



The Edmonton Police Service's Victim Services Unit (VSU) was established on July 23, 1979 and since then has been committed to improving the overall service it provides to the public and to enhancing the safety of the communities it serves. We recognize that we must continually seek innovative ways to build public trust, forge community partnerships and work together to prevent and deter crime.

Our Mission Statement:

To provide support, referral and information to victims of crime and tragedy.

In our community, citizens live with the fundamental expectation that they will not be victimized. This belief is based on the safety and security as provided for in law, in the presence of our justice system, through the establishment of safe communities and work environments and by using one's own good judgment and common sense. However, on occasion, and regardless of our best efforts, people do get hurt.

When consequences are severe, and people experience serious trauma, VSU will respond. We will assist persons experiencing emotional trauma and initiate actions to help victims cope with their distress. Post incident, people sometimes find themselves re-victimized by the justice system, particularly in the treatment they receive when giving evidence. The challenge is to guide the victim through this process through education and support.

As a strategic partner with the Edmonton Police Service, VSU looks forward to addressing the emerging needs of our community and to raising the standard of the service we provide.

Organization

VSU is police based. We receive budget support from the Edmonton Police budget, which is supported through municipal taxes.

The Unit is comprised of a Sergeant, Constable, four Divisional Coordinators, a Court Preparation Coordinator, support staff, and approximately 140 Victim advocates. Advocates are extensively trained by the Edmonton Police Service to provide support, information and referral to victims of crime and tragedy.

Operations are decentralized, in that the Advocates are assigned to work out of the police sub-stations in their communities. In each of the four operational areas Advocates work with a Divisional Coordinator.

Hours of operation

Monday - Friday 0900 – 2200 hrs

Day Advocates work one static three-hour shift, 0900 hrs to 1200 hrs, or 1300 hrs to 1600 hrs, Monday thru Friday.

Evening Advocates work one rotational four-hour shift, 1800 hrs to 2200 hrs, Monday thru Friday.



Advocates are placed on a team and each team member is responsible to an advocate team leader who is, in turn, responsible to their Divisional Coordinator. Volunteers sign a one-year contract and are provided with a shift schedule for the calendar year.

Services

The Unit is in contact with at least thirty thousand victims annually and approximately 20,000 hours are volunteered by the Advocates each year. Contact with victims is initiated through various means:

- Victim Services referral card provided to victims by the Police member
- Correspondence
- Telephone contact
- Police reports
- Referred by surrounding RCMP detachments
- Referred by various community organizations

Crisis Response

There are opportunities for trained advocates who volunteer to be available on a twenty-four hour basis. They attend locations to directly assist police members in dealing with victims of crime or tragedy, suffering severe stress and trauma, particularly where there is no family or friends support base available. Some examples are:

- homicides
- suicide
- sudden deaths
- sexual assault/child abuse
- domestic violence
- armed robberies
- commercial/financial robberies
- sudden infant deaths

VSU has also assisted the Edmonton Police Service and the RCMP in non-criminal situations such as the 1987 tornado, home explosions, and various accidental or industrial accidents.

Personal Support

Advocates provide support through telephone contact, home visits and home security checks. They receive daily police reports identifying victims. Telephone contact is made with the victim, offering assistance and support. Crime prevention techniques and programs are explained and information packages are provided, focusing on prevention of further victimization and proactive community involvement.

Follow-up Assistance

Victims who wish to access or update information about their cases can contact the Victim Services Unit. Advocates then record the information on appropriate departmental forms and forward them to the appropriate investigator or department. Additional stolen property and information about possible suspects are common types of follow-up assistance the Unit provides.



Domestic Violence Follow-Up

Following an assault, advocates contact domestic violence victims to offer support and appropriate community referrals. For advocate safety, home visits do not occur, though the victim may opt to attend the station.

Victim Information

The Unit acts as a focal point for the Justice System and upon request, provides information to victims regarding the status of stolen property, the status of their case, court proceedings and court dispositions.

Death Notification

Advocates are trained in bereavement and are familiar with procedures at the Medical Examiner's office and mortuaries. They are available to assist EPS members in death notifications

Referrals

Victims are referred to appropriate community and government agencies for additional or long-term support and assistance.

Victim Impact Statements

A Victim Impact Statement is a written statement prepared by a victim who has suffered physical or emotional loss as a result of a criminal offence. This statement may be considered by the court for the purpose of determining an offender's sentence. Advocates will be trained on the protocols involving Victim Impact Statements.

Court Preparation & Accompaniment

VSU offers Court preparation programs for both adults and children each month. These small classes are provided to people who will be required to testify in the near future. The class familiarizes them with court procedures, explains courtroom personnel and their roles, discusses fears and concerns that many people experience and offers ways to cope. As an advocate you can volunteer to be trained in assisting with these classes and also accompanying people to court who require that support.

Critical Incident Stress Management

Following a traumatic event, Victim Services Advocates provide immediate defusing to the victims of a traumatic event as requested by Edmonton Police Service. VSU also assists in finding resources from the community to assist the individuals with short or long term support. Examples may include: Bank Robberies, MVA, Sudden Deaths, Industrial Accidents and Natural disasters, etc)



Advocates' Background/Screening/Training

Initially, new Advocates attend an Orientation session and then two basic training weekends, as well as monthly workshops. The third weekend of training usually takes place several months after the first two. All instructors are highly qualified in their field of expertise and are drawn from the Police Service as well as government and community agencies. Examples of the types of training are:

- Sudden Death
- Assault
- Suicide Intervention
- Crisis Intervention
- Report Writing
- Court Orientation
- Court Accompaniment
- Elder Abuse
- Financial Benefit Program
- Restitution
- Communication Skills
- Domestic Violence
- Victim Impact Statements
- Property Crimes
- Sexual Assault

Certification

In May 2002, The Alberta Solicitor General, in conjunction with numerous police, government, and community agencies developed criteria for provincial certification for Alberta Victim Advocates. The provincial certification program encompasses a total of thirty (30) workshops that advocates can work toward achieving. Orientation and Basic Training are Included in these.

With completion of the required workshops advocates could complete their certification program in two (2) years or less.

Final Note

To determine whether the reciprocal relationship between new advocates and the Edmonton Police Service's Victim Services Unit is of value, their performance is monitored and evaluated during the probationary period. Team Leaders and Divisional Coordinators check to see that shifts are attended, policies and procedures followed and training opportunities taken.

We hope that you find this volunteer experience fulfilling and that you will enjoy working as a member of the VSU team.