

CRIME VICTIM SERVICES AWARD

Travis County, TX
Sheriff's Office



From left to right: Sheriff Paul H. Fitzgerald (NSA President), Amy Durall (Victim Services Manager, Travis County, Texas Sheriff's Office),

Sheriff Greg Hamilton (Travis County, Texas), and Tom Seigel (President, Public Safety Services Group, Appriss, Inc.)

NSA's Crime Victim Services Award was established in 2005 with funding from the Office for Victims of Crime, U.S. Department of Justice. Since 2008, the award has been sponsored by Appriss. The NSA Crime Victim Services Committee administers this award which recognizes "outstanding achievement by a Sheriff's Office in support of victims." The 2012 award recipient is the Travis County, Texas, Sheriff's Office (TCSO), headed by Sheriff Greg Hamilton.

Established in 1984, the TCSO's Victim Services Unit has been expanded by the Sheriff's Office to its present day size of 7 staff members and 61 trained volunteers who provide on-scene response to approximately 3,100 victims annually. The Unit recently was approved to accept interns from four local universities. These interns provide services to victims of Identity Theft and Elder Abuse – previously underserved victim populations.

Crime victims in Travis County receive continuity of services through TCSO's comprehensive services that include: crisis intervention; referrals to community agencies to access social services; and assistance for victims in exercising their constitutional/statutory rights, establishing personal safety plans, completing Crime Victim Compensation applications, and obtaining educational and emotional support.

The Victim Services Unit is also committed to researching and implementing "best practices" for service provision to victims. A pilot program was recently started in which Victim Services personnel are trained on how to properly photograph and document injuries in sexual assault and domestic violence cases. In addition, a new process has been initiated whereby information provided on the Assault Victim Statement by family violence victims is shared with the agency responsible for providing treatment

recommendations to the court for family violence offenders. And, Victim Services personnel monitor the GPS devices on family violence offenders. Finally, the Unit was called upon to assist in the Sheriff's Office's review and enhancement of policies and procedures regarding service provision to incarcerated victims of sexual assault.

The TCSO Victim Services Unit has established working relationships with many State and community entities that positively impact the services provided to crime victims. This outreach by Unit staff and volunteers has resulted, among other benefits, in better relations between the local immigrant population and law enforcement, with immigrants reporting more criminal activity and cooperating as witnesses to crime. And many agencies also utilize the services of the Victim Services Unit. The county Medical Examiner's Office calls upon the Unit to assist in death notifications, as does the Texas Department of Public Safety in traffic crashes.

According to its manager, Amy Durall, the Victim Services Unit of the Travis County Sheriff's Office is "a cohesive team that shares the vision of comprehensive and compassionate service provision to victims through the celebration of successes, the learning opportunities of challenges, the sharing of knowledge and ideas, and the intrinsic enjoyment of a job well done."

NSA established the Crime Victim Services Award to focus national and local attention on law enforcement services to victims of crime; in recognition of the unique needs of crime victims; and to promote assistance by law enforcement as early as possible in the response process. Nominations for 2013 are due November 16, 2012. For more information, contact Tim Woods at twoods@sheriffs.org.