

## Faith and Community Based Approaches to Victim Services Webinar

### Additional Participant Questions

1. Is there a means by which we can order some of the tools mentioned in the Webinar?

Clementina Chéry: Order Online at [www.ldbpeaceinstitute.org](http://www.ldbpeaceinstitute.org) or contact Rachel Fazzino, Director of Training and Education at 617-825-1917 or [rachel@ldbpeaceinstitute.org](mailto:rachel@ldbpeaceinstitute.org).

2. Ms. Chéry, what do you think could have been the most helpful thing or things that victim services could have done for you or provided for you at the time of your child's death?

Clementina Chéry: Clarity, consistency, communication, and coordination of resources. We received lots of support after it was deemed that Louis did not belong to a gang and that he had parents who were involved in the community. This is why we developed the survivor based model for serving survivors of homicide victims. *What To Do After Leaving the Hospital A Step-by-Step Burial and Resource Guide* is the tool that I developed out of my own personal experience. I developed it because it is exactly what I wished I had after my son was murdered. This tool would have given me the direction from the time of death notification, what to do after leaving the hospital, how to navigate the multiple players, roles, and resources, and then what to expect and where to turn post funeral.

3. Ms. Chéry, thank you for sharing. I would like to know how the faith based community helped you and your family.

Clementina Chéry: In the beginning beside the funeral and the ministers speaking out publically about the ongoing violence, there was not really any type of help that the black faith community offered me and my family. Before Louis was murdered our family had attended a predominantly black Catholic church. They worked with us to provide the funeral mass and other than that I didn't receive spiritual guidance after the funeral from this church. Because I am from Honduras I have a network of friends I relate to because we are all Spanish speaking. My friend who is Dominican brought her priest to our house in the days before the funeral as there were many people in and out to pay their respects to our family. This particular priest asked permission to pray with us in our home. We welcomed the prayer at that time because it was needed and no one else had asked permission to pray with us. The asking of permission to do this was meaningful to us and made the prayer more welcome to our family as well as the many people who were in our home at the time. He made the prayer relevant to everyone who was present. After the funeral this priest invited us to visit his parish and we became members of that parish. I remain a member there today. It is important for me to note that this priest was white because at the time my assumption was that it would be someone from our own parish who would have offered the in-home spiritual support that we needed at the time because they were the only ones fit to do that and could understand us because of our race and class, etc. What made this spiritual guidance that we did receive from Father Von Euw so meaningful to us was that he asked permission before offering his prayer and that he prayed with us and did not preach to us at that time.

Today, as part of our training and education work at the Peace Institute, we provide guidance to the faith community about how they can be most supportive to survivors of homicide victims – both in the immediate aftermath of a homicide and ongoing.

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4. Ms. Chéry, If there was one thing that an agency or community could do that would be most beneficial to co-victims - what would that be?

Clementina Chéry: Partner with a survivor led agency in the community if there is one. There usually always are co-victims organically supporting other families in their community. Know who does what in your community. Co-victims have to navigate multiple service providers in order to get their needs met in all the many aspects of the life that they now have to lead. For example, there are specific needs before the funeral, after the funeral, ongoing needs regarding the investigation process, court, parole, probation, acquittal, safety concerns, employment, media relations, marital instability, health, self-care, etc.

The Peace Institute has developed a specific relationship with the many service providers that are mandated to serve co-victims in accordance to the Massachusetts Victim Bill of Rights in these areas of need. We have also developed a survivor leadership academy so that survivors can meet these providers and when the time comes that they need to interact with them, they will know how to in a healthy productive way that will not add to re-traumatization. Service providers through the Academy also get to hear from survivors about how they would like to be served and supported.

5. Ms. Chéry, do you think restorative justice principles and practices could help survivors of a heinous crime such as murder?

Clementina Chéry: I do and the work of the peace institute is based on restorative justice principles. There is also the socio-ecological framework to preventing youth violence and serving and supporting survivors of homicide victims, or co-victims, which is also useful in supporting survivors of heinous crimes. Our belief about restorative justice is that it is not something that you do; it is more of a set of principles or values, a mindset that you use to inform how you do any of the work that you do. It is also important to understand the culture or values of the people you are working with because many people's belief systems are rooted in restorative justice principles but they will never call it that because it is natural to them to operate in this way.

It is also important to note and research the many titles that victim services use to talk about justice for crime victims.

6. Who is responsible for providing victim services and when does that process begin?

Clementina Chéry: Anyone who is receiving funding to serve this population. We are all responsible for providing victim services, and it begins at many entry points. The challenge is that the agencies are not encouraged to talk to one another. There are many barriers that keep victim service agencies from meeting their goals in serving crime victims (e.g., HIPAA). It starts with the death notification. A part of the work of the Peace Institute is to answer this major question. For the past 10 years we have convened a network of service providers in order to better serve survivors of homicide victims (co-victims). It is also different in every city, county, and state. It also changes depending on biases, relationships, and assumptions made about victims and their families, especially those in poor urban areas.

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Katherine Lawson: At Victims to Victory the victim advocates typically initiate the contact with victims. Victims of assault and robbery may walk in for immediate services or call for appointments. Domestic abuse and child services are immediately referred to the respective counselors. Services to homicide co-victims are started as soon as they are ready, usually within 72 hours or sooner, to provide victim compensation information to assist with funeral and burial arrangements.

7. I'm a victim advocate and my biggest challenge is lack of funds. I'm in a rural area so that is also challenging. How can we get funds for our programs and jobs?

Katherine Lawson: You may want to explore partnerships with child and family, or social service agencies with which you could share resources and activities to help raise funds to support aspects of service delivery. Look for OVC grants with the goal of establishing services in underserved rural areas. Foundations, civic groups, and corporate funders sometimes offer small grants for programs and causes they support, like domestic violence, e.g., Mary Kay Foundation. And finally, churches may be willing to host special events to help raise funds for vital services that you can offer.

8. It appears to me that reliving the "story" of the trauma would be retraumatizing to co-victims. When in the grieving process has this been found to be helpful?

Clementina Chéry: You are right; this is why the Peace Institute uses a different approach. This is a journey, we work with survivors where they are on their journey, remember that many co-victims are dealing with ongoing trauma without any safe space to address their grief. It also depends on the person. Mostly, I would say it depends on the guidance and support before and after telling of the story and in what context. The biggest thing to be careful of is tokenizing victims and using their stories in ways that do not benefit their healing process. That is when it becomes the most retraumatizing and adds additional levels of trauma. We always guide survivors in preparation of telling their story, making sure that they have a plan for self-care and support for after they tell their story.

Katherine Lawson: Yes, reliving the story of the trauma can be retraumatizing. However, specific interventions –like Dr. Ted Rynearson's restorative retelling and trauma focused cognitive behavioral therapy – prepare co-victims to tell their story over a period of 10 -12 weeks. Through a process of support that builds on co-victims' resiliencies, educates them about trauma, teaches relaxation and de-stressing techniques, and encourages celebration of the life lived by the victim, these strategies have been found to be helpful.

9. How can you get beyond a church's response of "we don't have those problems with our congregation"? Especially in regards to violence, assault, and domestic violence?

Clementina Chéry: We must continue to work and teach, and train faith leaders on the issue and we must work with the members of the congregation to remove blame, shame, and stigma about the ongoing issues. At the Peace Institute we train survivors of homicide victims to develop survivor's ministries at their churches. Just as each church is committed to prison ministry, we encourage the survivors and we assist them on how to present to their leaders and get buy-in and ongoing support.

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This then does not fall on the pastor; it truly empowers those that have been harmed to transform their pain and anger into power and action.

Katherine Lawson: The church leaders can be presented with statistics about the incidence of crimes in its neighboring areas. Even in suburbia where some churches may be less likely to acknowledge that violent crime exists, local crime statistics will usually include domestic abuse and some other crimes of violence. Since most churches do outreach in their surrounding communities, you may suggest that they could be even more effective in reaching out to family and community members when they are better educated about the personal impact of crime. Let them know that you are a resource that can help bring awareness and can connect parishioners to victim support and services.

#### 10. Can the *Healing Homes* Curriculum be purchased?

Clementina Chéry: The Peace Institute has a *PEACEZONE* curriculum that can be purchased; we also have *Always in My Heart*, a workbook for grieving children, and in production we have the Step-by-Step Burial and Resource Guide.

Katherine Lawson: To discuss the possibility of purchasing the *Healing Homes* curriculum, contact Dr. Pam Connor by e-mail: [dconnor@uthsc.edu](mailto:dconnor@uthsc.edu).

#### 11. Who generally funds victim advocate positions?

Katherine Lawson: VOCA grants can provide money for direct victim services that can fund victim advocate positions.

#### 12. How do victims find out about your services? What is the relationship with local funeral homes?

Clementina Chéry: The Peace Institute has developed a unique partnership with three of our trauma centers; the Boston Police Department Homicide Unit Victims Witness Advocate, The Suffolk County DA's Victim Witness Advocates in the Homicide Unit, the Boston Public Health Commission, the churches and the funeral homes. When a homicide happens, there is a network that begins to work, and families are referred to the Peace Institute. Many times they are brought to our office by a street worker. We encourage families to come to the Peace Institute before they go to a funeral home, this way the family is aware of the charges and the family is also aware of the limitations of the state's victim compensation. Many of our clients are referred to us by other families that we have worked with. Funeral homes also refer families to us if they did not come to the Peace Institute first.

Katherine Lawson: Most of the victims served through Victims to Victory are given our contact information by local law enforcement. Some know of us through friends and family, community agencies, presentations, online links, and the 2-1-1 information network. We also work with funeral homes, which call us to provide victim compensation information and to assist co-victims with filing claims and accessing other services.

#### 13. What do you do when the very people who are supposed to protect you (specifically law enforcement) are the very ones who violate you in the most personal and degrading way?

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Clementina Chéry: The Peace Institute provides space for the two parties to come together and mediate a conversation and agreements for future interactions.

14. Can you talk more about assembling a coherent narrative? My thought is that some of those questions simply cannot be answered, such as why a crime occurred and what kind of world would allow such a crime to take place.

Danielle Sered: You're right that meta-questions such as you suggest are more about large sociological realities such as the cycle of violence which are not easily answered and not the target of participatory justice (often referred to as "restorative" justice). However, one of the goals of participatory justice is to break that cycle. And, arguably, one of the most important potential benefits of participatory justice is that it allows victims, if they choose to, to come face-to-face with the people who harmed them and ask their questions directly, including: *Who are you? Why did you do what you did? Why did you choose me? Do you know the impact you had on me and my family? Why should I believe you won't do it again?* At Common Justice, we work with defendants extensively for the 3 months leading up to the dialogue with the victim to ensure they are ready to answer the questions fully, honestly, and respectfully. Howard Zehr, Kay Pranis, and Mark Umbreit, among many others, write powerfully about why these processes can be of so much help for victims in these ways.

15. Since you see the barriers that prevent young men of color from seeking victim services, what is being done to remove those barriers?

Clementina Chéry: From a survivor based perspective we work with the families and in the schools and as part of the serving survivors of homicide victims network we can then connect families to the resources instead of the family trying to find the resources. It comes to them. The Peace Institute and Boston Medical Center Violence Response Team are collaborating on the adolescent survivor groups.

Danielle Sered: Please see the Webinar Q&As. We are particularly excited about the new work supported by OVC and rooted in the extensive and important efforts of the Vision 21 project. For several years now, we have been learning from a number of hospital-based violence intervention programs, many of which are part of the National Network you can read more about here: <http://nnhvip.org>.

16. Could some of these statistics be shared? Particularly the rate and source for those who are victims of crime being more likely to cause harm to others?

Danielle Sered: You can find the data we cited, as well as the updated statistics on the Bureau of Justice Statistics Web site. The newest data are available to the public here: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=4494>.

17. Will OVC TTAC come to our training center?

Yes, through the Training by Request or Customized Training and Technical Assistance programs OVC TTAC consultants can conduct training free of charge at your training facility. For more information about these programs, please visit the OVC TTAC Web site: [www.ovcttac.gov/views/HowWeCanHelp/dspHowWeHelp.cfm](http://www.ovcttac.gov/views/HowWeCanHelp/dspHowWeHelp.cfm).