Fighting for Those Who Need it Most

One local nonprofit has made it their mission to seek justice for victims.

by Vista Exline
Community contributor

Who would get up in the middle in the night and drive to a crime scene at the request of a police officer? Who meets with a victim to say “I’m so sorry this happened,” “What can I do for you,” “Let me tell you about what’s going to happen next and help you get what you need,” and most importantly, “You are not alone.” If you said “VOI Victim Advocates,” you would be correct.

VOI stands for Victim Outreach Inc., and VOI Victim Advocates are trained to respond to victims in crisis, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, helping them get through those initial traumatic hours and helping them get the resources they need and the information that will help them know what to expect next. VOI Advocates know that human beings suffer psychological trauma as a result of criminal behavior. When called by police to a crime scene, they are there to support those whose lives have now been disrupted. Many victims report confusion and difficulty thinking through next steps. VOI works with police to ensure victims are treated with respect and dignity, have information about their rights and resources, and get the emotional support and information they need and deserve.

A Noble Mission

VOI Advocates play a vital role in helping victims with next steps, like developing safety plans and identifying where they might stay or who to call for help. Many victims feel unprepared and overwhelmed by the subsequent criminal investigation, and they welcome the help of VOI Advocates. Many victims need assistance with basic needs such as shelter, transportation or food.

VOI’s mission is to promote the healing of people impacted by crime and trauma so that they can recover to lead healthy, productive and inspired lives. For nearly 28 years, this community non-profit has contracted with police to provide comprehensive services to victims of crimes in Jefferson County – crimes that include homicide, robbery, child abuse, sexual assault and domestic violence, as well as seemingly small crimes such as harassment or criminal mischief. VOI also helps people through non-crime related but traumatic incidents such as the natural death of a loved one, suicide or SIDS death or witnessing a terrible accident. Last year alone, VOI helped over 4,000 citizens who reported to police in Arvada, Wheat Ridge, Golden, Edgewater, Mountain View, Morrison, Lakeside and the Colorado School of Mines.

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The people at Victim Outreach Inc. do more than see that victims’ rights are followed. They give a victim peace of mind and hope – because when you have someone on your side, it makes even the darkest nights seem brighter.

Photo courtesy of Latham Junior Photography
Branching Out

In addition to offering these vital services, VOI is recognized for inter-agency work which contributes to the development of stronger and more effective policies and protocols for intervention with victims and their families. These efforts also serve to strengthen relationships, thereby contributing to a community where cooperation is a priority and consequently, more effective at responding to the needs of those who have been harmed.

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Help is On the Way

4,000

VOI helped more than 4,000 people in Jefferson County during 2013.

How to Help

Volunteering with VOI can be an exciting and fulfilling opportunity to give back to your community while gaining knowledge and experience. Advocates learn about victim issues, crisis intervention, community resources and the criminal justice process. They work with police and their community, helping people through a critical time and contributing to their healing. Prospective volunteers do not need a background in human services – only a caring heart, the willingness to learn about victim issues, the criminal justice process and incident command. We look for people who have common sense and are happy and healthy in their own lives. Those qualities contribute to the ability to do – and survive – this important, but difficult, work.

Volunteering with VOI is a unique opportunity to be on
Additional Initiatives

Take a look at some of the other programs and events that VOI has created.

**Courage Garden**
**Started by** VOI with the help of former district attorney Dave Thomas, the Courage Garden is a memorial garden for victims and Jefferson County Employees. Located behind the Jefferson County Courts and Administration building, it also serves as a place of respite and peace for those involved in court cases. This April 12, VOI will join with other Jefferson County Victim Service Providers to host “The Courage Walk,” which ends at the Courage Garden. For more information, please call 303-202-2196

**Adopt-A-Bear**
The police departments that VOI serves are all proud to be part of the “Adopt a Bear for a Child’s Sake” program. A donation of $20 purchases two teddy bears. The first bear, “Officer Hugs”, is yours to keep. The second teddy bear, whose mission is to provide comfort, will ride along with an officer until it lands in the arms of a traumatized child. This teddy bear’s t-shirt reads, “I got hugs from the police department.” Our “Adopt a Bear for a Child’s Sake” program takes community participation to be successful. 100% of your donation is used to support this program. For more information, please call 303-202-2196

As a nonprofit, VOI seeks volunteers from the community each year.

Photo courtesy of Latham Junior Photography

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Donations to “Adopt a Bear for a Child’s Sake” ride along with police until they’re given to a traumatized child.
Photo courtesy of Latham Junior Photography

the front lines of the criminal justice system and provide crisis intervention services in your community. Many of our current volunteer advocates tell us that they feel like they really make a difference, and they love all of the training and education they get. We have a diverse group of volunteers that includes full-time employed, retirees, and students. Because we ask our volunteers to help cover evenings and weekends, it is an ideal position for someone who works Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. VOI also recruits for advocates who can volunteer during the work-week.

VOI recruits bi-annually for volunteer victim advocates. Spring training is planned for April, 2014. If you are interested in joining a group that is making the difference in the lives of people, call 303-202-2196. There are a number of ways that you can contribute to this effort besides volunteering as a victim advocate. Sign up for our newsletter to stay connected to our work, join VOI’s Board of Directors, sponsor, host or help with a benefit event, donate a silent or live auction item, include VOI in your charitable giving or consider a legacy donation. Visit VOI’s website at victimoutreach.org for more information.