Spring is ushering new beginnings and opportunities. And right now, we are all adjusting to new normals and ways of doing our daily activities. This is especially true for the Metropolitan Police Department and the Victim Services Branch. COVID-19 has altered the way we support victims of crime. In effort to practice social distancing and maintain the safety to the public, we have gone remote. That is, our victim advocacy is being done with minimal contact with the public. While this new normal is quite different from our routine practice, we have managed to find new ways of engagement. Specifically, we are using teleconferencing to connect with service providers, victims of crime and other members of the Victim Services Branch. The current pandemic has forced us to change how we work. It definitely has not changed the level of commitment and access to our work. We understand that now more than ever, survivors of crime need advocacy, education and information. They have questions that need answers and they need a consistent supportive voice as they navigate the criminal justice system. The Victim Services Branch stands with you during this time of uncertainty with a steady hand. We are here to help.

Email us at victim.services@dc.gov
**National Crime Victims’ Rights Week ‘Seeks Justice, Ensures Rights, Inspires Hope’**

You can stay informed by joining our Official MPD Victim Services Branch Community Group. MPDC has created a confidential Google Group to enhance support for survivors/victims and improve communication with MPD and the community. This Group provides information on events and supportive services thought out the community. If you would like to join, send an email to Official MPD Victim Services Branch Community Group at official.mpd-vsb@gmail.com.

**Sexual Assault Awareness Month Emphasizes Consent Through ‘I Ask’ Campaign**

At its heart, Sexual Assault Awareness Month is about more than awareness — our ultimate goal is prevention. Since 2007, Yes Means Yes messaging has been sharing the importance of consent for more than a decade, and by replacing lost income, physical and mental health, grief, and trauma. While no amount of money can erase the trauma and grief victims suffer, this aid can be crucial in the aftermath of crime. By paying for care that helps restore victims’ physical and mental health, and by replacing lost income for victims who cannot work and for families who lose a breadwinner, assistance is available to all who need it.

Ultimately, each person defines what they see as justice. We are here to do our best to help you find it. Sometimes there are situations where a case is unable to move forward. A crucial element in this process is knowing that you are being treated with respect and given due process. Know that you are important to us and that we care.

Victim Services Branch Specialists work to ENSURE VICTIMS’ RIGHTS by working with victims and survivors to explain their rights, refer them to appropriate agencies and provide a supportive environment. Under District of Columbia Law (23 DC Code Section 1901 et seq.), crime victims have the following rights:

- Be treated with fairness and with respect for the victims’ dignity and privacy
- Be reasonably protected from the accused offender throughout the court proceedings
- Be present at all court proceedings related to the offender including sentencing and release or parole hearings
- Right to confer with an attorney for the prosecution in the case
- Right to receive an order of restitution from the person convicted
- Right to receive information about the conviction, sentencing, imprisonment, detention, and release of the offender
- Right to be notified of any available victim advocate or other appropriate person to develop a safety plan and appropriate services

Just as in every state, Washington, DC has a Crime Victims Compensation Program that can provide substantial financial assistance to crime victims and their families. While no amount of money can erase the trauma and grief victims suffer, this aid can be crucial in the aftermath of crime. By paying for care that helps restore victims’ physical and mental health, and by replacing lost income for victims who cannot work and for families who lose a breadwinner, compensation programs are assisting victims in direct ways. Victim Services Branch Specialists will guide you through the Crime Victims Compensation Program process and the requirements to qualify.

Our Victim Specialists IN-SPIRE HOPE on each contact they make, with their calm, caring, and compassionate approach. Our Victim Services Team has led the art of self-care, something ever more important in these trying times of the pandemic. We care — that you can best ultimately serve you, our community. We need to be at our best with a store of reserve. We assist victims in remembering to take care of themselves as well, especially now.

We create events to support and inspire survivors such as Never Of Kin (NOK) Meetings, Grief Healing workshops, Denim Day, and Paint with MPD. We provide outreach designed to address what people are struggling with to empower them to seek help. For instance, our trainings on domestic and intimate Stalking Awareness Month proved vital to some audience members who were in that situation. We lifted up teens who had experienced the death of a loved one to give them a break from it all and created new cherished memories honoring their loss through art.

The #MeToo stories are powerful, which is “I ASK.” Our Victim Services Group at Metropolitan Police Department is interested in sex. “I Ask is the statement by survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence. They make, with their calm, caring, and compassionate approach. Our Victim Services Team has led the art of self-care, something ever more important in these trying times of the pandemic. We care — that you can best ultimately serve you, our community. We need to be at our best with a store of reserve. We assist victims in remembering to take care of themselves as well, especially now.

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May is Mental Health Awareness Month. This year’s theme for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is “Why Care?” According to NAMI, this campaign is an opportunity to share the importance of care in relationship with others. Care concerning the mental health treatment and services toward others. Care regarding the support and education to millions of people, families, caregivers, and loved ones affected by mental illness. Care brings awareness to broken systems preventing individuals from receiving adequate treatment. Care has the power to make a life-changing impact on those affected by mental health conditions.

When we care, we contribute to the health and well-being of those around us. Individuals experiencing mental health issues can feel alienated and alone. Care is being inclusive, asking questions, and listening without judgment. Care also ensures that people remain connected with the appropriate mental health professionals.

The Metropolitan Police Department’s Victim Services Branch (VSB) is committed to the care of survivors and secondary victims of violent crime by being a resource to mental health and grief services. VSB continues to provide supportive services through individual and community advocacy with events such as Wellness Workshops and other victim-related events that empower survivors and victims as they continue to heal from trauma.

For more information and immediate Assistance contact:
» MPD-Victim Services Branch: https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/victim-services-branch
» DC Department of Behavioral Health Access Helpline: 888-793-4357 or visit https://dbh.dc.gov
» The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Information Helpline: 800-950-6264 or visit https://www.nami.org
» Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration’s National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357), (also known as the Treatment Referral Routing Service) or visit www.samhsa.gov

—Marlene Castro
Denim Day is a global campaign that is held annually. It originated in Italy in 1992, after the Italian Supreme Court overturned a rape conviction due to the justices concluding that the victim must have helped the suspect take her pants off because, the jeans she was wearing were too tight. The next day, the women in the Italian Parliament all came to work wearing denim in solidarity with the victim. Denim Day asks us all to take a symbolic stance of solidarity with sexual assault victims and survivors everywhere by wearing denim on Denim Day. This year, Denim Day is Wednesday, April 29th, 2020.

In past years, Metropolitan Police Department’s (MPD) Victim Services Branch (VSB) has taken great pride in hosting an annual Denim Day event that provided an opportunity for advocates, local service providers, and MPD members to come together to make a statement that we are all dedicated to supporting victims and survivors and educating our community by way of informational panels, music, and various genres of entertainment and education.

During this time of transition, we are currently facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been mandated to avoid large gatherings and practice social-distancing for the well-being of us all. Although we will not come together physically, we will come together in solidarity and not allow the spirit of Denim Day to lie dormant this year. We encourage each one of you to virtually share your stories, pictures, or even inspirational messages to survivors on your social media platforms. Using popularized hashtags such as #denimday, #mpddenimday, #IAsk, or #30DaysofSAAM, victims and survivors abroad can be encouraged by your support. Even though our method may change this year, our message stays the same. We will still make a statement; we will still stand strong.

While we observe Denim Day in April, Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) is dedicated to supporting victims and survivors of sexual assault 365 days of the year. MPD’s Victim Specialists provide supportive services and referrals to victims and survivors by linking them with wrap-around services that are crucial during the initial period after victimization has occurred.

—Ashley Rinaldi

Resources

Fortunately, the District of Columbia has a vast array of community resources available to assist victims such as free sexual assault medical exams (SANE), temporary safe housing, and counseling resources. While many of the services available do require that a police report be filed, there are programs that provide services to self-reporting victims.

Should you or someone you know need assistance locating resources, contact MPD’s Victim Services Branch at 202-727-6007 or the DC Victim Hotline at 1-844-4HELPDC.
Modified Approach to Next-of-Kin Meeting During Coronavirus Restrictions

With the recent developments and restrictions surrounding the Coronavirus (COVID-19), the Family Liaison Specialists Unit is conducting a modified Next-of-Kin Meeting. Family members with open homicide cases from 2016 through 2018 are invited to schedule a phone appointment with the detective investigating their loved one’s case. In the future, face to face meetings will be rescheduled as needed. The goal of the Next-of-Kin meetings is to empower survivors to take an active role in the investigative process while providing them with individual support from a victim specialist.

Each year, April’s Next-of-Kin Meeting is held in observance of National Crime Victims’ Rights Week (NCVRW). This year’s NCVRW theme promotes “seeking justice, ensuring victims’ rights are upheld, and inspiring hope.”

Losing a loved one to homicide has far-reaching effects on families, friends, and the community. Victim Specialists are reaching out to all families participating in this Next-of-kin meeting to inspire hope and address the various needs of secondary victims of homicide during this COVID-19 pandemic. As families navigate their healing journey, they are encouraged to continue to seek justice by maintaining communication with the assigned detective. The Metropolitan Police Department remains committed to ensure that victims’ rights are upheld as we provide supportive services and information on available resources during this global crisis.

Megan Riley

Resources
If you have any questions regarding the Next-of-Kin Meetings or would like to speak with a Victim Specialist, please call 202-645-6363.