

VICTIMS FOR
JUSTICE

2023 Annual Report

(7/01/22 - 6/30/23)



CONTENTS

Board of Directors and VFJ Staff	4
Message from Board President	5
Message from Executive Director	6
Year Overview	7
An Advocate's Role	8
A Day of a VFJ Advocate	9
Data Breakdown	10
Community Focused	12
Sponsors	14
Donors	15

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Blaze Bell

Lia Patton

Kelsey Hannaman

Portia Babcock Samuels

Mariajose Echeverria

Captain Sean Case

Bob Spurlock

Jana Turvey

Corey Young

VICTIM FOR JUSTICE STAFF

Suki Miller- Executive Director

Dulce Camacho - Communications & Development Specialist

Phylicia Christian - Lead Advocate

Golda Ingram - Victim Advocate

Cynthia Gachupin - Victim Advocate



MESSAGE FROM BOARD PRESIDENT



As I approach the end of my term as the President of the Victims For Justice Board, I find myself in a bittersweet moment. There has been remarkable growth between 2017-2023, yet there remains a significant amount of work ahead. Reflecting on this journey, I'm deeply honored to have crossed paths with many of you during our community events, sharing moments of healing and shared hope. Victims For Justice (VFJ) holds a special place in my heart, as many of you are familiar with my personal story. I know, firsthand, the crucial and powerful impact VFJ has on its clients. I don't know where I'd be without them and serving on their board has been one of my greatest honors.

As my role shifts, my commitment to amplifying the voices of survivors and advancing the cause of a safer and more compassionate Alaska remains. As you read this annual report, I encourage you to listen not only to the content but also to the unspoken voices of those impacted by violent crime. While our team may be small, their dedication is profound as they work hard to care for our neighbors, families, and friends. Your support is greatly appreciated.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Blaze Bell".

Blaze Bell
VFJ Board President

MISSION

To care for those affected by violent crime.



MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This was my first year as Executive Director at Victims For Justice (VFJ) and I feel very honored to have been entrusted with this position. It was a year of transition, and my heartfelt thanks go to my colleagues who all bring different skill sets and ideas to the team, all serving one main goal: fulfilling the mission of VFJ, caring for Alaskans affected by violent crime.

In the coming pages you will see how we have continued to build upon our victim's services in a holistic approach that resulted in providing well over 3,984 free services, to 263 clients, in 27 different communities. As you read the report, please know that we have incredible advocates and staff that are compassionately responding to every client.

VFJ also hosted two memorials, the Homicide Memorial in July, and the Ceremony of Remembrance in April. I am humbled by the extraordinary generosity of those in our community that, year after year, support and help care for our memorial and allow us to meet the needs of those grieving in our community by creating a space for solace and healing.

In addition to providing services to victims of violent crime, we also celebrated those individuals and groups for their dedication and outstanding contributions to victim services. I am pleased to congratulate this year's awardees on their selection for these distinguished awards and extend my deepest gratitude for their continued work.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the previous Executive Director, Tory Shanklin, outgoing Board Member Lia Patton, and Board Chair Blaze Bell. Thank you for your contributions in making VFJ a strong sustainable mission driven nonprofit. You made sure that we remained grounded in our values, and able to meet the needs of our community when they needed it most.

I am proud of the work we have done this year however; it is not our accomplishment alone. We thank all who have contributed to our success. Through the collaboration with and support of community partners, we are able to provide essential services, re-direct adverse outcomes and improve the well-being of Alaskans. This is, and always will be, our ongoing commitment to our community.



Suki Miller
Executive Director



VISION

To give everyone affected by violent crime a voice and ability to elicit positive change.

YEAR OVERVIEW



3984

SERVICES PROVIDED



\$24,119.44

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED



557

HEARINGS ATTENDED



87

CLIENTS HELPED WITH VCCB APPLICATIONS



119

INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING PROVIDED



19

JOINED SUPPORT GROUP



16

CLIENTS HELPED WITH VICTIM IMPACT STATEMENT

Tax ID 92-0110889



A VICTIM ADVOCATE ROLE

Describing what it means to work as a victim advocate has always been difficult for me, and I think it's because so much of the experience is emotional. Within each task I accomplish, there is an emotional weight.

I will try to illustrate with an example. One task often performed by advocates is accompanying a victim to a bail hearing. Sounds simple enough: go to court.

But let's pause and imagine the depths with this task.

Picture supporting a father whose son was violently and suddenly ripped out of his life by the hands of another. Often, the father (or mother, sister, brother, child, grandparent) wants the perpetrator to be punished immediately.

“He killed my son. Why would the judge allow him to have bail? Why does he get to live his life while my son is dead?”

He's facing unimaginable pain alongside fear, anger, and anxiety surrounding the idea that the person responsible might get to step back out into the community while awaiting trial. There is nothing I can do to make this idea seem OK. The best I can do is be there.

While I'm there, I answer questions, provide explanations, and offer a listening ear. Sometimes, merely being present, even in silence. After the hearing, I often mirror the emotions of relief that the bail was set high, or anxiety that the offender might get out. Sometimes I must remind myself this is not happening to me.

As a result, my job occasionally leaves me with a heavy heart. Yet, being present during the darkest moments often allows me to also be there in the moments of light. I get to share in the relief, hope, healing, and even joy. I've learned lessons about forgiveness and acceptance, watching people transcend their grief and trauma to emerge stronger than they ever thought possible. I've met some of the most gracious, beautiful people. When I say, “It is my privilege to be your advocate,” I mean it every time.

Occasionally, I have doubts about the impact of my work. I see the big picture of all the things that seem broken, and it feels like what I do is not enough. It's during these times that I am fortunate to have worked with people who are filled of gratitude and thanks. They tell me that the work we do at Victims For Justice matters. They thank me for being there and for caring, and remind me that my job is important and worthy.

-BY PHYLCIA CHRISTIAN



A DAY OF A VFJ ADVOCATE

I knew today was going to be a busy day if yesterday was any indication. I just picked up a couple of homicide cases and from the time I turned on my computer, it has been nonstop. I sent emails to VCCB* and APD*, called the DA*, and did my daily routine of local crime surfing all while manning the phones for incoming calls. Did I mention it was busy?

Since 8am this morning, I've been entering notes and tracking the services I've been providing. In a month, I average around 70-100 services. In the past 24 hours, I logged 40! I'll admit not every day is like this, sometimes it's the complete opposite. But I don't mind. I find solace in the ebb and flow of the job.

Throughout my day there is a lot of gratitude amidst the chaos of combing through specific situations, I work with 'survivors of homicide' crime classification and the respective crime agencies and professionals. From my personal experience, the clients I help are full of gratitude and gentleness far beyond the normal expression. I tend to lean on the calmness and compassion, meeting them on mutual ground. My clients notice and it makes a

positive impact to their day. Last month a client texted,

"...demand is in every direction and Victims For Justice was the only kind part of my day."

Our interaction with clients is characterized by a personal and transparent approach, and we are readily accessible through text, email, or phone. I am confident to say that we excel in communication, offering swift responses to our clients. There is a saying between us Advocates: 'If I can't find the answer or help, I can connect you with someone who can.' Most of our callers and clients find this mantra comforting and calming.

Victims For Justice has positively impacted my life. Shaping and teaching me wisdom, grace, and professionalism through the interactions I have with community members. I have gained so much knowledge! The Advocacy Team provides relief to often scary and horrible situations. I am grateful that advocacy and compassion is what concludes my workday, every day.

-BY GOLDA INGRAM

*Violent Crimes Compensation Board

*Anchorage Police Department

*District Attorney



DATA BREAKDOWN

LOCATION OF CRIME

- 55% Residence
- 29% Public
- 9% Vehicle
- 7% Other/Unknown



10% Out of Alaska

GENDER

75.6% Female
24% Male
0.4% Transgender

263 Served Clients

40 Cities Served

LENGTH OF TIME SINCE STARTING VFJ SERVICES



Receiving services for a year or less



Receiving services for over a year

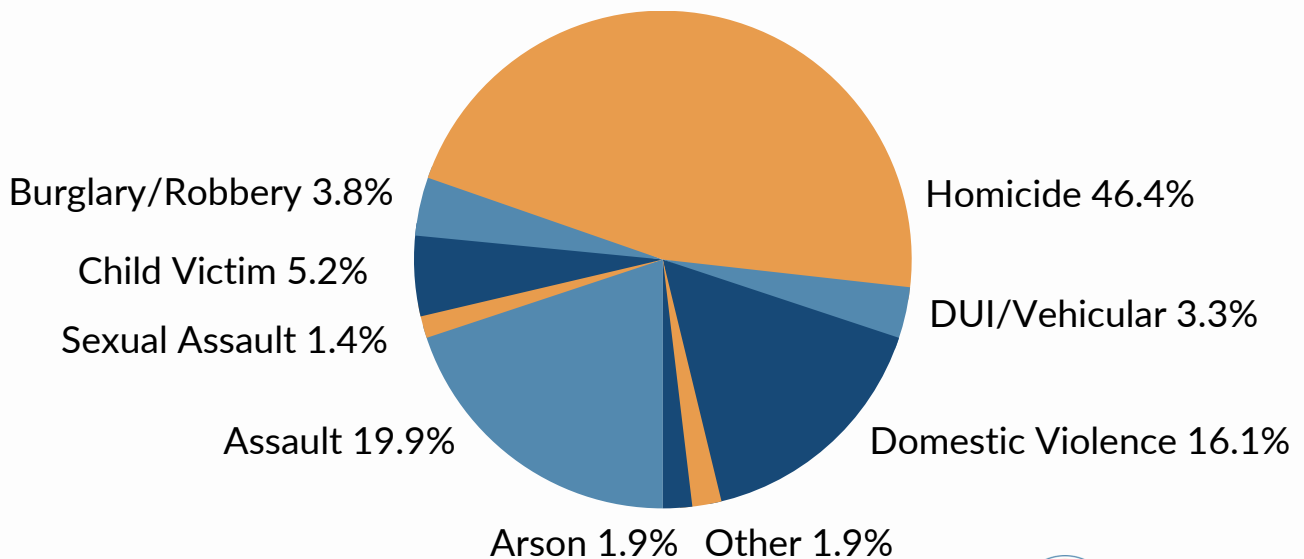


Receiving services for 2-5 years

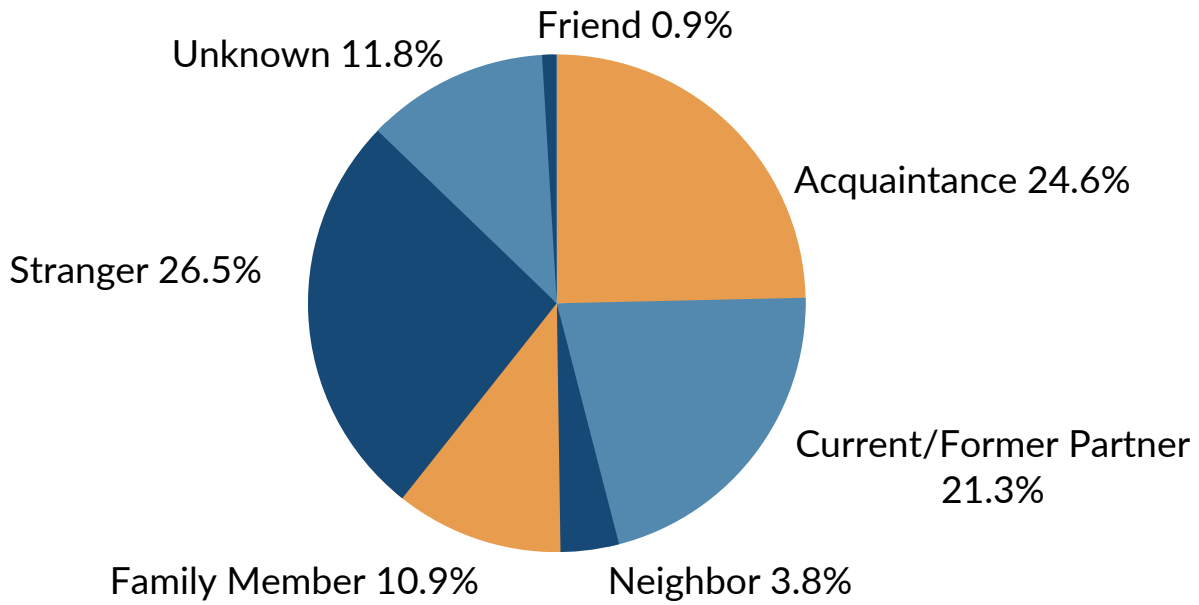


Receiving services for over 5 years

CRIME TYPE

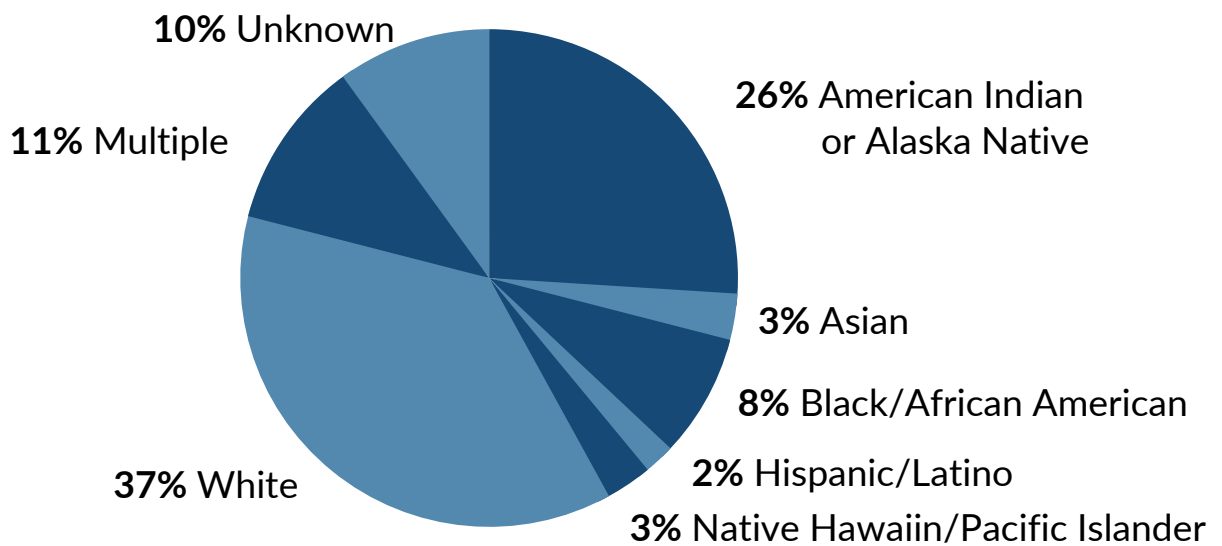


RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OFFENDER AND VICTIM



31% CHILDREN IN THE HOME

RACE/ETHNICITY



COMMUNITY FOCUSED

National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW)

During National Crime Victims' Rights Week, we honor and remember victims of crime. Their courage and resilience not only stand as a testament to their strength in overcoming trauma and adversity but also paves the way for justice and healing for countless others.

We recognize and celebrate individuals and organizations for their dedication and outstanding contributions to victim rights and services and providing all violent crime victims a place to turn in their time of need.

This last year's observance was April 23-29th, with the theme: Elevating Survivor Voices: Elevate. Engage. Effect Change. It called upon communities to amplify the voices of survivors and create environments where survivors have the confidence that they will be heard, believed, and supported.

Ceremony of Remembrance:

Also known as the Tree Ceremony, commences NCVRW honoring those affected by violent crime. We are joined by victims' families, tribal leaders from Native Village of Eklutna, law enforcement agencies, victim service providers, legal professionals and others to honor Alaskans whose lives have been impacted by violent crime. Attendees are invited to tie colored ribbons, signifying eleven types of violent crime on branches to represent themselves or others who have been impacted by violent crime.

Victims Service Awards:

This deeply moving special event recognizes those individuals, programs, teams, and organizations that demonstrate outstanding service in supporting victims and victim services. The award recipients are selected from public nominations in 6 categories for their vision, action, and leadership in improving the lives of victims in the aftermath of crime. We congratulate the VFJ Victims Service Award recipients and thank them, for demonstrating resilience, for providing outstanding service to crime victims, and for helping to prevent other people from being victimized in the future. See pictures and read about this past year's awards recipients on our website!

Updates about VFJ events can be found in our Newsletter.

2024 NCVRW will be held from April 21 to 27, with the theme "How would you help? Options, services, and hope for crime survivors."



Homicide Memorial

In 1994 the Municipality of Anchorage donated a memorial to homicide victims in our state. The memorial serves as a remembrance of victims of homicide throughout Alaska, and a symbol of hope and community for the families and friends who have lost loved ones to violent crime.

We are grateful to Corvus Designs who designed this space and takes care to help us add names each year and Anchorage Parks and Recreation who helps us maintain the space and plants beautiful flowers each year. Corvus Designs added 16 more names this year, making it a total of 521 names.

When the new monument was created in 2017, we had 377 names. In the planning of this now redesigned park they used the average of 8 names per year from the old memorial. They assumed that it would be about the same in the future.

We have been averaging 24 names a year, with a peak of 36 names in 2020.

"I'm hopeful that we get fewer and fewer names each year as a direct sign of fewer homicides... that would be nice to never need to figure out how to add more names."

Homicide Grief Group

One of the changes we are keeping around is our virtual Homicide Grief Group. We were heartened that during the pandemic, participation expanded to those who may not have been able to join us in the past, especially those outside of Anchorage and even outside Alaska, by providing our Homicide Grief group online.

Surviving family members of homicide victims have legal rights in Alaska and they often need assistance accessing those rights and navigating the criminal justice system. Going through an investigation and a trial causes survivors to re-live painful memories and feelings. Intense media attention can be trying, and, when there is no media coverage at all, it may seem that the victim is forgotten. Survivors may have to cope with issues of parole and release of the offender for years to come.

In this past year in particular, the Alaska Court of Appeals is undergoing a broad reevaluation of sentences for juvenile offenders, causing survivors' wounds to be torn back open as their crime story from decades ago is thrust back into the news.

Healing often begins by talking about what happened with trusted people who provide support without being judgmental or giving unwanted advice about what survivors should do or feel. Talking with other homicide survivors may help you feel better understood and less alone. Contact us to learn more.



SPONSORS

We want to extend our deepest gratitude to our sponsors, donors and supporters for believing in our mission and for their unwavering support of the important work we do for victims of crime here in Alaska.



— Alaska Native —
JUSTICE CENTER
Voices for Justice



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The Alaska Community Foundation
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Thomas Nightswander
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Zachary Johnson
Zane Shanklin





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