

Crime Victim Services Award

Arapahoe County, CO Sheriff's Office

The NSA Crime Victim Services Award was established in 2005 with funding support from the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Since 2008, the award has been generously sponsored by Appriss, Inc. NSA's Crime Victim Services Committee administers this award program, which recognizes "outstanding achievement by a Sheriff's Office in support of victims." The award recipient for 2014 is the Arapahoe County, Colorado, Sheriff's Office, headed by Sheriff Dave Walcher, who succeeded Sheriff (ret.) Grayson Robinson on February 1, 2014.

The Victim Assistance Program (VAP) at the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office provides immediate crisis intervention and comprehensive follow-up to crime victims, witnesses, family, friends, and other individuals impacted by critical events. The VAP has one full-time coordinator, Kathleen Beebe; two full-time staff; and approximately 30 volunteers. It serves a population of over 175,000 residents, covering over 800 square miles that comprise both metropolitan and rural communities. As a predominantly metropolitan law enforcement agency that also serves rural communities, where services can be scarce, the Sheriff's Office has to be creative with resources and referrals. Accordingly, VAP staff have developed many working relationships with allied professionals in an effort to provide comprehensive services to rural crime victims.

The VAP is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The dedicated staff and volunteer members of the unit ensure that victims are aware of their rights and are provided appropriate resources and referrals to aid in their recovery. Volunteers are required to attend a monthly training meeting to keep current and competent in their skills. In addition, the VAP conducts an annual training academy with over 60 hours of classroom instruction in victim assistance and crisis intervention.

In 2013, the VAP provided direct services to over 3000 crime victims and persons-in-need. Every victim is personally contacted for follow-up by a VAP staff member. Furthermore, in addition to serving its own jurisdiction, the VAP also provides back-up and agency assists for police departments in the cities of Aurora, Englewood, Glendale, Greenwood Village, Littleton, and Sheridan, as well as to the Colorado State Patrol.

In 2012, the VAP was involved in the immediate response to the July 12th theatre shooting in Aurora. The VAP provided crisis intervention as well as aftercare, including aftercare to families whose loved ones were murdered in the shooting.

Also, in 2012, the VAP had a book and cell phone drive that collected over 5,000 books which were donated to battered women's shelters, the local child advocacy center, and other



Pictured (from left to right) are 2013-2014 NSA President, Sheriff Mike Leidholt; Victim Assistance Coordinator Kathleen Beebe; Tom Siegle, President, Public Safety Services Group, Appriss; and Captain Larry Etheridge.

agencies in need. The more than 100 cell phones collected were sent to the 911 emergency phone bank for persons in need of emergency communication. In 2010, the VAP developed a booklet that addresses death and provides a wide variety of information and resources for surviving family members. The booklet has been used by other VAPs in their own departments.

The VAP has also been involved in a project to create a statewide mass crisis response toolkit. The toolkit contains easy access to information, forms, and other documents to aid in the quick response to mass crisis situations. The Toolkit for Response for Advocates in Colorado: A Victim Assistance Guide to Planning and Responding to Critical Incidents can be found at www.trac.state.co.us.

And, every year the Sheriff's Office participates in National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW); and for several years now, the VAP has sponsored poster contests in the schools incorporating that year's NCVRW's theme.

In summary, the Victim Assistance Program at the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office has provided crucial services to the residents of Arapahoe County and the State of Colorado for many years. The staff and volunteers provide a sense of security and assistance to victims while maintaining quality services and dedication to the VAP's mission. They are the quiet and calm in the storm.