

VOIS - Victim-Offender Intervention Services

RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF THOSE HARMED BY CRIME

A program of the Iowa Department of Corrections

What is VOIS?

Victim/Offender Intervention Services (VOIS) include voluntary programs that provide an opportunity for individuals directly affected by crime to actively participate in dealing with the consequences of that crime. Goals of the program are for the parties most affected by crime to have an opportunity to address:

- What happened,
- How it felt when it happened,
- Why it happened, and
- What is needed for restitution and/or to repair harm.

VOIS services are “victim-centered.” Anyone who has been impacted by a crime can contact our office by phone, mail, or email:

Office of Victim and Restorative Justice Programs
Mary Roche, LMHC – Director
510 E. 12th Street – Suite 4
Des Moines, IA 50319
515-725-5742 or 800-778-1182
mary.roche@iowa.gov

What are Program Options?

- 1. Victim Services:** Sometimes victims may have many unanswered questions after an offender has been convicted, such as: restitution, the location of the offender, or the terms of supervision/custody. Most people are not familiar with the criminal justice system and may feel uncertain about their role and their rights as a crime victim. Our VOIS program is here to provide assistance – simply contact the program Director with any question or concern.
- 2. Indirect Communication:** Communication and agreements between victim(s) and offender(s) can be made **indirectly** through our program as well. Please refer to the information about our Apology Letter Bank further below. All indirect communication between victims and offenders is monitored and evaluated for safety and appropriateness through our program.
- 3. Victim/Offender Dialogue:** Face-to-face dialogue between a victim and an offender is an option. This intervention involves careful planning and preparation, and is facilitated by a trained professional. Assessing the safety and preparation needs of each participant is a vital part of this process. Follow-up procedures are also implemented to increase the likelihood that this process is beneficial to all involved.

Once a referral has been made, a trained facilitator will contact all parties involved and discuss program options. If all parties agree to an intervention, individual preparation meetings usually take place until all parties feel they are prepared, all concerns have been explored, and safety options addressed.

Common questions about Victim/Offender Dialogue:

a. ***Is this program safe?***

For victim/offender dialogue, preparation meetings are required. A trained facilitator conducts assessments to determine safety issues for all involved. This is a voluntary program for all participants.

b. ***What does it cost?***

There is no charge for this service.

c. ***Do I Have To Do This?***

This type of meeting is not for everyone. Only you can decide if this is something you wish to pursue, and we can explore a variety of options.

d. ***Is It Effective?***

Many participants report that this process is satisfying, healing and helpful.

Potential Benefits for Victims:

- **An opportunity to actively participate in the process of resolving the incident.**
- **An opportunity to express frustration, loss or trauma as a result of the crime.**
- **An increased chance of receiving restitution or reparation.**
- **An opportunity to be more fully informed:**
 - *about the incident (motive, method, background of the offender)*
 - *about the offender (what kind of person is this?)*
 - *about the Criminal Justice System and its processes.*
- **An opportunity to experience a sense of healing.**

Potential Benefits for Offenders:

- **An opportunity to be aware of the harm suffered by victims and the community.**
- **An opportunity to “make it right” with the victim, to acknowledge responsibility and to do whatever is reasonable and possible to make amends.**
- **An opportunity to fully participate in finding a fair and reasonable way to repair harm where possible.**

Apology Letter Bank

Sometimes, an offender wishes to write an apology letter to his/her victim, or a victim may request one. All letters must be screened and determined appropriate before “deposit” into the Letter Bank. Victims are notified that a letter exists and given the option of having the letter mailed, or read over the phone. Offenders are not informed of any communication with a victim unless the victim gives permission to do so.

Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice views crime as a violation of the victim and the community. It defines accountability for offenders in terms of taking responsibility for their actions, working to repair the harm caused to the victim and community, and attending to needs that both led to, and were created by, the offense. It provides for active participation by the victim, the offender, and the community in the process of repairing the fabric of community peace and safety.