

Victims Support Agency  
May 2008

# Update VSA



DEPARTMENT  
OF JUSTICE



# The Victims Assistance and Counselling Program

Working in partnership with the Victims Support Agency is the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program (VACP). This state-wide service system provides immediate crisis response to victims of crime both in person and by telephone. Outreach services, practical support, court support, referral and coordination of specialist support groups are all provided in response to individual needs. Eligible victims of crime may

## **Southern Metropolitan VACP: Windermere Child and Family Services**

Windermere was established in 1851 and is one of Victoria's oldest institutions. Originally an orphanage, it was first located at St James Church in King St, Melbourne before moving to Windermere Crescent in Brighton, hence the name. Now

growing municipality, the Southern Metropolitan victim support service has been at Windermere since 1999 and covers 10 local government areas from the cosmopolitan entertainment precinct of St Kilda to the dairy grazing plains of Bunyip on the outskirts of Gippsland; from the city of Kingston in the north, to the tip of the Mornington Peninsula in the south. In addition to the Narre Warren office, Windermere has offices at Cranbourne, Berwick, Springvale and Pakenham.

Jan Donaldson is the manager of the VACP and housing program at Windermere. She has worked in the VACP since May 2003 and has a wide background in welfare including child protection in both Victoria and New South Wales. Jan was a program manager with Court Network Victoria for 18 years and holds various qualifications including a Graduate Diploma of Arts (Human Services Administration).

In addition to Jan, there are five case managers, an intake worker and a team leader/case manager. Psychologists on salary work at Cranbourne, Hastings, Pakenham, Frankston Springvale and Berwick; while other psychologists are contracted throughout the region.

A typical week for a Southern Metropolitan VACP worker involves a mixture of client work; meetings and supervision; court support; arranging appointments and going with clients to solicitors; and advocating on behalf of clients at various other victim support and investigative



Jan Donaldson, Manager of the Southern Metropolitan Victims Assistance and Counselling Program  
Front cover: Jan with Michelle Johnson, Policy Support Officer from the Victims Support Agency

also access short term counselling to assist them in their recovery from the effects of crime. The following spotlight on two VACP agencies highlights the importance of the program, and illustrates the contrasting roles of metropolitan and regionally-based agencies.

situated at 48 Webb St, Narre Warren, Windermere is one of the fastest growing non-government organisations and has many services including family day care, in-home child care, housing support and disability services.

Situated in Victoria's fastest

agencies. Jan's week generally consists of policy and procedure development; networking and building partnerships; supervising senior staff; and contributing to various task forces. She also carries a medium case load and is rostered on a weekly session of intake.

Jan is acutely aware of the impact of working with traumatised people on workers, and managing this is of utmost importance. The agency works on a "well-being" framework, where new staff have a comprehensive induction and are supervised closely. There is a strong emphasis on professional development and training. Supervision, secondary consultation and debriefing are available to all staff.

Clients presenting at the agency are typically distressed, in need of information, and many are not sure if they want to take the matter further. Some need to flee their home to preserve their safety. It is important for workers to acknowledge, validate, and believe the clients. In some cases they need to advocate for them, to be their voice and focus on their strengths.

Meetings with clients are often conducted in parks or cafes, and in some cases hospitals and rehabilitation centres. It is important that clients have the appropriate support, and it is the role of VACP staff to link them in with police, psychologists, solicitors, housing services, housing support services, VOCAT, the South Eastern Centre against Sexual Assault, Family Violence Services and various other service agencies.

Staff at Windermere enjoy a strong relationship with police.

While it is difficult to get to know every police force member at the 34 stations in the region, referrals are frequent and they have roughly doubled since the Victims' Charter was introduced on 1 November 2006. There is a Memorandum of Understanding between the VACP and Region Five police with regard to the Family Violence Code of Practice, and a "fax back" system is in place to refer male victims of family violence to the program. Staff frequently work directly with the Homicide Squad, the Major Collision Unit, and other specialist police units in addition to the many Criminal Investigation Units in the Southern Region.

There are three main Indigenous population areas within the region: St Kilda, Dandenong and Hastings. Jan is looking forward to strengthening relationships with these communities and in meeting regularly with Nellie Flagg and John Bell, the VSA Indigenous Liaison Officers.

Windermere has a culturally and linguistically diverse strategy plan as a result of research conducted and published by the agency last year. This is an extremely important aspect of the agency's work, as around 60 per cent of residents in the City of Dandenong are non-English speaking!

A homicide support group for families and friends of victims was established at Windermere in 1999. Jan emphasises this is not a law and order or lobby group, rather it provides an opportunity for people who have been touched in any way by murder, culpable driving, or even a mysterious disappearance, to come together in an unstructured way and share their experiences.

While the group meets monthly, some victims are not ready for a group setting and prefer to chat to someone on a one-to-one basis on the phone. Members are involved for varying lengths of time, and as members "move forward", they often continue in the group to help those who are less advanced in their grief.

## **Gippsland VACP: Anglicare**

Anglicare Victoria has a long history of assisting vulnerable children and families across the state. Providing a range of services including foster care, disability support, drug and alcohol counselling, financial counselling, family counselling, and Indigenous support programs, Anglicare is home to the Gippsland Victims Assistance and Counselling Program.

In contrast to the Southern Metropolitan VACP, which caters to the needs of a fast-growing population in a highly diverse urban community, the Gippsland VACP must respond to a small population spread across a huge geographical area including the mountain ranges and ski plains of Mount Baw Baw, the dense and rugged bushland of the Snowy River Region, Orbost and Lake Tyers, and the tourist hubs of Wilson's Promontory, the Bass Coast and Philip Island. VACP offices are located at Morwell, Bairnsdale and Warragul.

Liz Quinn is the Manager of the Gippsland VACP. She has extensive experience within the welfare sector, and a background in nursing, disability services, family therapy and counselling. Barbara Livingstone is based at Warragul and has been with

## Victims Support Agency Update



Mark Longmuir, Manager of Anglicare Gippsland, with Barbara Livingstone (Middle), Victims Assistance and Counselling Program worker at Warragul, and Liz Quinn, Manager of the Gippsland Victims Assistance and Counselling Program.

the team since May 2007. She has been involved in the social welfare sector for almost seven years, working in community health counselling and the youth justice sector. Michelle Salas is based at Bairnsdale and has been working within the team for approximately two years. She has been working in the social welfare field for the past ten years. Caryn Anderson is the newest member of the VACP team. Based at Morwell, she previously worked in the disability sector in East Gippsland for five years.

When asked about a typical day in the life of a Gippsland VACP worker, Liz and Barbara described two types. The first was an office-based day, where they would work on case management, intake

and assessment, liaising and consulting with representatives from Victoria Police, VOCAT registrars, psychologists, solicitors and other service providers. As well as this, they would have to respond to both scheduled and unscheduled client visits, balancing the needs of both new and long-term clients. A large part of their office time is spent trying to organise appropriate counsellors and psychologists, as there is a limited pool available within the Gippsland Region.

The second typical day is an out-of-the-office day, which involves lengthy travel time visiting clients, meeting with various community groups, and networking with police and other service agencies. A lot of time

is spent working on community education programs at Indigenous communities, as a face-to-face approach has proven to be most effective. With the second-highest Indigenous population in Victoria, relationships with these communities is of utmost importance. The rate of Indigenous people accessing victims' services has recently increased in the Bairnsdale region, and it is expected that this trend will continue throughout Gippsland.

Gippsland VACP workers face many challenges in meeting the needs of their clients across such a large and mostly remote area, and this is one of the main differences between regional and metropolitan agencies. Clients are not always

able to access psychologists and counsellors who are usually located in the main towns, so a travel voucher system has been established to enable the client and counsellor to meet. Regional people also suffer from particular stressors, such as drought, isolation and high unemployment, which can compound the effects of crime.

Clients presenting to the Gippsland VACP are often very traumatised, expressing a lack of knowledge about the criminal justice system, complaining of an “information overload”. Some clients come forward after a significant lapse in time. These people often have issues relating to loss of employment, housing or Centrelink payments, and are unaware of their rights and entitlements as victims of crime.

Liz, Barbara, Michelle and Caryn have very little “down” time and their workload is very intense. The well-being of staff is crucial and the four have a very close working relationship relying on each other for support and debriefing, however this is often via phone link. There is a strong employee assistance program in place to prevent staff burnout which includes counselling, debriefing and critical incident stress management. Anglicare pride themselves on employing the most appropriately qualified and experienced staff to fill the often difficult and challenging but worthwhile positions available within the team.

Gippsland VACP has great expectations of strengthening working relationships with the VSA, Victoria Police and the Courts, as well as Indigenous and CALD communities. The VSA greatly appreciates the work of all

VACP agencies and acknowledges their valuable contribution in providing a consistent and high quality response to victims of crime across the state.

#### **Barwon South-West**

##### **Geelong**

Bethany Community Support  
1 Gibb St  
North Geelong 3215  
Ph: 5278 8122  
Fax: 5278 6382

##### **Warrnambool**

Brophy Family & Youth Service  
150 Liebig St  
Warrnambool 3280  
Ph: 5561 8818  
Fax: 5561 8816

#### **Gippsland**

Anglicare Gippsland  
Ph: 1800 777 423  
Fax: 5135 9595

##### **Morwell**

162 Commercial Rd  
Morwell 3840

##### **Bairnsdale**

3 Main St  
Bairnsdale 3875

##### **Warragul**

2/3 Barkly St  
Warragul 3820

#### **Grampians**

##### **Ballarat**

PACT Community Support  
4/17 Lydiard St Nth  
Ballarat 3350  
Ph: 5333 1351  
Fax: 5331 5082

##### **Horsham**

Wimmera Uniting Care  
185 Baillie St  
Horsham 3400  
Ph: 5382 6789

#### **Hume**

Ovens & King Community Health Service

##### **Shepparton**

399 Wyndham St  
Shepparton 3632  
Ph: 5831 6967  
Fax: 5723 2038

#### **Wangaratta**

86-90 Rowan St  
Wangaratta 3676  
Ph: 5723 2038  
Fax: 5722 2313

#### **Wodonga**

12 Stanley St  
Wodonga 3689  
Ph: 02 6056 6282  
Fax: 02 6024 5792

#### **Loddon-Mallee**

##### **Bendigo**

Bendigo Community Health Service  
47 High St  
Eaglehawk 3556  
Ph: 1800 620 542  
Fax: 5448 1699

##### **Mildura**

Sunraysia Community Health Centre  
149 Deakin Av  
Mildura 3500  
Ph: 5022 5400  
Fax: 5022 5445

#### **Eastern Metropolitan**

##### **Ringwood**

Eastern Access Community Health Building B, 46 Warrandyte Rd  
Ringwood 3134  
Ph: 1300 884 284  
Fax: 9870 4688

#### **North-Western Metropolitan**

##### **Footscray**

Western Region Health Centre  
72-78 Paisley St  
Footscray 3011  
Ph: 8398 4178

##### **Coburg**

Moreland Community Health Service  
21 Victoria St  
Coburg 3058  
Ph: 9355 9900  
Fax: 9355 9992

#### **Southern Metropolitan**

##### **Narre Warren**

Windermere Child & Family Services  
48 Webb St  
Narre Warren 3805  
Ph: 9705 3200

### The Child Witness Service

The Child Witness Service is for children involved in cases of crime against the person and for their principal carers. It was established to address specific concerns identified for child witnesses including having to see the accused person in the courtroom while giving their evidence; having to recount (and relive) the events multiple times during the court process; and the length of time taken for their involvement in the court process to be complete.

The Government allocated \$3.2 million to the service as part of a \$34.2 million package of legislative reforms and new initiatives to support victims of sexual assault and child witnesses in the 2006-07 State Budget. When the Honourable Rob Hulls, Attorney-General, announced the new service in September 2006, he said, "Appearing in court can be bewildering for children and the service aims to reduce the trauma of giving evidence". He added "Sexual assault affects some of the most vulnerable members of our community, with more than four in ten victims aged under 15... Better support in court will help encourage people to come forward and report sexual assault and sexual abuse".

The service offers specialised support to child witnesses, helps them to understand the legal process, and prepares them for court. Support is provided right through the legal process, from when charges are laid until after the court case is over. To make the experience less intimidating, support workers called "child

witness officers" explain the court process and show children through the court.

The Child Witness Service is located in Melbourne's court precinct. It offers child friendly surrounds and remote witness facilities, allowing children to give evidence from the service through a live closed circuit television link to the courtroom.

The service will gain valuable insight into the experiences and needs of children in the criminal justice system. Accordingly, it will play a role in providing professional and community education and in identifying ways to improve the system for child witnesses.

The service is located within the Department of Justice and reports to the Director Community Operations/Victims Support Agency. The service's manager is Vicki Bahen.

For enquires, call the service on 1300 790 540.

### Access to the Victims of Crime Helpline for Deaf People

Deaf people can contact the Victims of Crime Helpline by calling TTY 8684 6740 between 8.30am and 5.00pm weekdays, except public holidays. Alternatively, they can send an email to [vsa@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:vsa@justice.vic.gov.au) anytime, and a Victims Support Officer will respond at the soonest opportunity during office hours.



### Victims Register Update

Changes have recently been introduced to the Victims Register. On 1 December 2007, the *Justice Legislation Amendment Act 2007* commenced operation in Victoria, amending the definition of "criminal act of violence" in section 30A(1) of the *Corrections Act 1986*, thereby expanding the range of crimes for which victims are eligible to be placed on the Register.

Victims affected by culpable driving causing death; dangerous driving causing death or serious injury; and failing to stop and render assistance after a motor vehicle accident causing death or serious injury, are now eligible to be placed on the Register. This applies whether the crime occurred before or after the commencement date of these amendments, 1 December 2007.

## New Program & Service Advisors Appointed at the VSA

Direct management of the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program (VACP) was transferred from the Department of Human Services to the Department of Justice on 1 January 2008. The relocation enables the VACP to develop even closer links with the agencies which make up the criminal justice system, including police and the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal.



Jo-Ann Mishra

Three Program and Service Advisors (PASAs) will focus on the development of a collaborative partnership between the VSA and the various Victims Assistance and Counselling Program agencies. The PASAs will be responsible for broad service system planning, development and monitoring; and for providing updates to the VACPs in relation to Department of Justice and Department of Human Services policies, directions and initiatives. The PASAs will work with the VACPs in their allocated regions:



Michelle Stevens

- Jo-Ann Mishra - Hume, Eastern Metropolitan and Barwon South West
- Nadiene Caple – Southern Metropolitan, Gippsland and Loddon Mallee
- Michelle Stevens – Grampians, North West Metropolitan



Nadiene Caple

## Victims' Charter Implementation Update

Implementation of the Victims' Charter continues with approximately 61,000 copies of the *Victim's Guide* booklet being distributed by Victoria Police and other agencies so far. The VSA has also produced a series of plain-language fact sheets

focusing on the Charter principles and complaints process to inform Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities of their rights and entitlements under the Charter.

During the first year of operation, approximately 10,000 justice and victim service employees underwent on-line training to learn of their obligations in satisfying the 12 Charter principles, and Victoria Police reinforced their obligations under the Charter by launching their *Policy Statement for Victims of Crime and Victims of Crime Operational Procedures*.

On 30 January 2008 members of the VSA Victims' Charter Implementation Team attended the launch of the first of a series of anti-homophobic violence postcards and posters. The postcards and posters were designed to highlight the issue of homophobic violence and encourage victims to report to police. The project was partly funded by a Victims' Charter Grant to the Victoria Police Gay and Lesbian Advisory Unit. Under the Victims' Charter Grants Project Scheme, agencies can apply for funds to implement a Charter-related project. There have since been 10 grants of up to \$5,000 awarded. Other successful applicants include the Victoria Police Criminal Identification Squad, the Victoria Police Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Unit; the Office of Public Prosecutions; the County Court; the Supreme Court; and Court Network.

# Update VSA



## The Victims' Charter

If you are the victim of crime, you have the right to:

1. be treated with courtesy, respect and dignity by all criminal justice and victim support services
2. be given clear, timely and consistent information about your rights and entitlements and, if appropriate, be referred to victims and legal support services
3. be told about the police investigation at key stages - in some cases, the police may not be able to give you all the details if it would jeopardise an investigation, in which case you should be informed accordingly
4. be told about the prosecution, including charges laid and any substantial changes to charges, details of court dates and times when you are required as a witness or have indicated a wish to attend, court outcomes and any appeals lodged
5. be told (if you request it) about the outcome of any bail application and any special conditions of bail which are intended to protect you - your safety can also be taken into account when considering a bail application
6. have the court process explained to you, including your role as a witness
7. as far as practicable, be protected from unnecessary contact with, and intimidation by, the accused and their family and supporters, as well as defence witnesses while you are at court
8. prepare a Victim Impact Statement which may be considered by the court in sentencing the offender, and have access to the assistance you require to prepare a Victim Impact Statement
9. have your personal information, including residential address and telephone number, not disclosed to anybody except in accordance with the *Information Privacy Act 2000*
10. have your property that is held for investigation or evidence stored and handled in a lawful, respectful and secure manner and, in consultation with you, returned as soon as practicable
11. if you are the victim of a violent crime, request that the court order the offender to pay you compensation. You may also apply for financial assistance from the government for harm resulting from a violent crime
12. apply to be included on the Victims Register if an adult offender is sentenced to prison for a violent crime against you, receive specific information regarding the release of the offender, and have your views taken into account by a Parole Board when any decision about parole of the offender is being considered.

Published by Victims Support Agency  
Victorian Government Department of Justice  
Melbourne, Victoria Australia

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## VSA Update Evaluation

A big thank you to all the readers who completed our evaluation sheet issued with the last edition! The 50 responses were representative of the large range of stakeholders who receive the newsletter, and an overwhelming majority were positive and complimentary with a strong indication that the current look, format and name of the newsletter should be maintained.

Suggestions for improvement generally centred around the fact that there was not enough emphasis on the Victims Assistance and Counselling Program, and there was a recommendation that the newsletter cater for deaf people. This edition is intended to reflect these suggestions.

To offer further feedback, comments or advice, please call James McInnes on the Victims of Crime Helpline: 1800 819 817, or email James at [vsa@justice.vic.gov.au](mailto:vsa@justice.vic.gov.au)

Also published on  
[www.justice.vic.gov/victimsofcrime](http://www.justice.vic.gov/victimsofcrime)

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Office Hours  
9.00am-5.00pm  
Monday to Friday