

Empower!

GIVING VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES A VOICE



A Publication of the Metropolitan Police Department's Victim Services Branch

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Message from Tyria Fields



Tyria Fields

Last year was a meaningful and full year for members of the Metropolitan Police Department's Victim Services Branch. To keep that energy going, we hope that this first edition of Empower for 2009 will be used to encourage families and survivors of homicides to remain involved in the investigative aspects of their case. We want families and survivors to stay connected with the Police Department through the resources that we pro-

vide. This is true for those families that we are meeting for the first time during the onset of the case through the Family Liaison Specialists Unit. We also continue to reconnect with families in older cases through the Major Case Victims Unit. In addition to providing case management, advocacy, and education, each unit develops and maintains relationships with family members. Most importantly, we help increase the communication between families and the detectives

assigned to cases. Our 2009 commitment to families is that we will continue to highlight the resources that are available and continue to empower and support family involvement as their loved one's case is being investigated by the Metropolitan Police Department.

Tyria Fields,
Manager

Upcoming Events and Activities

National Crime Victims' Rights Week

25 Years of Rebuilding Lives: Celebrating the Victims of Crime Act
April 26–May 2, 2009

First declared in April of 1981 by President Ronald Reagan, National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW) has been observed annually. The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) assists and encourages communities throughout the country to observe this special week through rallies, candlelight vigils, and numerous other commemorative activities that promote victims' rights and honor crime victims and those who advocate on their behalf.

This year's theme is 25 Years of Rebuilding Lives: Celebrating the Victims of Crime Act. OVC was established in 1984 by the Victims of Crime Act to oversee diverse programs that benefit victims of crime.

Activities scheduled during the NCVRW include:

Next of Kin Meeting: Open to immediate family members of homicide victims whose unsolved homicides occurred from 2006 through 2009.

- Metropolitan Police Department
- Wednesday, April 22, 2009
- Metropolitan Police Academy
- 4665 Blue Plains Drive, SW, Washington, DC 20032
- Time: By appointment—please contact Carla Okonkwo at (202) 645-9629.

National Observance and Candlelight Ceremony

- Thursday, April 23, 2009
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- 1615 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C.
- Time: 6:30–7:30 p.m.

Ninth Annual Jerry Lee Crime Prevention Symposium

- Monday, April 27 and Tuesday, April 28, 2009
- Contact: Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy
- Administration of Justice Department
- George Mason University
- 10900 University Blvd. MS4F4, Manassas, VA 20110
- (703) 993-4901

- For more information on activities near you, please visit OVC's calendar of events at www.ovc.gov/ncvrw/welcome.html

Frequently Asked Questions About the Identification Process

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

1910 Massachusetts Ave., SE
Building #27
Washington, DC 20003
Phone: (202) 698-9005
Fax: (202) 698-9101
ocme.dc.gov

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
111 Penn Street
Baltimore, MD 21201
Phone: (410) 333-3271

Q: Who determines the cause of death?

A: Most victims of homicide are transported to the DC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME). All homicides are autopsied to determine the cause of death and for the purpose of collecting evidence from the body to help in the investigation and prosecution of the case. The OMCE is responsible for writing an autopsy report and a death certificate.

Q: What is the identification process?

A: The identification process is conducted in a controlled

and private environment at the OCME. If identification is found on the decedent at the time of death, that is the name assigned to the decedent until positive identification can be made. If no form of identification was found on the decedent at the time of death, then the decedent is listed as unidentified male/female until identification is made.

Visual identity is confirmed through a photographic presentation of the decedent to a family member, friend or other reliable source during the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., seven days a week.

Q: What happens if my loved one is taken to a hospital in Maryland?

A: Occasionally, victims of homicide are transported to Maryland hospitals. If this occurs, the homicide victim will be transported to the Maryland State Medical Examiner's Office in Baltimore, Maryland. Positive identification is made by the assigned homicide detective. This facility is not set up for family identification.

Highlights from Recent Victim Services Events

The Victim Services Branch hosted a number of events during 2008 that benefited families of homicide victims. The following are highlights from those events.

DC City-Wide Homicide Commemorative

The DC City-Wide Homicide Commemorative Event, sponsored by the DC Homicide Coalition, is an annual event dedicated to remembering the victims of homicide. The Metropolitan Police Department which is a member of the DC Homicide Coalition and the Victim Services Branch played an integral role in bringing together families, law enforcement members, counselors and victim advocates. More than 500 people participated in the event held at Matthews Memorial Baptist Church on September 18, 2008. The

City made an official proclamation for the event and declared September 18, 2008 a "Day of Remembrance."

Next-of-Kin Meeting

While waiting to meet with the assigned detective on their case, families participated in an open discussion on October 29, 2008 that focused on coping with the death of a loved one. Family members had the opportunity to offer their own coping strategies to deal with their grief and pain. A few of the suggested strategies to cope with the loss were: saying the loved ones name, talking about the loved one, going to church, praying, creating a website, staying involved with the in-

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vestigation, thinking about good times, saying words of encouragement, exercising, giving yourself permission to cry, etc.

Deirdre Gardner, a licensed social worker from the Maryland Crime Victims' Resource Center, co-facilitated the meeting with MPDC Victim Services manager Tyria Fields. The Department will schedule three Next-of-Kin meetings for 2009. For information on upcoming dates contact the Family Liaison Specialists Unit at 202-645-9629 or Major Case Victims Unit at 202-727-7139.

Tree of Remembrance Event

The Metropolitan Police Department hosted a Tree of Remembrance holiday memorial dedicated to honoring the lives of loved ones lost to homicides. The

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LaVerne Harley, victim specialist; Jennifer Murphy, victim specialist; Dawn Christie, senior victim specialist; Mark Dixon, volunteer; Carla Okonkwo, supervisor, family liaison specialist; Marlene Castro, bilingual family liaison specialist; Tyria Fields, manager Victim Services Branch gather around the remembrance tree.

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event was an opportunity for MPD to acknowledge people who were experiencing new and/or returning emotions of despair and other forms of anxiety often felt during the holiday season.

The event, held on December 6, 2008 at the former Judges Council Chambers, was made possible by the MPD Criminal Investigations Division, Victims Service Branch, Family Liaison Unit (FLU) and Major Case Victim Unit (MCVU).

Christmas Party Celebration

On Saturday, December 20, 2008 the Metropolitan Police Department partnered with community service providers Murder Mistaken and Survivors of Homicides for an annual Christmas Party. More than 400 gifts were provided for children affected by homicide through the generous sup-

port from officials and detectives within the Criminal Investigations Division at the Metropolitan Police Department and the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. Support from an anonymous donor helped to make the event, held at the

Youth Service Center, successful. In addition to food, holiday crafts, and music, the children met Ms. Teen Maryland Mariah Battle.



Numerous gifts were provided for children affected by homicide.

Letters

Share your story

Send a letter detailing your experiences — positive or negative — to victim.services@dc.gov or send via US Mail to:

Victim Services Branch
Family Liaison Specialists Unit
3244 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20020

Just wanted you to know that several of us attended the (homicide) commemorative event. It was very emotional... I wanted to thank you for letting me know about the event. My hope is that this will further inspire District officials to continue to pursue the unsolved murders. I don't want to see another family suffer what we have dealt with for the past nine years...Please,

please, continue the work your unit is doing. I'm praying for a breakthrough.

—C. B.

I thank you very much for the very touching remembrance ceremony you helped to plan for the families of all the homicide victims in Washington DC... I arrived just in time to place the ornament on the tree. I look forward to next year's

event and hope I will be able to attend. Thanks again. And please convey my appreciation to the others of your team who made it all possible.

—D.M.C.

I want to thank you for everything and keeping us informed. We really appreciate it... Stay blessed! Thanks

—I.L.

How May We Assist You?

Victim Services Branch

Tyria Fields Manager 724-4339 tyria.fields@dc.gov

Family Liaison Specialists Unit

Carla Okonkwo Supervisor 645-9629 carla.okonkwo@dc.gov
Marlene James Family Liaison Specialist 645-9631 marlene.james@dc.gov

The Family Liaison Specialists Unit (FLSU) provides support services to homicide victims and survivors throughout the investigative process.

Victim Specialists Unit

Helen Hall Victim Specialist 727-6007 helen.hall@dc.gov
Kayce Simmons Victim Specialist 724-2215 kayce.simmons@dc.gov
Esther U. Thomas Victim Specialist 727-6006 estheru.thomas@dc.gov

The Victim Specialists Unit (VSU) provides support, information, and referrals to victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Major Case Victims Unit

Dawn M. Christie Senior Victim Specialist 727-7139 dawnm.christie@dc.gov
Laverne Harley Victim Specialist 727-5391 laverne.harley@dc.gov
Jennifer Murphy Victim Specialist 727-6181 jennifer.murphy@dc.gov

The Major Case Victims Unit (MCVU) supports and educates survivors of homicide victims during the reinvestigation of unsolved homicide cases.

Please Note: All numbers are area code (202).



Metropolitan Police Department
Victim Services Branch/Family Liaison Specialists Unit
3244 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20020

