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# **VICTIM SERVICES**

# **PROGRAM EVALUATION**

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AN INITIATIVE OF:

**The Violence Prevention Initiative**  
**(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador)**

COMPLETED BY:

Hollett and Sons Inc.

Shoal Harbour NL

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Victim Services Program has been in existence for 11 years. In that time span it has expanded in terms of its geographical presence, its mandate and by the number of staff. Grown from the needs of victims expressed by anti-violence and equality seeking groups as well as the judicial system in the early 1990's, the Victim Services program has evolved into a critical component of the Newfoundland and Labrador judicial system.

This evaluation of the Victim Services program is meant to provide program administrators insight to the perception of their client, stakeholder and staff opinions on the performance of the program. To that end, Hollett and Sons Inc. was contracted to work with these groups about their experiences with and recommendations for the Victim Services program.

Several pieces of independent primary research and consultation were undertaken. Specifically:

- Interviews with 12 stakeholders from the judicial system and the community
- Survey of 114 clients of Victim Services.
- Interviews with the 17 Victim Service Co-ordinators

The results of the research show there are many accomplishments of the program over the last 11 years and there are several challenges currently facing it.

### *Accomplishments:*

- Victim Services Program is highly regarded by clients, community, staff and the judiciary system;
- Clients credit the program as a key component in their ability to survive their ordeal and would recommend it highly to others;
- The most successful components of the Victim Services program appear to be their ability to provide support and information to the victims and to provide information to and communication with the judiciary system;
- Staff are considered professional, committed, empathetic, supportive and very hard-working;
- the Newfoundland and Labrador Program compares favourably to Victim Services Programs in other jurisdictions.

### *Challenges:*

- There is a major gap for service to children under 16 in Newfoundland and Labrador and most people point to Victim Services as the organization of choice to be given a mandate (and budget) to deliver those services;
- It is considered to be under-resourced;
- Some geographical areas not perceived to be well serviced;
- There are concerns about adequate service provision to aboriginal communities in Labrador;
- Case Loads are considered to be too high;

- Victim Services Co-ordinators are not able to stay connected with community and work on the preventative and proactive part of anti-violence due to heavy caseloads.

The remainder of this report presents the findings from the perspective of the different groups. The complete findings are found in the three appendices.

The management and staff of the Victim Services program have been of tremendous assistance in completing this review by providing advice, reviewing draft questionnaires, contacting clients for permission to interview them for the evaluation, and providing names and substitutes for the stakeholder interviews. They are a very busy group and this time and effort was much appreciated.

*Recommendations from the Evaluator:*

While it was not the goal of this evaluation for the evaluator to provide recommendations, there are several Hollett and Sons Inc. would like to make, based upon the research completed for the project.

1. Investigate what services can be provided to Children under the Victim Services program and how they can be best delivered. Whether this is a partnership with Health and Community Services, a new segment of Victim Services or a new Victim Services initiative completely, this appears to be a critical gap around a vulnerable population in the service spectrum of the program.
2. Increase the meeting time, programming time and networking opportunities with the anti-violence and equality seeking community groups. The Victim Services Co-ordinators are wanted by these groups to ensure the voice and experiences of victims are heard and in exchange, the Victim Services Co-ordinators remain grounded, networked and informed in the service-delivery and advocacy work of these groups, and are able to work on the prevention and education around violence issues.
3. While it is appreciated there are no new resources anticipated for Victim Services, there is a definite need for more resources in terms of better meeting the needs of Children (as above) as well as geographically distant and culturally distinct communities, particularly aboriginal communities.
4. Ensure there is effective annual training on changes to the criminal code and other areas that affect the work of the Victim Services Co-ordinators.
5. Ensure all opportunities to network and co-ordinate services and communications with other representatives of the judicial system are taken.
6. From a logistical point of view, when a client avails of the Victim Services program, they sign a confidentiality agreement with their co-ordinator. It is recommended a change in that form be made which enables the client to opt in (or out) of any future evaluations. This would diminish the amount of logistical work required to set up future evaluations.

Finally, it can not be over-emphasized the importance of this program and the vital service it provides to victims of crime in this province. As the research shows, the program has obviously been well staffed, well-executed and well managed and must be continued as such.

The concern is that continued high caseloads and difficulty in meeting all of the demands placed upon it will begin to "wear at the seams" of the abilities of the staff and the service to clients may diminish.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background**

Victim Services is a program offered through the Department of Justice which aims to help persons who have been victims of criminal offences. The services focus mostly on victims of violent crimes. Help is provided through a network of ten regional offices throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Presently, the program is coordinated by a provincial manager with an additional 14 full-time and three part-time regional coordinators delivering services. The program celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in November 2001.

The success of the program has been demonstrated in the growing demand for service by voluntary clients. Victim Services activated 3,745 referrals in 2000-2001 which was an increase of 104% from the previous year. Some of this increase has been attributed to the 1999 changes to the Criminal Code of Canada.

Available services include general information about the criminal justice system, special information about a case, pre-court preparation, assisting with completing Victim Impact Statements and providing emotional support and short-term counseling. The program is available to victims 16 years and older.

### **Scope of Analysis**

According to the Request for Proposals, the following was the Scope of the Analysis required for the Program Evaluation:

*In keeping with Government's accountability agenda, this project will conduct a program evaluation of Victim Services. The project must address client satisfaction with current services and the outcomes associated with these services. In addition, it will include a component which reports input on the program from professionals in the justice system and the community on the level of support, the nature of the services delivered, and the service delivery model utilized. This information will be presented in an orderly written format suitable for publication.*

*In order to achieve this goal a number of activities will be necessary. The scope of this project should include but not be limited to the following:*

- 1. Prepare a detailed work plan within one week of signing contract.*
- 2. Develop an evaluation framework to include approach and methodology, outcomes to be evaluated, key indicators and analytical techniques.*
- 3. Develop questionnaires for interviews with key respondents (sample of former clients, and sample of professionals from government and the community to be provided by Victim Services).*
- 4. A report will be found including literature review related to best practices in similar programs, information gathered from key informants, analysis of data and recommendations for the program's future development.*

5. *An appendix of support documents including contact information for key informants, survey tools used and other supporting documentation relevant to the program.*

**Method**

After Hollett and Sons Inc. were awarded the contract for the Evaluation, a detailed research method was developed and approved by the project management committee. Several pieces of independent primary research and consultation were undertaken to complete the program review. Specifically:

- Telephone & in-person interviews with 12 stakeholders from the judicial system and the community to assess their opinions of the program
- Telephone Survey of 114 clients of Victim Services.
- Telephone Interviews with the 17 Victim Service Co-ordinators

The methodology for each is included in the respective report of full results included as Appendices 1, 2 and 3.

All research was conducted between May and August, 2003 by Susan Hollett, Andrew Taillon and/or Bev Stone of Hollett and Sons Inc.

This summary report brings together the findings of the primary research.

A Literature Review was included in the original terms of reference. After much research and discussion, it was agreed there is very little to include in this as there is very little literature actually on Victim Services programs. In its stead, we include a brief comparative overview of the Victim Services programs in the four Atlantic provinces as part of this report.

## **RESEARCH AREAS**

### ***From the Clients Perspective***

The survey was developed by Hollett and Sons Inc., reviewed and edited by the evaluation project team (including representatives of the Victim Services Program, the Women's Policy Office, the Department of Justice and the Violence Prevention Initiative) as well as input from the 17 Victim Services Co-ordinators.

The development of the survey was done with particular care and diligence because of the nature of the service and of the client base. Considerable research was undertaken in other jurisdictions to find examples of surveys that had sampled a similar population with little success. Hence, much time was dedicated to the finalization of the survey to ensure it was sensitive to the position of the client, evaluated the program and not staff performance, and was able to gather solid, quantifiable data. A copy of the survey is appended.

The original sampling goal was 400 clients. A sampling quadrant, based upon region and upon "type" of client (Female, male, family, or business) was developed and the Victim Service Program Manager randomly selected client who filled the quadrants. This number was considerably reduced when it was recognized the 400 was based upon an assumption that referrals equaled services provided, which in fact was not the case, and the number of referrals was considerably higher. The final number of survey participants identified was 161.

The client file numbers of these selected clients were then forwarded to their respective Victim Services Co-ordinator. Because clients have never agreed to participate in any form of evaluative research by a third part, and there are strict confidentiality rules within Victim Services, each potential survey participant had to be contacted to see if they were interested in the survey. Once they had agreed, their first name and their phone number was forwarded to the evaluators to contact. This process was unanticipated and added considerably to the overall time frame of the survey. Jan 2001 to Oct 2002

The following are the survey participation rates: Completed Surveys - 114

No Answers - 21

Inaccessible Clients - 23

Partially Completed - 3 started to do survey, and client had to leave - unable to reach again

TOTAL 161

### **Survey Logistics and Population Demographics**

- All surveys were conducted in May 2003.
- The bulk of the survey (47%) were completed by participants from the Avalon Region, 23% from Central, and 15% from both Western and Northern respectively.
- Our survey population shows the following breakdown: Female 68%, Male 29%, and Family and Business 2% respectively. This approximately follows the group representation in the client

populations as a whole.

- The age grouping was for the age of the person for whom the services were provided. 55% were between 16 & 40 years of age; 21% between 41 & 65 years of age; 11% were either under the age of 16 or a family; and 3% were over the age of 65.
- Most (58%) of the survey population were involved with a personal offence and 31% were involved in a property offence.

### **Awareness and Opinions of Services**

- Most (68%) were not aware of Victim Services before being referred to the program.
- Most respondents were contacted directly by Victim Services (41%) and the next largest grouping were referred by police (33%). 13% were referred by "someone else".
- 90% of respondents felt the timing of when they were contacted was appropriate; 9% thought it should have been sooner.
- Most (79%) of respondents dealt directly with the Victim Services Co-ordinator, 4% dealt with the Victim Services Assistant, and 18% weren't sure of the position.
- Most frequent services used were:
  - Updates on your Case (90% used this service);
  - Updates on decisions made with respect to their offenders (86%);
  - Information on the Criminal Justice System (85%);
  - Help in preparing a Victim Impact Statement (82%);
  - Emotional support to victims (69%).
  - Pre-court orientation (68%);
  - Referrals for counselling required by victims (55%);
- Survey Participants were asked to assess the "helpfulness" of each of the services they used. As can be seen from the results, the vast majority of participants found the services to be either helpful or very helpful. The one category that received the highest amount of "Not that Helpful or Not at all Helpful" was providing information on the Court system, where 10% of respondents chose that response.



Service	Very Helpful	Helpful	Not that helpful	Not at all helpful	No Answer
1. Information on the Court System	38%	38%	8%	2%	14%
2. Case Updates	53%	35%	2%	1%	10%
3. Pre-Court Orientation. Court Preparation	37%	24%	4%	3%	33%
4. Victim Impact Statement Help	40%	30%	6%	2%	22%
5. Referrals	25%	25%	5%	1%	44%
6. Emotional Support	38%	30%	3%	1%	30%
7. Info on Offenders in the system	48%	34%	4%	4%	10%
8. Other:	5%	2%	0%	0%	93%

- 92% felt the overall experience with Victim Services was positive, while 4% thought it was not.
- Participant's expectations were largely met or surpassed in the delivery of services by the Victim Services Program. Points (2) receiving information and (6) receiving emotional support scored the lowest of only partially met or did not meet participants' expectations.
- 86% thought the types of assistance offered were meeting the needs of clients. 10% thought they were not.
- 20% of respondents had suggestions for change - 78% did not.
- When respondents were asked what was **the most important** thing (*action, service*) the Victim Services program did to help you, the overwhelming response to this question was the provision of support to the victim:
  - emotional support to face the court process and to face their attacker;
  - the support of knowledge about what to expect in court, how to explain things to children, what was happening with their case and with the offender.
  - The support of understanding, caring and empathy of their situation.
- The vast majority of respondents said they would (highly) recommend the Victim Services program to others.

***From the Victim Services Co-ordinators Perspective***

**Most Valuable Services Victim Services Provides**

**Major Themes**

Many respondents indicated they felt all services were valuable, although were willing to choose some as more valuable. The most common responses (respondents could identify as many services as they wished) to this question were:

- **Information**(10 responses) This included case and court specific information as well as general information provisions.
- **Support/advocacy**(11) This included counseling, referral to other services, accompaniment to court and general advocacy.
- **Victim Impact Statements** (2)
- **Safety Planning** (1)

**Gaps in Service Provision and/or Delivery**

**Major Themes**

- **No services for children under the age of 16 (12)** By far the most common response to this question was the lack of provision of services for children under the age of 16. Many coordinators reported feeling frustration at their inability to help individuals in this situation, other than being able to help with the writing of a victim impact statement.
- **Human Resources (4)** Many coordinators reported not having enough time to handle their caseloads, with the result that the quality of the service was lowered.
- **Tine Constraints/Coordination with partners in the justice system (4)** Coordinators felt there were issues with some of their partners in the justice system. These included extremely tight deadlines for victim impact statements, slow or non-existent referrals from some police partners, and a lack of knowledge and respect for the Victim Services Program.
- **Access (2)** The issue here was the inability of some coordinators to service their entire region, due either to geographical restraints or clients who had no phone or other convenient means of contact.
- **Profile (1)** This respondent felt Victim Services needed to be more well known generally.

**Suggestions to Improve the Program (within Current Resources)**

**Major Themes**

Almost all respondents noted more resources, particularly for more staffing, would be the most welcome change. Once that was out of the way, some respondents still had some suggestions

- **Streamlining and prioritization of services (3)** The main issue here was coordinators devoting a good deal of time dealing with administrative issues rather than using that time to deal with more serious concerns. For example, tracking down businesses for VIS regarding shoplifting offences was seen as reducing the ability to work with victims of violent crime.
- **Better flow of information/communication with partners (4)** Coordinators were also concerned that their partners in the justice system were not coordinating with them adequately, to the detriment of victims. A major example was slow or non-existent referrals by police, as noted in the section above. The suggested solution was better communication with, and education for, partner organizations.
- **No (3)**

### Pressing Issues

### Major Themes

Most of the responses in this area dealt with issues identified in questions 2 and 3 above. Respondents took the time to identify issues that they had not identified previously, which usually corresponded with answers given for the other questions by other respondents.

- **Timing of referrals/interagency issues (5)** Respondents were concerned other justice partners, as noted in question 3 above, were not communicating with them adequately. In some cases this led to referrals being received too long after the incident and too close to the court date.
- **Caseloads (2)** Coordinators felt lack of resources caused their caseloads to be too high for them to provide the level of service they would like.
- **VIS redundancy (2)** Respondents were concerned along the same lines as the streamlining/prioritization concerns noted in question 3. VIS statements, particularly those for less serious crimes, were seen as taking time away from more worthwhile endeavours.
- **Provincial information system(1)** This respondent was concerned the computerized system the coordinators used for getting information on areas around the province was not able to get information on areas outside her immediate community.
- **Yearly Training for Staff(1)** This respondent felt that keeping current with developments in legislation, counseling, and computer technology was a key area which was being overlooked.
- **Youth (1)** This issue was the same as the one addressed in question #2
- **No Answer (4)**

### ***From the Perspective of the Stakeholders***

The key informant interviews with the Stakeholders took place in July and August, 2003. 11 interviews were conducted, from a group of individuals identified by the Victim Services Program Manager. They are a balance of the judicial system (police, crown prosecutors, probation officials) and community (representing anti-violence and equality seeking associations).

### **The Evolution of Services**

#### **Themes:**

- Most stakeholders interviewed had been involved with Victim Services for several years - many of them since the original lobbying for the service. They referred repeatedly to the unacceptable level of support for victims before the VS program started;
- It was considered a positive sign (of a healthy program) that many of the original staff were still with VS
- There appears to be increasing public awareness of VS
- Many commented about program having evolved by adding more staff geographically to better serve victims throughout Newfoundland and Labrador;
- No appreciable difference between the comments of community and judicial stakeholders

### **The Current Service Delivery Model**

#### **Themes:**

- Most stakeholders had an overwhelmingly positive opinion of the service delivery model itself
- having the a continuum of services delivered to the client (rather than just at the court house) was a considered to be a strong point of the Newfoundland and Labrador VS system
- Community stakeholders in particular felt VS should be more involved in anti-violence organizations and initiatives, but the time just isn't there for it. Both VS and community lose when this does not take place as VS lose the opportunity to network and understand what is happening in the community and community organizations lose the level of analysis and front line knowledge that VS has.
- There is a perceived high level of commitment of the VS Co-ordinators to their clients and professionalism in their work.
- VS Co-ordinators are relied upon as a liaison by people in the judicial system to their clients and there is an expectation that VS provides a referral service for the clients to the other community services they may avail of.

## **The Current Service Levels**

### **Themes:**

- All stakeholders thought the Victim Services System was underfunded and the case loads were too high, although their praise for the work they did was very high;
- The Victim Service Co-ordinators work hard to service their clients as best as possible and are excellent as liaisons between the “system” and the victim. However, there is still much to do, including more and better partnerships with community groups to be more proactive;
- There are serious concerns about service gaps to aboriginal women, particularly those in remote aboriginal communities and to areas such as the south coast of Labrador, the west coast and the Burin Peninsula.

## **Recommend Changes to the Program**

### **Themes:**

- The major gap identified is the lack of programming and services directly to children under 16. Most stakeholders, both in community and the judicial system, felt this is a critical service and no one needs it more than do that vulnerable group, and that Victim Services is the best place for delivering it - they have the staff and they are trained. But most also said there would have to be new resources dedicated to the delivery of this service.
- There are serious gaps around providing services to geographically distant areas (such as the West Coast, the South Coast of Labrador and the Burin Peninsula) and culturally distinct areas (aboriginal communities) and the impact self-government will have on the latter.
- There are gaps at the tables of several community anti-violent groups and initiatives where the Victim Services Co-ordinators are wanted to ensure the voice and experiences of victims are heard and that the VS Co-ordinators remain grounded, networked and informed in the service-delivery and advocacy work of these groups.
- Finally, there is a perception among some stakeholders that VS has broadened its original mandate to much and the service to women as victims of violence is not as important to them as it should be.

## **Compare the Newfoundland and Labrador Program to Others**

### **Themes:**

- Most people were not able to answer this questions as they didn't have experience with other VS programs to which they could compare ours;
- Of those having knowledge of other VS programs, the Newfoundland and Labrador program compares quite favourably, both in terms of its comprehensiveness and the quality of service.

## JURISDICTIONAL REVIEW

### *Introduction*

This section presents a brief discussion of issues relevant to the operation of a victim services program. It's focus is mainly on the programs in the Atlantic Canadian provinces. There are two primary reasons for this:

- C National Relevance: Nationally, the maritime provinces are similar in terms of geography and demographics to Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as offering similar system based service delivery models.
- C International Relevance: Internationally, many countries are running substantially different (ie. volunteer based) systems, or have no system at all.

This section begins with a comparison based on service provision. It then compares selected statistics between provinces to set the stage for a discussion of program differences and the relevance of such issues for Newfoundland and Labrador.

### *Comparison of Services By Province*

The four charts below present a summary of victim services programs and their delivery in the four Atlantic provinces.

<b>Province</b>	<b>Programs Offered</b>	<b>Method of Delivery</b>
<b>New Brunswick</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crisis Support (short term counseling)</li> <li>• Referrals to Psychological Services</li> <li>• Process support (information and accompaniment)</li> <li>• Liaising with community and police</li> <li>• Victim impact statements</li> <li>• Trauma Counseling</li> <li>• Financial compensation for Victims of Crime</li> <li>• Services to children</li> </ul>	15 offices located throughout the province. Staff include 11 full time coordinators, 3 part time and 2 paraprofessional coordinators. There is also a central program consultant, programs officer and administrative assistant.

*Victim Services Program Evaluation*

Province	Programs Offered	Method of Delivery
<b>Prince Edward Island</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process Support</li> <li>• Referrals to other services</li> <li>• Short term counselling</li> <li>• Victim impact statements</li> <li>• Financial compensation for Victims of Crime</li> <li>• Service to children</li> </ul>	4 Victim services workers travel from offices located in Charlottetown and Summerside. Other staff consist of a manager, a projects officer, and 2 administrative support people.
<b>Nova Scotia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process support</li> <li>• Referrals to other services</li> <li>• Liaison with courts, community, police and crown</li> <li>• Short term counseling</li> <li>• Victim impact statements</li> <li>• Financial compensation for Victims of Crime</li> <li>• Service to children (child victim witness program)</li> </ul>	<p>There are four regional offices, three of which employ 2 victim services officers. The other employs three.</p> <p>Each office has an administrative staff person.</p> <p>There are also 20 support workers who work on a fee for service basis.</p> <p>The department is overseen by 4 managers and three support staff.</p>
<b>Newfoundland and Labrador</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process support</li> <li>• Referrals to other services</li> <li>• Liaison with courts, community, police and crown</li> <li>• Short term counseling</li> <li>• Victim impact statements</li> <li>• Legal defense fund</li> </ul>	<p>There are 16 regional coordinators located at 10 regional offices.</p> <p>Some offices have half-time staff. The overall program is managed from an office in the capital by a manager and an assistant.</p>

Comparing the four programs offered in the four charts we can see two significant differences - Newfoundland and Labrador is the only one of the four which does not offer services to children and it is the only one which offers a legal defense fund for victims of crime. Thus, Newfoundland and Labrador are leaders in one regard, and laggards in another.

Comparing the method of delivery, Newfoundland and Labrador have similar staffing arrangements to the other four provinces. The number of staff vary from province to province, but given relative population levels seem to be appropriate.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EVALUATOR**

While it was not the goal of this evaluation for the evaluator to provide recommendations, there are several Hollett and Sons Inc. would like to make, based upon the research completed for the project.

1. Investigate what services can be provided to Children under the Victim Services program and how they can be best delivered. Whether this is a partnership with Health and community services, a new segment of Victim Services or a new Victim Services initiative completely, this appears to be a critical gap in the service spectrum of the program.
2. Increase the meeting and networking with the anti-violence and equality seeking community groups. The Victim Services Co-ordinators are wanted to ensure the voice and experiences of victims are heard and that the VS Co-ordinators remain grounded, networked and informed in the service-delivery and advocacy work of these groups.
3. While it is appreciated there are no new resources anticipated for Victim Services, there is a definite need in terms of better meeting the needs of Children (as above) as well as geographically distant and culturally distinct communities, particularly aboriginal communities.
4. Ensure there is effective annual training on changes to the criminal code and other areas that affect the work of the Victim Services Co-ordinators.
5. Ensure all opportunities to network and co-ordinate services and communications with other representatives of the judicial system are taken.
6. From a logistical point of view, when a client avails of the Victim Services program, they sign a confidentiality agreement with their co-ordinator. It is recommended a change in that form be made which enables the client to opt in (or out) of any future evaluations. This would diminish the amount of logistical work required to set up future evaluations.

Finally, it can not be over-emphasized the importance of this program and the vital service it provides to victims of crime in this province. As the research shows, the program has obviously been staffed with highly competent and dedicated people and the program has been implemented and managed well and must be continued as such.

The concern is that high caseloads and difficulty in meeting all of the demands and expectations of clients and stakeholders will begin to “wear at the seams” of the capabilities of the staff and the service to clients may diminish.