



Victims' Voice Newsletter

Volume #2 | Issue #4 | Montana Department of Corrections Victim Services



Announcement...

Happy new year! We kick off January 2022 acknowledging those who have experienced the traumatic crimes of slavery, human trafficking and stalking.

January is national Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month, a time to acknowledge those experiencing enslavement and those who have escaped. Traffickers use violence, threats, deception, debt bondage, and other manipulative tactics to force people to engage in commercial sex or to provide labor or services against their will.

January is also national Stalking Awareness Month. Though millions of men and women are stalked every year in the United States, the crime of stalking is often misunderstood, minimized and/or ignored. In 85% of cases where an intimate partner (i.e., boyfriend or husband) attempted to murder his partner, there was stalking in the year prior to the attack.

Together, we can identify, address, and reduce these horrific crimes. What an excellent goal for the new year.

We hope you enjoy this issue of the Victims' Voice newsletter. Please send any feedback, content suggestions, and ideas for future publications to CorVictimLiaison@mt.gov.

What's inside our latest issue:

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EMPTY PLACE AT THE TABLE

*Butte Silver Bow Courthouse
December 21-23, 2021*

UPCOMING EXHIBITS

*Montana State Capitol
Rotunda: January 25-28,
2022*

*Cascade County Courthouse:
February 14-19, 2022*



Top: Honoring Darcy Buhmann; Left: Honoring Cassandra Harris; Right: Honoring Jeff Dykeman



Honoring Donna Meagher and Mark Luther

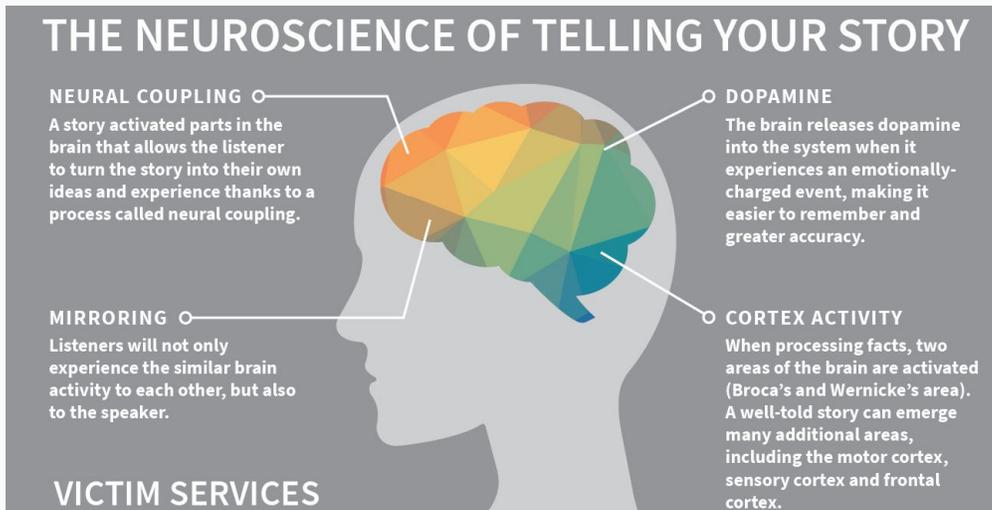
MT DOC Victim Services displayed, Empty Place at the Table, at the Butte-Silver Bow Courthouse December 21-23, 2021. This exhibit will be traveling across the state to bring awareness to the ripple effect of crime. Because society's focus is often on the offender, the ongoing trauma of victims, like anniversary dates, and the loss they feel when they see empty places at their tables where their loved ones once sat, are sometimes forgotten.

Thank you to the Montana victims and survivors who shared their stories, their place settings, and placed their trust in us to make this exhibit a reality. Each place setting contains personal items that represent loved ones they have lost and individuals whose lives have been forever changed by crime.

"Empty Place at the Table" is a powerful reminder that life can change in an instant. If you or a loved one would like to participate in this event, please contact MT DOC Victim Services.

Evidence for the Impact of Storytelling

BY JAMIE ROGERS



It is not just the telling or writing it down, but knowing that what you write will be read by others and the hope that by sharing in a public way, someone else might be inspired or helped by your story.

Sharing our Stories Increases Our Resilience

Clinical Psychologist Dr. S. Hamby talks about storytelling in an article for Psychology Today. She says "I have been surprised at the power of emotional, autobiographical storytelling. Emotional, autobiographical storytelling means writing about events and people that have mattered to you in your own life--not just describing the facts of your lives." Research shows that even brief autobiographical storytelling exercises can have substantial impacts on psychological and physical health even months after the storytelling.

1) Realizing that sharing your story can help others

Stories can be very healing and many people benefit from getting the opportunity to pass on their wisdom to others. This can be especially powerful for people who do not always feel that they have the chance to help others. Resilience is strengthened by recognizing that we are all experts in our own lives and we all have something to share with others. Another piece of this is starting to understand that words can have power—positive power—on others. As mentioned above, this is an under-appreciated benefit of narrative and storytelling.

2) Finding your voice

Another well-known benefit of storytelling is finding your own voice. What does it mean to "find your voice?"

It means learning how to express yourself and learning how to think about what has happened in your life in a way that makes sense. Developing and organizing your story often means imposing a traditional story structure on the events of your life. Sure, in some sense it may be true that many of the events of our lives are random and unconnected. From a psychological point of view, however, it does not help to think about them that way. It helps to think about your life as a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. It helps to think about how the various events—even the bad ones—have been part of a journey toward the person you want to become. Writing it down or telling it to someone else can help you impose that organization on it, help you identify key events, and even help you just rehearse and remember the details in a way that helps you become the author of your own life.

3) Re-affirming your values

Sometimes you learn things about yourself from the act of writing or storytelling. It can be a way to clarify what is important.

4) Finding peace, finding hope

What's the difference between someone who has achieved resilience and someone who has not? One important difference is a sense of well-being. People who have found their voice, shared their story, and reaffirmed their values often find a sense of peace and a hopefulness that they did not have before.

THE REAL COST

A Victim Impact Statement written by a burglary victim.



"I want to take some time to acknowledge the burglars who broke into our residence while we were away and proceeded to destroy and/or steal what we've worked for or received during our lives."

Dear burglars,

I want you to know the real value of what you have stolen from my family and I. Nothing you stole has significant monetary value, and everything is replaceable. What I cannot get back is the memories.

- *The baseball cards you stole are what I used as a replacement for not having a father around. They were years of childhood joy and the presence of thousands of role models to look up to when I was missing the one that really mattered. They were also the foundation of what I was going to start my son's college education with.*
- *The tools you stole were my reward from my Grandpa for graduating college. I graduated years ago but just recently received the collection after the passing of my Grandma. They have been in my family for over 50 years, but I guess you felt you have more right to them than I.*
- *The large Denver Broncos rug was a gift for my wife and I from my best friend, whom is a hardcore Raiders fan. He despises the Broncos so much yet respects the rivalry of the two teams. He also respects us as human beings.*
- *The acoustic guitar you stole was a memorial gift to my step-son due to the untimely passing of his father.*
- *The 3 wedding dresses are reminders of days where my wife and her Great Grandma never looked so beautiful.*
- *All of my old toys you stole were reminders of how hard my Mom worked to provide for my sister and I. She never chose to be a single mother, and she had to give up her youth for us. The toys took me to a better place, a much nicer place than this often cruel world. They never hurt me.*
- *There are gifts from my two deceased Grandmothers and my Grandpa that have so much meaning behind them. They will, surely, be tossed away as trash by you people, but I wish you knew how priceless they really are.*

We did not give anyone permission to enter our premises and take them as their own. We are very hurt by these actions and cannot fathom how one person or a group of people could be so vindictive and invading. Obviously our absence from the residence, at the time, was known to the individual(s) and it is also obvious that utilities were used and abused. Residence of the home was apparently taken for several days, also without permission.

I want you to know that I often help out charities or individuals in need. I am the kind of guy who would, indeed, give the shirt off of my back to help someone who needed it. What you have done to us is evil and should be unforgivable, but I would be a hypocrite should I not give someone a fair chance to redeem themselves. I have sinned in my life, but I hope I have made my amends.

We want our belongings back. You know which ones mean something. Do the right thing, please. Now, if you choose the alternative direction and do not return the items, we will not stop looking. My hope is that it is merely an awakening. There is simply too much meaning and memory attached to some of these items to simply let them be handed off to people who can't/won't appreciate them, for what they're worth.

Return our items. We are all human and on the same team, I assure you...

Some Tips for Coping with Grief at the Holidays

ADAPTED FROM VITAS HEALTHCARE

For many victims and co-victims of crime, the holiday season last year was different. In 2022, use these tips to help ease the feelings of loss and create a new way to celebrate.

Set realistic expectations for yourself. Remind yourself that this year is different. Examine the tasks and events of celebrating and ask yourself if you want to continue them. Accept others' offers to cook, shop, decorate, etc. Consider shopping by phone, Internet or catalog this year if you feel a need to avoid crowds or memories.

Surround yourself with people who love and support you. Share your plans with family and friends and let them know of changes in holiday routines. Memories can sometimes be a source of comfort to the bereaved, so share them by telling stories and looking at photo albums.

Despite the temptation, try to avoid "canceling" the holiday. It is OK to avoid some circumstances that you don't feel ready to handle, but don't isolate yourself. Make some time for solitude, remembering and grieving, but balance it with planned social activities.

Allow yourself to feel joy, sadness, anger – allow yourself to grieve. It is important to recognize that every family member has his/her own unique grief experience. No one way is right or wrong. Experiencing joy and laughter during a time of grief does not mean you have forgotten your loved one.

Draw comfort from doing for others. Consider giving a donation or gift in memory of you loved one. Invite a guest who might otherwise be alone for the holidays. Adopt a needy family during the holiday season.

Take care of yourself. Avoid using alcohol to self-medicate your mood. Try to avoid the hustle and bustle of the holiday season. Physical exercise is often an antidote for depression. Writing in a journal can be a good outlet for your grief.

"Allow yourself to feel joy, sadness, anger- allow yourself to grieve."

Create a new tradition or ritual that accommodates your current situation. Some people find comfort by honoring traditions, while others find them unbearably painful. Some examples of new rituals and traditions include:

- Announce beforehand that someone different will carve the turkey.
- Create a memory box. Fill it with photos of your loved one or memory notes from family members and friends. Ask young children to contribute drawings in the memory box.
- Make a decorative quilt using favorite colors, symbols, images or pieces of clothing/fabric that remind you of the person who died.
- Light a candle in honor of your loved one.
- Put a bouquet of flowers on your holiday table in memory of your loved one.
- Visit the cemetery and decorate the memorial site.
- Have a moment of silence during a holiday toast to honor your loved one.
- Place a commemorative ornament on the Christmas tree.
- Dedicate one of the Chanukah candles in memory of your loved one.
- Write a poem about your loved one and read it during a holiday ritual.
- Play your loved one's favorite music or favorite game.
- Plan a meal with your loved ones' favorite foods.

The most important thing to remember is there is no right or wrong way to celebrate the holiday season after the death of a loved one. The best coping mechanism for the first holiday season is to plan ahead, get support from others and take it easy.



*The victims of crime have been transformed into a group oppressively burdened by a system designed to protect them.
-Ronald Reagan*

VICTIM SERVICES SPOTLIGHT: FRANCIS MEAGHER



Francis Meagher exemplifies what it means to fight for the change you wish to see in the world. While pushing for legislative change in 2019 and 2021 for post-conviction relief processes and crime victim rights, he saw a larger gap across Montana's criminal justice system: victim peer support.

Francis created the **Victim Support Network- Victims for Victims** as a bridge to the gap that many crime victims, families and survivors encounter when entering the criminal justice system and beyond. Often, the system is confusing, overwhelming and isolating. A network to connect, ask questions, and share experiences is spreading throughout Montana.

The Victim Support Network is a peer support system for members to share and connect through lived experiences. You can join anytime regardless of when your experience occurred.

To join, please contact MT DOC Victim Services for registration forms or Francis Meagher at francismeagher@yahoo.com for more information.

OTHER NEWS THIS QUARTER:

Stalking Awareness Month- January
National Day of Human Trafficking- Jan. 11
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day - Jan. 17*
Black History Month - February
President's Day - Feb. 21*

**State/Federal Holidays*

CONTACT US

The Victim Services program office hours are 8 a.m. to 5p.m. (MT) Monday through Friday except for state and federal holidays.

It is our practice to return calls within 48 hours. Please leave a voicemail including your name, number, and any pertinent information you can provide.

Address:

5 S. Last Chance Gulch
 Helena, MT 59601
 P.O. Box 201301



Fax: (406) 444-4920

Helpline: (406) 444-0447 or Toll Free:
 (888) 223-6332

Website: <https://cor.mt.gov/victims>

Email: CORVictimLiaison@mt.gov