

# Victims' Voice NEWSLETTER



Volume #1 | Issue #2 | Montana Department of Corrections Victim Services

## Announcement

Welcome to our second issue of Montana Department of Corrections Victim Services quarterly newsletter. We are here to provide you with information regarding crime victims' rights, how to get involved and important topics in the victim services field.

During this issue of Victim's Voice, we take time to honor our co-homicide survivors. Co-homicide survivors are those victims who have lost a family member to homicide — negligent, deliberate, or other crimes resulting in loss of life.

We hope you'll enjoy reading and learning about some of the great things the DOC is doing. We welcome any feedback, content requests and ideas for future topics at [CORVictimLiaison@mt.gov](mailto:CORVictimLiaison@mt.gov)

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# Victim Impact Panel: Speaker of the Quarter

*"I am a much stronger, resilient person than I was prior to the victimization. I've learned acceptance and grace - maybe that is the definition of forgiveness."*

**Home Base:** Twin Bridges, MT

**Years Speaking:** 18+

**Crime Victimization:** Negligent Homicide

### **What do you want other victims of crime and victim service providers to know about VIP?**

"A crime victim has to learn a new "normal" - if there ever is a normal again. Family and friends sometimes tire of your experience, your grief, your pain.

VIP provides a positive way for you to speak about what happened within a secure setting. The telling of your experience is so beneficial to the acceptance of what happened.

I have found over the years; I have remembered details from the event that were not prevalent in the beginning. You have to learn to paddle the stream you are on now and VIP acts as that paddle. (I always visualize my son Brooks, who was killed, inside the canoe with me.)"

### **What is a favorite memory of VIP thus far?**

"I think what I value the most is the people I have met; other victims, who have become dear friends and employees of crime services who genuinely want to provide help to victims.

I was at a training once where the trainer fed back to me my feelings about the event like nobody had ever been able to previously. The feeling that someone else knew what it felt like and could communicate it to me left me in tears at the training table. I will never forget that."

## **Mardi Elford**



### **What encourages you to keep speaking?**

"I would hope I can reach at least one person to make them realize the things they do and say have consequences on others and themselves. I hope another family/person never has to go through what my family and I had to.

My son, Brooks, was a pretty fantastic person. During my presentation, a lot of happy memories are in the background and I like to think he is proud of me for keeping his memory and spirit alive. In speaking, I hope I have helped other victims learn to come to grace with their experience and provide someone else they can relate and talk to."

Thank you, Mardi Elford!



# Notification Spotlight: VINE LINK



VINE is the nation's most reliable and confidential source for updated custody status and criminal case information. Register and stay informed.

[www.vinelink.com](http://www.vinelink.com)

## Request Notification

VINE (Victim Information & Notification Every Day) is a free, confidential, automated telephone, text messaging, and email system that provides custody status information about adult felony offenders under Montana Department of Corrections supervision – in prison and community-based facilities and programs.

### Registration is not automatic – participation is voluntary

For more information about notification services, please visit [www.cor.mt.gov/victims](http://www.cor.mt.gov/victims)

## If your contact information changes...

If your address, email address or phone number changes, please contact VINE immediately. We cannot notify you of the offender's status if you do not take these steps.

For assistance, call the Department of Corrections Victim Services or email [CorVictimLiaison@mt.gov](mailto:CorVictimLiaison@mt.gov). A Community Victim Liaison can retrieve your PIN, cancel the current call to your number, and ensure that you receive VINE notification the next time the offender's location or custody status changes.

Anyone can call VINE at (800) 456-3076, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to hear the current location of an inmate. The same information is available on the Internet at <https://www.vinelink.com>, or by downloading one of these free apps (applications) for your mobile device.



## Notification Services



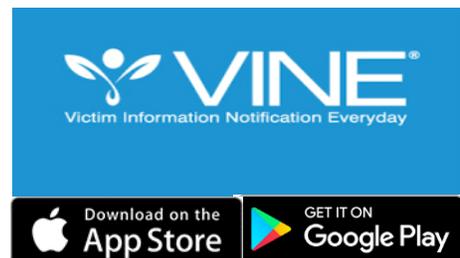
Correctional Offender Network (CONWeb)  
<https://app.mt.gov/conweb>



VINE (Victim Information & Notification Every Day)  
[www.vinelink.com](http://www.vinelink.com)



Montana Sexual or Violent Offender Registry (SVOR)  
[www.app.doj.mt.gov/apps/svow/default.aspx](http://www.app.doj.mt.gov/apps/svow/default.aspx)



# What Do Victims Want?

Victims require a continuum of timely support and service to heal from the trauma they suffer. These components encompass the needs of victims, their families and their communities.

**Safety:** Protection from perpetrators and revictimization; crime prevention through collaborative problem solving; a restored sense of individual and community safety

**Access:** Ability to participate in the justice system process and obtain information and services, regardless of individual or family circumstances

**Information:** Verbal and written information about justice system processes and victim services that is clear, concise, and user-friendly

**Support:** Services and assistance to enable participation in justice processes, recovery from trauma, and repair of harm caused by crime

**Continuity:** Consistency in approaches and methods across agencies; continuity of support through all stages of the justice process and trauma recovery

**Voice:** Empowerment to speak out about processing of individual cases; opportunities to influence agency and system-wide policies and practices. Justice is achieved when all stakeholders are satisfied with the process and the outcome is fair to all participants.

## When Communicating with a Victim...

(American Probation & Parole Association)

- ❖ What do you need?
- ❖ What can I do for you?
- ❖ I'm sorry that happened.
- ❖ What happened to you is not your fault.
- ❖ I believe you.
- ❖ Your case is important/unique.
- ❖ Are you safe?
- ❖ Do you have any concerns about your safety?
- ❖ Who else have you spoken to?
- ❖ Would you like a referral for further victim assistance?
- ❖ Can I make any calls for you?
- ❖ Do you need anything else? If you do, contact me at....
- ❖ Is now a good time to talk? Is there a better time to talk?
- ❖ You're not going crazy.
- ❖ I can't imagine how difficult this was or is for you.
- ❖ I am going to try my best to help you.
- ❖ I don't know, but I'll find out.
- ❖ How are you doing?
- ❖ Let's see if we can figure out your most important needs right now.
- ❖ I'm glad you called.

## How Can You Help?

- ❖ Follow local legislature regarding victims' rights and criminal procedure  
<https://leg.mt.gov/>
- ❖ Be informed about local community resources  
[www.ovc.gov/help/](http://www.ovc.gov/help/)

Effective Strategies to Achieve Justice for Victims of Crime: 1999  
IACP Summit on Victims of Crime

<https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/201808/WhatDoVictimsWantSummitReport.pdf>



# Co-Homicide Survivors

## National Grief Awareness Day: August 30<sup>th</sup>

Information provided by: Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime

<https://crevc.ca/docs/homsurv.pdf>

The murder of a loved one seems almost impossible to comprehend. Life seems unreal, like a dream. Survivors may need to go over the details of the crime again and again, discussing them endlessly, as though trying to put together the pieces of a puzzle, struggling to make sense of it all. A murder often forces the victim's family to reconstruct events.

In a murder case, the wounds keep being reopened. There is no chance to heal or move on. A state of limbo exists. Lawyers, courts, judges and a live criminal blessed with civil rights appear to control the co-survivor's life.

The criminal justice system is a unique stressor or burden for homicide survivors who are sometimes forced to deal with it for many years after the murder. A homicide case can take years to complete, and there are no guarantees that the outcome will satisfy the survivors. Delays and appeals may disrupt the grieving process and prolong the survivors' suffering. Each new hearing stirs up feelings seemingly laid to rest.

The court process often leaves victims feeling like outsiders, as they have no formal role in it. The justice system concentrates on the accused and his/her guilt, leaving victims wondering what, if any, rights they have. Survivors soon learn crimes do not always result in convictions and sentences do not necessarily match the severity of the crime. Perceptions of injustice and a lack of respect for their loved one often cause further distress for homicide survivors. The victim is seldom referred to by name, which can seem dehumanizing to the family.

Keeping 'tabs' on an offender by dealing with corrections and paroling authorities may be another emotional burden for homicide survivors who choose to do so. Receiving semi-regular updates about an offender as he/she progresses through the prison system may rehash painful memories for survivors. At the same time, some survivors express a desire to ensure the offender is never able to harm anyone else and monitoring them is the best way to do so. Stress increases as the offender is moved within the system and parole board hearings are scheduled.

Homicide survivors often find ways to channel their grief positively, including involving themselves in helping activities in memory of their loved one. Many survivors have gone on to take active roles in education and advocacy following their victimization.

At DOC we offer some restorative justice programming to assist in healing for victims of crime: Victim Offender Dialogue, Victim Impact Panels, VINE notifications and the Accountability Letter Program. Mardi Elford, one of DOC's exceptional Victim Impact Panel speakers is featured in this issue and is a testament that ongoing healing is possible for homicide survivors.

DOC Victim Services program is here to help. If you are a co-homicide survivor or you encounter a co-homicide victim needing advocacy and additional support, please contact a Victim Liaison who is trained in trauma informed care and the knowledge to assist co-homicide survivors in understanding their grief.



## Upcoming Events

### June

National Safety Month: Focuses on saving lives and preventing injuries, from the workplace to anyplace.

This year, NSC is shining a spotlight on:

- ❖ Mental Health
- ❖ Ergonomics
- ❖ Safety Culture and Driving

<https://www.nsc.org/work-safety/get-involved/national-safety-month>

<https://hr.mt.gov/Programs/Workforce-Wellness>

### July

July 4th, Independence Day

### August

National Bystander Intervention Month:

<https://www.nsvrc.org/bystander-intervention-resources>

August 30<sup>th</sup>: National Grief Awareness Day

## HOW TO CONTACT US

**Email:** CORVictimLiaison@mt.gov

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

**Mail:** P.O. Box 201301

Helena, MT 59620-1320

**Fax:** (406) 444-4920

**Website:** [www.cor.mt.gov/victims](http://www.cor.mt.gov/victims)

Our victim program office hours are 8 a.m. to 5p.m (MT) Monday through Friday except state and federal holidays.

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

Visit the Department of Corrections Facebook Page for the latest agency updates:

<https://www.facebook.com/MTDeptCorrections/>

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*"In order to empathize with someone's experience you must be willing to believe them as they see it, and not how you imagine their experience to be."*

*Brene Brown*

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## SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER

EMAIL: [CORVICTIMLIAISON@MT.GOV](mailto:CORVICTIMLIAISON@MT.GOV)

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