

Finding and Following Your Passion

by **Angie McCown, Director**

Texas Department of Criminal Justice Victim Services Division

My first experience as a victim advocate came in 1985 when I became a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer working with children who had been abused, providing them a voice in the courtroom that represented what was in their best interest. I had a bachelor's degree in Marketing from the University of Texas at Austin - "Hook'em" - and I was working full time for a large furniture design corporation making a very good salary. Although I was enjoying my career and the successes it had brought me, something was missing. I needed to do something that I could feel passionate about; I wanted to contribute to positive social change for the future. CASA opened that door for me. The work I was doing for those children just felt natural for me. And as painful as some of their stories

were, I walked away from every child visit with a sense of purpose and a feeling of accomplishment that I had never experienced in my marketing career.

After four years as a CASA volunteer, I decided that I had found my passion, so I applied for and was accepted into graduate school at the University of Houston at Clear Lake in the Marriage and Family Therapy Program. I quit my marketing job, went to graduate school full-time, and upon graduation took a position at Houston Child Guidance Center as a Family Therapist working primarily with child abuse cases. I loved my work as a Therapist; however I wanted to move to Austin - "Live Music Capital of the World" - because my husband is a musician, and this time my passion for victim advocacy was fulfilled again when

I was hired at the Austin Police Department Victim Services Division to be mentored by one of the most passionate victim advocates I have known, Ann Hutchison. The rest is history. I went on to become the founding Director of Victim Services at the Texas Department of Public Safety, and then moved into to my current position as the Director of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Victim Services Division (TDCJ VSD). From my very first case at CASA to my current work at TDCJ VSD, I feel so fortunate to have found my passion and to have been afforded so many opportunities to follow it. So thank you CASA for helping me to find and follow my passion!

For more information on Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates please visit www.texascasa.org. ★

The VICTIM'S INFORMER

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Addressing the Needs of Asian Crime Victims

By Marina Ong Bhargava

Language Access and Community Outreach Coordinator, SAHELI

SAHELI is a survivor-centered agency formed in 1992 to address the gap in services for Asian immigrants. The organization focuses on gender-based violence issues such as domestic violence and sexual assault in Central Texas. SAHELI specifically addresses the cultural and language needs of Asian and other immigrant families in four main programs: Survivor Assistance and Empowerment, Economic Empowerment, Community Education, and Systems Advocacy.

Through our Survivor Assistance program, we offer a confidential hotline that is answered by trained advocates in a number of Asian languages, crisis intervention and case management, group and individual counseling, and legal advocacy. For longer term solutions, the Economic Empowerment program helps clients achieve self sufficiency through employment, financial

literacy and permanent housing.

The Community Outreach and Education program provides tailored and culturally appropriate outreach to the diverse immigrant communities. The Asian community is not monolithic and requires presentations facilitated by members of the community and in language that can be easily understood. Additionally, the Systems Advocacy program provides trainings to local service providers on best practices when interacting with isolated communities. Increasing language access for immigrants and cultural best practices are two main components that are addressed during these trainings.

There is a genuine need for an organization to serve the Asian and immigrant community because of specific obstacles that this population faces in getting help. Limited English proficiency is an obvious barrier, and for this reason, SAHELI employs bilingual staff, contractors and volunteers to en-

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sure efficacy of services. Our language capacity is currently over 20 languages, including non Asian languages such as Tigrinya and Aramaic.

The Asian community is multifaceted, multi-generational and extremely diverse. However, for many Asian immigrants, culture impacts how survivors perceive domestic violence and seek assistance. Asian cultures are generally more collectivistic and a high value is placed on keeping the family intact, maintaining harmony, and familial honor. Gender roles are more entrenched and male privilege is emphasized in many societies. Religion may reinforce these ideas. These cultural norms lead to Asian survivors being more likely to self blame, deny that the problem even exists, or stay in an abusive relationship. Sometimes it means that the victim's own family will not support her decision to leave an abusive home, which can have a profound effect on the survivor.

Additionally, there are institutional barriers. Many survivors face obstacles in receiving core services. Some agencies lack resources to find appropriate language assistance or hire advocates who understand the survivor's cultural environment. There are vast differences in approaches to mental health counseling between eastern and western societies, leaving traditional therapeutic models ineffective. Some survivors from conflict countries come with a myriad of intersectional trauma issues of war or torture that are unaddressed in traditional programs.

To further complicate matters, immigrants often bring with them perceptions of social service agencies, law enforcement organizations and the legal system that are negative based on their life experiences in their countries of or-

igin. This leads to many being highly resistant to seek help here even when they are aware of available services. Perpetrators sometimes use survivors' lack of knowledge of these systems to control their victims; threatening deportation or loss of children to keep victims suffering in silence.

These factors contribute to Asian survivors under-reporting crimes committed against them, preferring to cope with their problems by themselves or through their own network of family and friends. Often when law enforcement gets involved, it is due to a third party initiative, a neighbor calls for instance and the victim will often minimize the violence. We see this regularly with our clients; survivors who were wrongly arrested because they could not or refused to tell their story to law enforcement officers, clients who file for protective orders and change their minds, and clients who choose not to apply for crime victim compensation even when eligible.

Although SAHELI serves clients from a multitude of countries and socio-economic backgrounds, one particular client story highlights some of the aforementioned issues. This victim was originally from Korea and although she had lived in the US for 18 years, her husband did not allow her to study English, to learn to drive or go many places without him. He would get drunk and hit her, but she stayed in the marriage because of their children and because divorce is taboo in her community. She was also acutely aware that she could not support herself or her children on her own.

A friend told her about SAHELI and an advocate informed her about shelter facilities and legal remedies available to her. She did not take any action at

the time, wanting to avoid the shame of divorce and to give her husband another opportunity to change. A couple of months later, he was violent again. This time, she called SAHELI and with an interpreter's help, she reported the incident to police. SAHELI assisted her in applying for a protective order, getting into shelter and securing a job providing childcare. She is currently living in her own apartment and taking ESL classes at a community college. She has said that she could never have made these changes without SAHELI's support.

In 2011, SAHELI assisted 353 adults and their children in person and over the phone. Demand for our services keeps growing as more communities become aware about our services. Because Austin is a refugee resettlement city, we are serving increasing numbers of clients from the Middle East, Burma and western Africa. Our cultural and language competency along with our philosophy of empowering the client to make decisions that are best for their situation allows us to build trust and credibility in these communities and help keep survivors as safe as possible within the options that make sense to them.

For more information about the agency, please visit www.SAHELI-Austin.org. To discuss our services or schedule trainings on best practices when working with immigrant survivors, please contact SAHELI at (512) 358-6318. ★

TDCJ Victim Services Division: Victim Offender Mediation Dialogue Program

By Gene Stewart

Assistant Deputy Director, Programs, Texas Department of Criminal Justice Victim Services Division

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice Victim Services Division's (TDCJ VSD) Victim Offender Mediation Dialogue (VOMD) program has been awarded a Victims of Crime Act grant from the Office of the Governor. The grant will fund two additional staff members to facilitate mediation cases, increasing the number of fulltime staff mediators to five.

The VOMD program has been in existence for almost twenty years. In 2001, the right to request VOMD became a crime victims' right listed in Article 56.02 of the Texas Code of Criminal Procedure (TCCP). The VOMD process is only initiated at the request of a person who is a crime victim as defined by Article 56.01 of the TCCP. Participation in the VOMD program is voluntary for offenders.

In the history of the program, about 1,500 mediation cases have been initiated at victims' requests. Referrals have come mostly from victim advocates, criminal justice professionals and victims who have participated in the program. Of those cases, about 350 have culminated in an in-person meeting between the victim and offender and another 150 cases have been resolved through a form of creative alternative to an in-person meeting which typically involves a letter to the offender written by the victim and delivered by the mediator.

During the early years of the program's existence, the waiting list of victims wishing to meet with their of-

fender reached over 200. Some victims had to wait over a year before a mediator could be assigned to begin the process of mediation preparation. Some victims dropped out of the programs as a result of the long waiting period, and others were discouraged by the prospect of a long wait and chose not to initiate a case. Over the years, a concerted effort has been made by the Victim Services Division to reduce the time that victims spend on the waiting list. Currently, the waiting list numbers less than fifty. However, victims may still be required to wait four months or more before their case can be assigned to a mediator. Through the grant award from the Office of the Governor, TDCJ VSD is hopeful that the addition of two mediators will result in the reduction of the waiting period to 2-3 months.

The number of victims involved in the VOMD program has also been limited due to the reality that some victims are not interested in meeting with their offender. The process of healing from the trauma associated with violent crime is highly individualized. Some individuals may not feel any need to communicate with the offender responsible for the victimization. However, other victims have a strong desire to face the person whose actions brought such pain and destruction into their lives. With the assistance of trained mediators, victims are provided the opportunity to express to the offenders the full impact the crimes have had on their lives, to ask questions and receive

answers which only offenders can provide, and to be directly involved in determining appropriate acts of amends that hold offenders accountable for the harm they have caused.

If you or someone you know has been the victim of a violent crime and think it would be helpful to speak with the offender, this is an excellent time to participate in the VOMD program. To initiate the process or to receive more information about the program, please call (800) 848-4284 and ask to speak to someone in the Victim Offender Mediation Dialogue (VOMD) program or email victim.svc@tdcj.state.tx.us.

If you are interested in becoming an approved volunteer mediator with the VOMD program, please contact the VOMD program by telephone or email for information on the application and approval process. ★

**January is
National Stalking
Awareness Month**

Advocating During the Holidays



By Vanessa A. Luna-Marquez, M.Ed.

Manager of Victim Services, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, West Texas Region

Turkey roasting in the oven, the Thanksgiving parade, the football games, and the family prayer, decorating the Christmas tree, the crackling fire from the fireplace, lighting the Hanukkah candles, kissing a loved one at midnight, and making plans for the upcoming year. The holidays are here. The description painted above may be a wonderful picture for many, but for victims of crime whose loved one was killed, some may have a very different image of the holidays. For some victims the holidays bring a range of emotions that can include anxiety, anger, sadness, and fear. Instead of celebrating with their loved one, they now have to experience an empty chair at the holiday dinner table.

As victim advocates, it is our role to support victims and provide them with tools and resources to help them cope through their victimization. It is especially important to provide advocacy and support during special days, like birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays. Support groups, remembrance programs, information, and referrals can be a resource of healing for victims of crime.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) offers Candlelight Vigils before the holidays. MADD's Candlelight Vigils were designed to remember the victims and survivors of impaired driving and hit and run crashes, and to support their families. Candlelight Vigils also alert the public to the realities of impaired driving and express hope for a nation without drunk driving. It is not a coincidence that the Candlelight

Vigils are scheduled near the holidays. Candlelight Vigils are a special opportunity for families to remember and honor their loved ones as we approach the holiday season. They offer families a special setting in which to say, "We love you. We miss you. We will never forget; and as we begin to celebrate the holidays, you are in our thoughts and in our hearts."

In addition to remembrance programs such as the Candlelight Vigil, offering a support group throughout the year and especially during the holidays is an important resource for victims of crime. Support groups can help bereaved victims feel less alone. Support groups enable movement through the grief process and allow group members to meet each other, to support members in speaking openly about their loss, and to help identify and acknowledge their feelings. The goals of support groups are to give victims the opportunity to share their experiences, discuss weaknesses, strengths and hopes, and openly express their feelings in a non-judgmental environment. In addition, they offer a place to meet with others who have suffered similar experiences and provide the opportunity to learn coping techniques and strategies from each other.

During the holidays, facilitating a support group in which group members can freely express their apprehension about the upcoming holidays can be therapeutic. For example, with the assistance of a licensed counselor, the MADD office in Houston facilitates a special support group session called

"Surviving the Holidays." During holiday group sessions, coping tips and resources are shared. One grief book used during group sessions is "A Decembered Grief - Living with Loss While Others are Celebrating" by Harold Ivan Smith. This book has numerous suggestions specifically targeted toward coping with grief during the holidays. Some great topics suggestions that Smith offers are "alter-rather than abandon-traditions" and "create ornaments or decorations that symbolize your loved one."

Support groups are a valuable resource for victims of crime. If you do not offer groups in your area you can provide support in other ways by making a telephone call, sending an e-mail or holiday card. As a victim advocate it is important to remember that the holidays have different meanings and feelings for victims after their victimization and death of their loved one. In your telephone call, e-mail or card, acknowledge that you realize the holidays might be extremely difficult. Let victims know they are not alone; share that you are available to provide assistance and can connect them with helpful resources, such as a helpline or an information sheet for coping with the holidays.

For advocates and victims alike, know that MADD is here to help. For more information on support groups and upcoming candlelight vigils or to locate the MADD office nearest you, please call (877) MADD-HELP or visit www.madd.org. ✨

calendar

December 4, 2012, 6:30 p.m.
22nd Annual Travis County Tree of Angels
Honoring Victims of Violent Crime

Central Christian Church
1110 Guadalupe Street
Austin, Texas

<http://www.treeofangels.org>

December 13, 2012, 6:00 p.m.
Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)
Candlelight Vigil

Grace Museum
Abilene, Texas

January 6, 2013
Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)
Annual Celebration of Life

Jones Hall, St. Thomas University
Houston, Texas

<http://www.madd.org/local-offices/tx/regional-events/>

January 13-18, 2013
Texas District and County Attorney's Association
2013 Prosecutor Trial Skills Course

Radisson Hotel Townlake,
Austin, Texas

<http://www.tdcaa.com/training>

January 17-18, 2013
North Texas Alliance and Dallas County Domestic
Violence Awareness Council
9th Annual Innovative Approaches to Family
Violence Conference

Dallas, Texas

http://www.ncdsv.org/ncd_upcomingtrainings.html

January 26-31, 2013
Chadwick Center for Children and Families at
Children's Hospital-San Diego
27th Annual San Diego International Conference
on Child and Family Maltreatment

Town & Country Resort and Convention Center,
San Diego, California

<http://www.sandiegoconference.org>

February 27-March 1, 2013
School Safety Advocacy Council
2013 National Conference on Bullying

Rosen Centre Hotel International Drive
Orlando, Florida

<http://www.schoolsafety911.org/event05.html>

December is National Drunk and Drugged Driving Prevention Month

calendar

February 19-24, 2013

International Critical Incident Stress Foundation
12th World Congress on Stress, Trauma and
Coping

Hilton Baltimore Hotel,
Baltimore, Maryland

<http://www.icisf.org/world-congress/12th-world-congress>

February 27-March 1, 2013

Fox Valley Technical College, Office for Victims of
Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center,
and National Criminal Justice Training Center
Responding to Missing and Unidentified Persons
National Training and Conference

Fox Valley Technical College
Appleton, Wisconsin

[https://www.ncjtc.org/CJCI/conferences/missing/Pages/
missing.aspx](https://www.ncjtc.org/CJCI/conferences/missing/Pages/missing.aspx)

March 2-3, 2013

Family and Friends Fighting Against Child Sexual
Assault (FACSA)
Million Survivor March and Rally

Jefferson Memorial
Washington D.C.

<http://www.facsafoundation.org>

March 4-5, 2013

Prevent Child Abuse Texas (PCATX)
27th Annual Conference on the Prevention of
Child Abuse

Omni Hotel at the Colonnade,
San Antonio, Texas

[http://www.preventchildabusetexas.org/nextconference.
html](http://www.preventchildabusetexas.org/nextconference.html)

March 4-7, 2013

Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA)
Annual Conference: "Bringing Justice to the
System"

Austin, Texas

<http://www.taasa.org>

**It's not too early to start
planning!
2013 National Crime
Victims' Rights Week
April 21-27, 2013
New Challenges ★ New Solutions**

New Year's Resolution? Goodbye Resolution! Hello Wellness!

By April Alaspa

Family Shelter Counselor, SafePlace

As the end of the year is approaching I find myself thinking about last year's New Year's resolution. I wonder how well I did on it. Do you remember your New Year's resolution? Did you have one? Mine was to live a "healthier life this year". I look back on it now and think, "wow, what an ambiguous resolution!"

As victim services professionals we are often so good at looking out for other people, finding services for others, making sure that people follow through with their needs; but when it comes to ourselves we find that we are often sorely lacking. Victim services professionals are the foundation of care for those that are seeking services; survivors of trauma are often looking to us for some form of role model of how to take care of themselves and if each one of us is not caring for ourselves then we make a poor archetype for others.

Out of curiosity I researched "wellness" on the internet and came up with over 450 million sites relating to the term. When I researched "self-care" I found an astounding 750 million sites! So with a society so devoted and interested in wellness and self-care, why are some of us so poor at doing these things? Why are service providers often overlooking the importance of self-care?

Perhaps first looking at why self-care and wellness are important to do would be helpful. I am a first responder to survivors of violence, and I know that working with survivors can take a toll on the body and mind. As a victim services professional it is important to recognize that repeated exposure to another person's trauma can cause what is called "secondary trauma". This can show up as symptoms such as anger, sadness, grief, anxiety, stomach issues, headaches, backaches, exhaustion, mood swings, irritability, and isolation. Many of these symptoms are the same as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and there is a reason for that; secondary trauma is often referred to as "a step away from PTSD". Clearly self-awareness is key to doing the work of a victim services professional.

Many individuals who are victim services professionals can list the symptoms of PTSD in their sleep. But often the aware-

ness of secondary trauma is not so prevalent. A great deal of the time the awareness is there that we all, as providers, need to keep our boundaries; but even with the best of boundaries we can still be traumatized. So what do we do?

We come back to self-care and wellness! I can preach to my staff and myself but often it just seems like there is little to no time to do self-care. "Self-care" can sound so intimidating. Do I have to go to a monastery and meditate for days? Do I have to restructure my diet to just eat grains and vegetables? Do I have to give up my daily intake of 10 coffees?

I decided to research that self-care thing because so often it is so huge and intimidating to my clients, my staff, and to me. Back I went to the internet. Wikipedia stated that "self care is personal health maintenance. It is any activity of an individual, family or community, with the intention of improving or restoring health, or treating or preventing disease." Ok so that is a lot. What about wellness? "Wellness is generally used to mean a healthy balance of the mind, body and spirit that results in an overall feeling of well-being." So ultimately I need to look for a healthier me that is in balance.

So many of us are working 50-60+ hour work weeks, running from work to home, and then back to work. I can't remember the last time I was able to just sit and not think about "what did I forget to do today?" Does that sound familiar? We need to find BALANCE.

Self-care does not need to come in the form of packing up your bags and running to a monastery. Rather, I suggest small steps. Make a list of ten things (or maybe just try five). Just a few things that you want to try each week. These are things that might take only a few minutes a day. You don't have to do them every day, just a list of options. For example, deep breathing, using the stairs, drinking water not soda, walking the dog around the block, visualizing the ocean or the park, walking away from your desk once every hour, calling someone instead of texting, taking a bubble bath instead of a shower, or working on art with your kids.

If you notice the list does not have to be big or extensive. Your list does not have to be extravagant or ambitious. The

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idea is to have fun and get away from the things that are stressful for you. What is important is that you are stepping away from what is the normal, ongoing routine of “work” and “stress” and getting a break. If you have a job that is intensive and possibly could lead to secondary trauma you might want to add in steps to “detox” yourself such as weekly supervision (talking to someone about what you hear, not family and friends), walking regularly, daily journaling of your feelings and thoughts, or drawing out your feelings (free draw on paper just what comes to mind, nothing formal).

If you put something on the list to try and you find that it is NOT restful then just remove it from the list and try something else. The intent is that you are trying, not that you are doing specifically what is on the list. This is not one more item you have to check off on a to-do list. This is a lifelong journey. You want, and need, to find what is helpful for you right now. What works today might not work tomorrow, so stay flexible and use the tools available to you to make self-care and wellness priorities in your life; not just New Year’s resolutions. ★

Examining Victimization and Its Consequences

By Crime Victims’ Institute (CVI)

Sam Houston State University

Adverse consequences associated with victimization vary significantly across individuals and impact not only the individual victim, but also their families, friends, and surrounding communities. Additionally, these consequences may be short- and/or long-term, and physical, emotional, and/or mental. Understanding these consequences is important not only for assessing the impact crime has on its victims and society, but also for determining how to respond more effectively to crime victims. Victimization research conducted by the Crime Victims’ Institute (CVI) at Sam Houston State University during the past year has examined several forms of victimization and the associated consequences, including the long-term adverse effects of bullying victimization and how those negative consequences are issues of concern in a public health framework.

CVI’s research has found that having experienced early victimization, especially repeated bullying, is associated with more negative perceptions of general health and mental health, higher rates of emotional/mental or behavior problems that interfere with school and/or work, and suffering from an eating disorder. Victims of bullying were also more likely to smoke and smoked more cigarettes per day than non-victims and were also more likely to experience subsequent violent victimization and homelessness. These results indicate that victimization that occurs early in life, especially bullying victimization, may have significant and substantial physical and mental health consequences for the victims later in life.

In addition to understanding the consequences associated with victimization, especially being the victim of bullying,

it is important to view these adverse effects from a broader public health perspective. For example, the effects of early victimization on subsequent experiences of victimization and homelessness later in life were also significant. These experiences may serve as potential conduits to further adverse physical and mental health outcomes, including substance use, lack of health insurance, and mental health issues. Victimization is linked to increased tobacco and alcohol use, which may lead to mouth, lung, colon, or throat cancer, alcoholism, liver disease, and hypertension, among other physical health problems. Depression, anxiety, and suicide are also linked to these experiences. Although these may seem like individual problems, they are public health issues due to the cost to society and communities in the form of social welfare, lost employment and productivity, and increased expense of health care. Investing in victim services and effective prevention programs is crucial to efforts to ameliorate the immediate trauma, both physical and emotional, that victims experience. Perhaps equally as important is the need to make victims more aware of the types of services and programs available to them to help in their coping. Investments in victim services may also have the added benefit of reducing the long-term negative effects identified in this and other studies, thus reducing the high cost of victimization borne by the victims themselves, the health care system, mental health system, employers, and society in general. Victim services that address both the short- and long-term consequences of victimization not only help the victims, but also have a beneficial impact on the wider community.

For additional information, visit www.crimevictimsinstitute.org ★

Spotlight On: The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

By David Boatright

Executive Director, Texas Regional Office, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), a private, 501(c)(3) organization, has operated from its headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, since 1984, and in Texas since 2007, to respond when a child goes missing and to rescue victims of sexual exploitation. NCMEC provides critical safety information to children and families about real world and online safety, as well as resources for families, law enforcement, children and other professionals who are directly affected by missing and exploited children cases.

The services offered by NCMEC are free of charge and NCMEC fulfills its congressionally mandated mission through several national programs including:

- The National Missing Children's Hotline (1-800-THE-LOST),
- The Missing Children Division (resources for missing children cases),
- The Case Analysis Division (sex offender tracking, attempted abduction information),
- The CyberTipline (for reporting online child exploitation),
- AMBER Alert (NCMEC validates and transfers alerts to secondary distributors),
- Team H.O.P.E. (volunteer-based family services by individuals who experienced similar events),
- The Child Victim Identification Program (to identify victims of child pornography), and
- Team Adam (providing rapid, on-sight response efforts).

Texas has a particular area of need for services related to missing and exploited children. Because of the large Texas-Mexico border, the state is home to hubs of human trafficking, including international and domestic child sexual trafficking. In 2011, 47,313 Texas children were reported missing to law enforcement. Texas has the second largest number of registered sex offenders in the nation (approximately 68,500). Over 1,000 offenders are currently serving time in state facilities for child sexual exploitation crimes.

As the official Texas-based representative for the full complement of services and programs offered by NCMEC, the Texas Regional Office's primary focus is to (1) offer training for law enforcement and prosecutors with a particular empha-

sis on Internet or technology related crimes against children and (2) work closely with government and non-governmental organizations in prevention and education programs to educate members of the community about child safety.

Recognizing a complex need to better support the community, schools, children, and law enforcement, two businesswomen and prominent Texans, M. Diane Allbaugh and Jan Bullock, led the effort to create the Texas Regional Office in 2007. As a branch office of NCMEC, case management services are also provided to law enforcement and families responding to a missing child through teams under the direction of NCMEC's Missing Children Division.

Child Safety Education

Keeping children safe online requires teaching children, as early as elementary school, to use technologies in a safe, responsible manner. Online safety education in schools and the community is a key component to preparing young children to identify and avoid harmful situations online. With the recent national attention on cyberbullying, schools and communities now recognize the severe effects of online harassment that follow a child outside school and into the home, and even into new communities.

Surveys of youth ages 12-17 indicate that almost one in every ten children will be sexually solicited online. One out of every twenty-five children online will receive aggressive solicitations in which a solicitor will ask to meet them in real life, call them on the phone, show up at their home or send them offline mail, money, or gifts. More than half of the children solicited will never tell anyone—not a parent, teacher, sibling or even friend—about the solicitation.

Educating the elementary age students about safe online behaviors, including teaching children not to trust everyone they meet online, has never been more crucial. NCMEC's NetSmartz® programs begin with animated, child-friendly and interactive elementary school materials and advance to increasingly realistic Tween and Teen programs.

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Community and School-Based Programs

The Texas staff crisscrosses the Lone Star State delivering NCMEC's nationally-recognized educational and prevention programs such as NetSmartz® and Take 25®. Texas H.B. 1942 requires schools to address cyberbullying in their health curriculum, but public education resources are perpetually thin. NetSmartz offers free, age-appropriate resources (presentations, videos, interactive games, handouts and discussion sheets) that address not only cyberbullying, but sexting, online predators, reputation management on social networks, and identity theft.

In 2011 alone, the office held NetSmartz workshops to promote online safety for more than 11,000 children and 240 organizations. Some 100,000 pieces of child safety literature were distributed to concerned parents, caregivers and child advocates, as well as children themselves.

Texas Law Enforcement Education

The Texas Regional Office provides high-quality and cost-effective training for law enforcement and prosecutors with a particular emphasis on internet-related crimes. Recently, the office has received state approval for a 16-hour best-practices course for law enforcement officials in this field. Investigating Internet-related crime cannot be stressed enough when child sex exploitation and trafficking are often discovered via child pornography.

Investigating child sexual exploitation cases often requires specialized technical skills outside the scope of usual investigation methods, as modern child pornography rings have hierarchies similar to traditional organized crime structures. The cases could not be more critical because data shows that investigations are increasingly leading to younger and younger victims. According to 2011 law enforcement data, 83 percent of offenders had sexual exploitation images of children under 12 years-old and 19 percent had sexual images of children younger than 3 years-old.

Child pornography is not just a crime about downloading an image; on average, one in six of the investigations will lead to an abuser who molested children. Therefore, law enforcement must be prepared for not only the internet-based technical investigations, but identifying and rescuing the children portrayed in the images as well as linking cases to IP addresses and offenders who may have access to other unidentified children.

There is simply no greater work in law enforcement than that of keeping children safe, and there may not be a time in

history when it's been more difficult. As the world becomes increasingly mobile, the threats to children are complex and often multi-jurisdictional.

For more information on the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, contact the Texas Regional Office at (512) 465-2156 or visit the following websites: www.missing-kids.com, www.NetSmartz.org or www.Take25.org. ★

OUR GOAL IS TO PRINT NEWS OF INTEREST FOR VICTIMS AND VICTIM ADVOCATES

The Victim's Informer newsletter is published quarterly. Articles, meeting notices, and other submissions should be sent to TDCJ Victim Services Division, Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse, 8712 Shoal Creek Blvd, Suite 265, Austin, Texas 78757-6899; faxed to 512-452-0825; or e-mailed to tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.state.tx.us. For questions or comments, please call us at 800-848-4284.

Please Note:

You may access the publication at the TDCJ VSD Internet website. If you wish, we will notify you via e-mail each time *The Victim's Informer* becomes available on the TDCJ VSD Internet website and provide an electronic link to *The Victim's Informer*. Please send your e-mail address to: tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.state.tx.us

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