

Bringing ★ ★ Honor to Victims ★★

INTRODUCTION

In addition to securing official proclamations and scheduling speeches and presentations, you also can organize special events during National Crime Victims' Rights Week and throughout the year to educate the public about the rights and needs of crime victims. To help with the planning process, we have assembled a list of possible special event activities that you may hold within your own community. Many of the suggested items come straight from victim advocates across the country.

An essential element of any outreach campaign is to involve other groups and individuals. Recruit external partners to have an even greater impact and a broader reach. And, remember that encouraging the participation of youth today can have an impact for years to come. A number of the suggested activities below are specifically targeted to young people.

CANDLELIGHT VIGIL

Candlelight vigils are one of the most popular and inspirational ways to honor victims of crime. Host your vigil at an easily accessible site to get the most exposure and participation (e.g., front entrance to the state capitol building, town hall, city park). Many communities choose to hold these ceremonies outside of courthouses. Add something unique and special to your vigil. During National Crime Victims' Rights Week, the Delaware County, Pennsylvania chapter of Parents of Murdered Children released two dozen doves at a candlelight vigil held in front of the courthouse.

RIBBON CAMPAIGNS

Ribbon campaigns are an easy way to enable a large number of people to show their support for victims' rights. Pass out ribbons at schools, shopping malls, courthouses, and your office. Red, white and blue ribbons could be used to reinforce this year's colors.

ART EXHIBITS

Host an art exhibit to raise public awareness about victims' rights. Invite victims of crime, survivors, or advocates to submit pieces that reflect the week's theme, "Bringing Honor to Victims," in the context of their personal experiences. In Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the YWCA hosted an art exhibit for Victims' Rights Week. The exhibit was entitled "Take a Walk in My Shoes," and it honored victims of crime and violence. The exhibit featured artwork by survivors.

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COMMEMORATIVE QUILT

Create a quilt to honor crime victims. Invite staff, volunteers, students, community members, crime victims, and their families to decorate a patch. You may be able to get local arts and crafts store to donate supplies. Find a visible spot for your exhibit, such as the lobby of your local courthouse or police station. Commemorative quilts provide the opportunity to portray the experiences of hundreds of people in one creative display.

VICTIM SERVICES AWARDS CEREMONY

Take advantage of National Crime Victims' Rights Week to honor those who have dedicated their lives to serving victims of crime. Hold a lunch or a dinner ceremony and present awards. Local communities have recognized the police officer of the year, victim advocate of the year, criminal justice professional of the year, and/or volunteer of the year.

RESOURCE AND EDUCATION FAIRS

Educate the public about victims' rights by organizing a resource fair. Choose an easily accessible public location, such as a shopping mall or university student union. Last year, local victim advocates in Albuquerque, New Mexico,

celebrated Crime Victims' Rights Week by holding a resource fair at a shopping mall. Participating organizations included the Sexual Assault Recovery Services, Rape Crisis Center, and Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

DEDICATIONS

Dedicate a local bench, monument, or building to victims of crime. A Florida chapter of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) dedicated a park bench and tree to victims of drunk driving. In Riverside, Ohio, a Victims' Memorial Wishing Well was built in a local park and dedicated to victims of crime. In Ware County, Georgia, families of homicide victims dedicated a white marble bench and stepping stones outside the courthouse to crime victims.

CLOTHESLINE PROJECT

Clothesline projects are popular throughout the country. They consist of different color tee shirts, each color representing a different crime. Victims decorate these shirts in order to express how they have been affected by crime. The shirts are then publicly displayed on a clothesline. If there is a clothesline project in your area, offer to display it for Crime Victims' Rights Week. If there is no clothesline project in your area, start one.

VICTIMS' RIGHTS WALKATHON

Sponsor a victims' rights walkathon to raise money for local victim service agencies. Encourage participants to register and find sponsors. Invite local activists, elected officials, or musicians to speak or perform during the event. In Richmond, Virginia, the third annual victims' rights walkathon was held this past year and featured the state's attorney general.

VOTER REGISTRATION AND EDUCATION

Will there be issues of importance to victims of crime in an upcoming election? Conduct a voter registration drive and education campaign to familiarize voters with the issues and to encourage them to go to the polls. Invite the participation of the local chapter of the League of Women Voters.

VICTIMS' RIGHTS RALLY

Empower crime victims and their supporters by holding a march or rally. Hold a rally to lobby for a specific piece of legislation, or one that focuses on a particular crime, such as Take Back the Night. Take Back the Night rallies are held to empower victims of sexual assault.

MEMORIAL GARDENS

A memorial garden is a living memorial to crime victims. Establish or advocate for a memorial garden to murder victims in your community. In Stark County, Ohio, victim advocates handed out seeds at a ceremony during National Crime Victims' Rights Week. Advocates encouraged families and officials to plant flowers in memory of victims who had lost their lives. In Modesto, California, families, friends, and supporters of victims gathered to dedicate Stanislaus County's Garden of Healing and Restoration to victims of crime. The garden, still under development, features, among other things, a coastal redwood tree dedicated to homicide victims. When completed, the garden will also feature a waterfall and monument.

TREE OF LIFE

Display a "tree of life" in your office. Construct the trunk, branches and leaves of the tree from construction paper, and place it on a wall in a visible location, such as your lobby. Allow victims and families to place different colored ribbons on the tree, representing different crimes. Alternatively, place ribbons on a living tree.

SURVIVOR POETRY READING

Organize a poetry reading for advocates, families and survivors of crime. Encourage participants to read their own poetry, or a poem that they find especially meaningful. To create a cozy and intimate atmosphere, find a local café or library at which you can hold this event.

EDUCATIONAL COASTERS

Create and distribute coasters with information about safety or crime victims' rights. In Riverside, California, victim advocates distributed coasters with information on date rape drugs to local bars.

FUNDRAISING

Many businesses are willing to contribute a portion of their profits to local non-profit organizations that serve the public interest. Work with a local business, such as a book store, pizza parlor, or coffee shop, to hold a "fundraising night" during which the business will contribute a portion of their profits from that night to your organization. Encourage the community to patronize your sponsor's business on fundraising night by distributing flyers and contacting your local newspapers.

ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS

POSTER OR POETRY CONTEST

Encourage the creativity of kids while supporting victims of crime. Work with local schools to organize a poster or poetry contest for victims' rights week. In Arapahoe County, Colorado, winning posters were placed in a 2002 calendar and distributed for free to the community.

PROGRAM FOR SCHOOL OR YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

Host an educational program for a school or youth organization. Perform skits, show videos, and hold discussions with classes. Discuss victims' rights and the impact of crime. Think about bringing counselors. For National Crime Victims' Rights Week last year, the California Youth Authority put on several programs for kids under its jurisdiction. They held a moment of silence, invited crime victims to be guest speakers, sponsored a poster and essay contest, held memorial services, and ran a fundraiser to support victim advocacy organizations.

PLEDGES AGAINST VIOLENCE

Have teenagers sign pledges against violence. In Hillsboro, Oregon, the

Washington County Juvenile Justice Department participated in the National "Hands Are Not for Hurting" Campaign. Local teenagers traced their hands and added those tracings to a tree displayed in the Justice Services Building. Adding their hands to the tree symbolized their commitment to end violence.

VOLUNTEER DRIVE

Work with schools to encourage children and teenagers to become active in their community. Hold presentations for middle school and high school classes. Tell kids about the different services provided by organizations in the community. Distribute educational materials. Encourage teenagers to volunteer their time with a local victim organization.

MOVIE HOUR

Go to high schools, youth organizations, and universities. Preview clips of movies which feature crime victims. Discuss how the victims are treated and portrayed in the movies, and how the movies compare to real life. At the University of California, Davis, the Campus Violence Prevention Program sponsored a movie night during Sexual Assault Awareness Month in order to open a dialogue on campus.

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