deep interest in helping his colleagues in crime victim compensation.

We thank Rodney for all his many contributions to this organization, his generosity in sharing his time and talent with us, and want him to know we’ll always remember him as someone who helped build a stronger Association. Good luck, Rodney, and please stay in touch!
Telling Stories of People Works Best in Training About Victim Compensation

Most compensation programs rely almost entirely on people who simply sit with victims to provide them with the message that financial assistance is available. Training those individuals — in law enforcement, prosecutors’ victim/witness programs, domestic-violence shelters, crisis-prone programs, and other victim-assistance programs, as well as in the medical and mental health fields — is a key function of every victim compensation program. How best to do that?

Stories, Not Statistics

Every trainer, no matter what the field, faces a basic problem: How can I grab and maintain the interest of people listening? What does this mean to me? In addition, information must be made relevant to the best, most effectively engage participants. People who simply sit and listen may not learn as easily as people who become actively engaged in the process. In addition, information must be made relevant to the people who are listening. What does this mean to me?

How can I apply this information in what I do? And there is a simple reality in play: what sticks in people’s minds is not slogans, statistics, or bullet-point slides, but rather stories that stimulate the mind, that elicit empathy and sympathy, and that challenge listeners to find solutions.

The PowerPoint Conundrum

PowerPoint presentations are a common-place in today’s conference environment. Everyone has a PowerPoint, and many speakers rely on them because they believe it not only organizes their own thinking, but it gives the audience something concrete to see and then to take home after the presentation. It’s a crutch and a tool for many speakers, and in itself, it’s neither a bad or good thing. It all depends on how it’s used.

Dry statistics and presentations are not made more exciting or meaningful by PowerPoint slides. Bullet points can’t be made up for boring material. But the fact is that crime victim compensation is NOT boring — it’s about real people in horrible situations facing difficult circumstances, and who get essential help in recovering. This not only is exactly what your audience is familiar with, it’s also what they want to know more about. You can give them information they will want to see.

So don’t let the PowerPoint control you, the presenter. Use the PowerPoint to bring the human element in, not just to list facts about your program. Tell stories, not stats — and watch your audience perk up.

Training Objectives

What are you trying to impart? What is your take-home message? Can you really expect that profession-als in some other field, whether it be police work, victim advocacy, or mental health, will retain the details about your program — how much in crime-scene cleanup you pay, how many days a victim has to appeal a decision? Wouldn’t it be better simply for them to see in a vivid way how victim compensation changes people’s lives, and that they have a direct responsibility to let victims know about it?

A presentation can turn from being just generic, ab-stract facts, into one involving concrete, rich examples of people whom your audience members encounter every day. They’ll remember the names, not the num- bers; the pain and hope rather than the statistic. So how better to start your presentation than with an intriguing example that illustrates all your major talking points? Yes, you want to make sure they understand reporting, filing, cooperation, contributory conduct, and what you actually pay for — but get that message across by focusing on a human story rather than a talking point.

Case examples

The following case examples were used at a national conference and a statewide training conference to illustrate requirements, benefits, and procedures. Presenters focused on these ex-amples as a starting point to engage their audiences, rather than as an afterthought following the recitation of “just the facts.” These examples are offered as only that; other cases can be used just as effectively to meet individual trainers’ needs and desires in imparting information about their programs. And don’t shy away from showing what your program can’t pay for; it helps people to understand limitations, so that there aren’t misunderstandings that ultimately may lead to more time spent by your staff dealing with unacceptable requests or misinformed victims.

Example 1

Joan is a 35-year-old woman with an eight-year-old daughter, Meredith. Tom, her estranged husband (and father to Meredith), breaks into the house, picks up a knife from the kitchen, and attacks Joan. Meredith, wailing, runs to her bleeding mother’s aid, and is cut as Tom swings the knife at Joan. Tom breaks the television, slashes the tires to the car, and kills the pet dog as he departs the premises.

Joan and Meredith seek medical attention at the emergency room. Meredith needs counseling, and is too traumatized to return to public school. Joan has no benefits from her part-time employment at the local drug store, and after two weeks of being too hurt to work, finds that she must now stay home to care for her child. She would like to get a private tutor for her child, as well as pay someone to look after her, so that Joan can return to work. The daughter talks constantly of wanting another dog, and her thera-pist has recommended getting one.

What other needs might these victims have? What can the compensation pro-gram pay for, and what can’t it help with?

Example 2

Mr. Jones drove a large van on an interstate highway and was struck by an un-insured drunk driver. Jones’ van rolled over, and although he was not injured badly, he sustained a blow to the throat, which damaged his voice so that only those very close to him could hear him. He works as a motivational speaker. When police arrived, they discovered that 15 Mexican nationals in the van also had been injured, some severely, and it was determined subsequently that none of the 15 met legal requirements to be in the country. Jones and all 15 passengers filed crime victim compensation applications.

What benefits are available to Jones? His only injury is to his throat, so he cannot work at his normal occupation of motivational speaker, but he could perform other jobs.

What benefits are available to the passengers? How does their “illegal status” affect eligibility? Can the immigrants receive lost wage benefits for the meat-packing jobs that were to start next week?
Training Calendar

National Training Conference
San Diego Sheraton Suites
September 8-12, 2008

Southern & Western Regional
San Antonio, Texas
February 17-20, 2008

Eastern Regional Conference
Mystic, Connecticut
May 6-8, 2008

More information will be sent soon to all programs!