



The OVC  
**VOCA**  
Center

The OVC Center for VOCA Administrators

# Creating a Staff Resiliency Plan: Lessons Learned from the Victims Compensation Field

*2023 National VOCA Training Conference for  
VOCA Victim Assistance and Victim Compensation Administrators*

*Karen Kalergis, Facilitator*

*August 16, 2023*

# Learning Objectives

- ▶ Understand the impact of vicarious trauma on VCP staff.
- ▶ Identify risks to the Compensation Program and its services if vicarious trauma is not pro-actively addressed.
- ▶ Learn how to use data from the evidence-informed VT-ORG to create a Staff Resiliency Plan to address the risks unique to Victim Compensation Programs.
- ▶ Be able to name two of the five pillars that support a healthy, vicarious trauma-informed organization.

# Background

## VOCA COMP Learning Community

- ▶ Introduce participants to the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit (VTT) and the guidance and resources it provides organizations to help become vicarious trauma-informed.
- ▶ Participants from eight states adapted the VTT model to the challenges of the VCP's unique victim services setting.
- ▶ Lessons learned helped inform the Learning Community participants and can be applied to other VCP and Victim Assistance grant programs.

# Show of Hands ...

- ▶ Who sees signs of vicarious trauma in your agency?
- ▶ Who has put some practices in place to address the impact of doing this work?
- ▶ Who has heard of the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit - anyone used it?

# Show of Hands ...

Where is your agency in terms of readiness to address VT:

- ▶ Do not see it as a problem, so no reason to do anything.
- ▶ Recognize it's a problem, but don't know what to do.
- ▶ We have a few things in place, but want to learn more about what we can do.
- ▶ We'd love to be part of a Learning Community for this.



What signs do you see in yourself, your colleagues, or staff that suggest this work may be having a negative impact?

# Signs of Vicarious Traumatization: Personal

- ▶ **PHYSICAL:** Rapid pulse, breathing, headaches, impaired immune system, fatigue, aches
- ▶ **EMOTIONAL:** Feelings of powerlessness, numbness, anxiety, guilt, fear, anger, depletion, hypersensitivity, sadness, helplessness, severe emotional distress, or physical reactions to reminders
- ▶ **BEHAVIORAL:** Irritability, sleep and appetite changes, isolation from friends and family, self-destructive behavior, impatience, nightmares, hypervigilance, moody, easily startled or frightened

(Adapted from J. Yassen in Figley, 1995)



# Signs of Vicarious Traumatization: Personal

- ▶ **SPIRITUAL:** Loss of purpose, loss of meaning, disillusionment, questioning goodness vs evil, questioning prior religious beliefs, pervasive hopelessness
- ▶ **COGNITIVE:** Diminished concentration, cynicism, pessimism, preoccupation with clients, traumatic imagery, inattention, self doubt, racing thoughts, recurrent and unwanted distressing thoughts
- ▶ **RELATIONAL:** Withdrawn, decreased interest in intimacy or sex, isolation from friends or family, minimization of others' concerns, projection of anger or blame, intolerance, mistrust

(Adapted from J. Yassen in Figley, 1995)

# Signs of Vicarious Traumatization: Professional

- Performance ▶ Decrease in quality/quantity of work, low motivation, task avoidance or obsession with detail, working too hard, setting perfectionist standards, difficulty with inattention, forgetfulness
- Morale ▶ Decrease in confidence, decrease in interest, negative attitude, apathy, dissatisfaction, demoralization, feeling undervalued and unappreciated, disconnected, reduced compassion
- Relational ▶ Detached/withdrawn from co-workers, poor communication, conflict, impatience, intolerance of others, sense of being the “only one who can do the job”
- Behavioral ▶ Calling out, arriving late, overwork, exhaustion, irresponsibility, poor follow-through

(Adapted from J. Yassen in Figley, 1995)

# What Happens When Organizations Don't Address Vicarious Trauma?



# Introducing the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit



## Introduction [↗](#)

It takes courage to help child and adult victims of sexual abuse, assist survivors of acts of terrorism and mass violence, fight fires that may have taken people's lives, or respond to shootings and other crime scenes. It also takes commitment to do this work despite the personal, physical, emotional, and mental impact it can have.

### Introduction

[Message From the Director](#)

[About the Toolkit](#)

- ▶ Web based
- ▶ Designed by the field for the field - victim services, law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services
- ▶ Compendium of 500 resources all vetted by the field for use by that field
- ▶ Policies, procedures, curriculum, research abstracts, and full articles

<https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/vtt/>

# VTT Introduced Concept of a Vicarious Trauma-Informed Organization

Recognizes the potential negative consequences of our work.

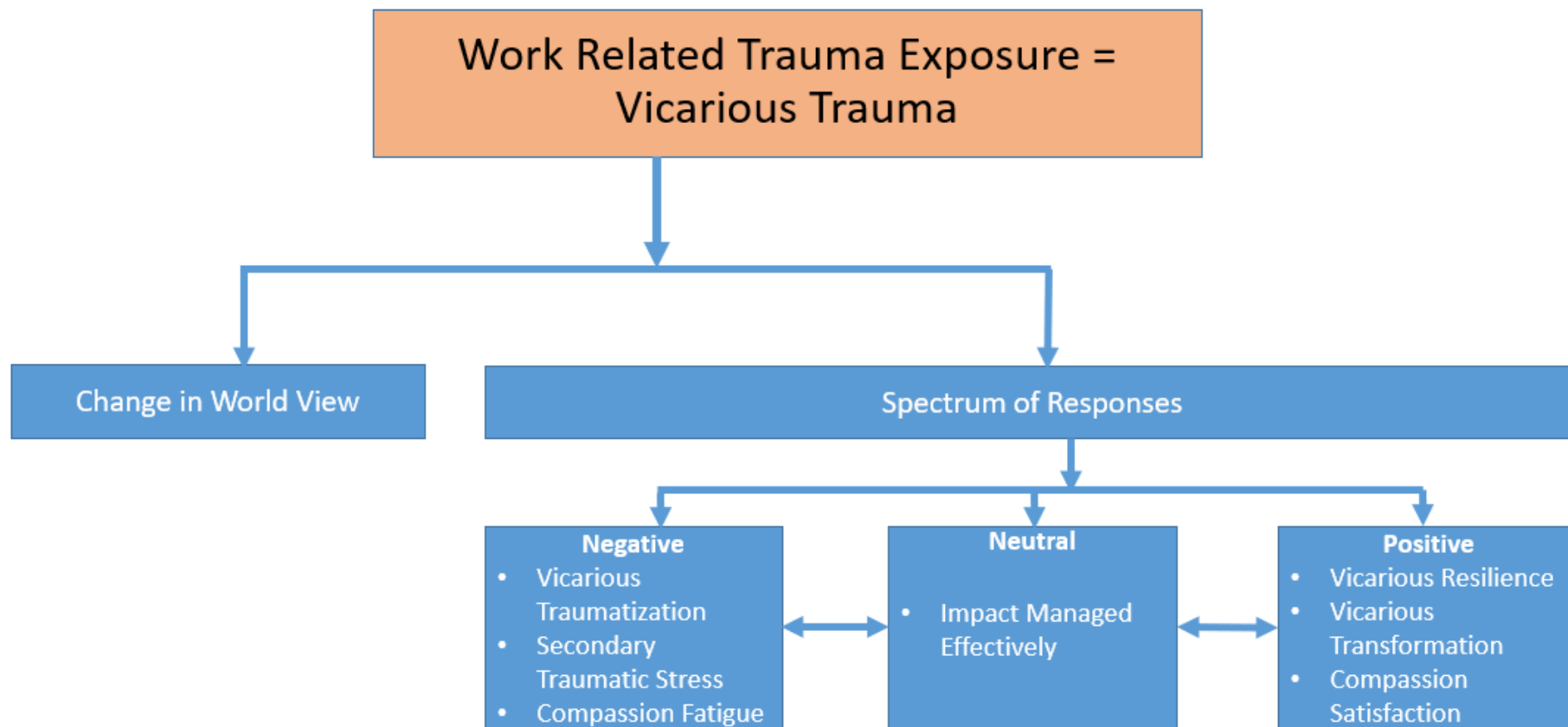
Proactively anticipates and addresses the impacts of our work.



*“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”*

-Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D., Kitchen Table Wisdom, 1996

# Vicarious Trauma Toolkit Model



# Introduced the Vicarious Trauma Organizational Readiness Guide (VT-ORG)

- ▶ Assessment tool created for the VTT .
- ▶ Helps organizations assess their capacity to address vicarious trauma and prioritize gaps and challenges.
- ▶ Data gathered guides their efforts to become vicarious trauma-informed.



# Five Pillars of a Healthy, Vicarious Trauma-Informed Organization

- ▶ **Leadership and Mission**
  - Clear vision, alignment with mission and values
- ▶ **Management and Supervision**
  - Clear, respectful, quality, inclusive of VT
- ▶ **Employee Empowerment and Work Environment**
  - Promotes peer support, team effectiveness
- ▶ **Training and Professional Development**
  - Adequate, ongoing, inclusive of VT
- ▶ **Staff Health and Wellness**
  - Devotes priority and resources to sustaining practices

## Scale of the VT-ORG is frequency

*How often does a practice that contributes to the health of your organization occur?*

- ▶ 1 = Never
- ▶ 2 = Rarely
- ▶ 3 = Sometimes
- ▶ 4 = Often
- ▶ 5 = Always

# Let's Hear the Lessons Learned from the Learning Community

- ▶ Pennsylvania - Stacie Brendlinger, Manager, Victims Compensation Assistance Program, Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency
- ▶ Nebraska - Gretchen Mills, Program Administrator, Crime Victim's Reparations Program, Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice
- ▶ Connecticut - Mary Kozicki, Deputy Director, Office of Victim Services, Connecticut Judicial Branch
- ▶ Wisconsin - Keri Berling, Crime Victim Compensation Program Director, Office of Crime Victim Services, State of Wisconsin Department of Justice

# Employee Empowerment and Work Environment

Stacie Brendlinger  
Pennsylvania

# VT-ORG Pillar 3 - Employee Empowerment and Work Environment

- ▶ 15 respondents -
  - ▶ 60% response rate
  - ▶ mix of newer staff, senior staff, and supervisors
- ▶ Overall Employee Empowerment & Work Environment Score: 3.68
  - ▶ Highest Score: Disparaging comments and other demonstrations of disrespect are not tolerated (Average Score: 4.40)
- ▶ Past 6 months
  - ▶ Legislative change
  - ▶ Paperless
  - ▶ Teleworking
  - ▶ Staffing issues
  - ▶ Administration change

- ▶ When needed my organization uses effective methods to address staff who are not able to contribute to a positive atmosphere or act as team players.
- ▶ Average score: 3.08
- ▶ Action Plan: Discuss with staff how personnel issues are handled per Office of Administration Guidelines
  - ▶ They may not see methods used to address staff due to it being a personnel issue
- ▶ Tasks to Maintain: Explain process to new staff
  - ▶ At employee performance reviews remind staff

- ▶ My organization provides formal and informal opportunities for building a sense of community and teamwork among employees.
- ▶ Average Score: 3.43
- ▶ Action Plan: Ask staff how we can increase these opportunities
  - ▶ What can be done in person?
  - ▶ What can be done when teleworking?
- ▶ Tasks to Maintain: Find opportunities to do staff luncheons
  - ▶ Involve staff in more decision-making opportunities

- ▶ My organization shows appreciation for employee efforts in meaningful ways (ex: public recognition, note in personnel file, promotions)
- ▶ Average score: 3.07
- ▶ Action Plan: Ask staff how they would like to be shown appreciation.
  - ▶ Explain why public recognition and promotions are not allowed
- ▶ Tasks to Maintain: Find opportunities to recognize staff



# Pennsylvania Update

- ▶ VT-ORG conducted office wide in June
- ▶ Sent to 28 employees
- ▶ Assessing Pillars 2 - 5
- ▶ Workgroup reviewed results and determined Action Plan

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AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE



**Jim Pillen, Governor**



**Crime Victim's Reparations (CVR)**

**Gretchen Mills**

**Program Administrator**

# Who is CVR?

1 staff member for the CVR program (in process of hiring one more) who reports directly to the Crime Commission's director

One Hearing Officer; 8 member CVR Committee

Formed in April 2023: The Commission Victim Support and Programs Coordinating Team

- Created to develop, enhance, manage and direct the Commission's victims' service programs.
- Core Mission: Support, Safety, Prevention.
- Consists of 4 core programs: Crime Victim's Reparations, the Nebraska Victim's Advocacy Program, the Nebraska Victims of Crime Alert Portal, and the Office of Violence Prevention.

The big question after joining this workgroup was- how was I going to use my area of influence to enact changes? I randomly found this quote online after the first group session and became inspired.

“ She was part of a group that helped tilt the world just a tiny bit the right way. Hardly noticeable, true, but “hardly” was more than nothing. “Hardly” made all the difference in the world in how she saw herself. ”

Ray Smith

From “The Magnolia That Bloomed Unseen”

From “The Magnolia That Bloomed Unseen”

Ray Smith

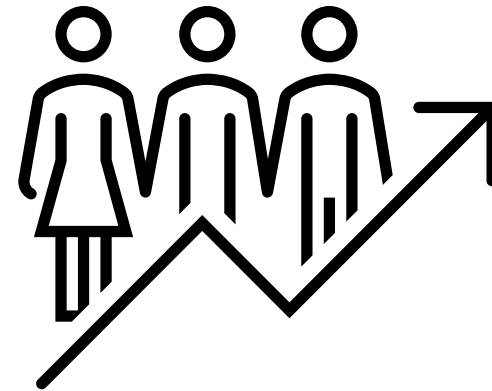
# Can such a small staff use the VT-ORG?



- ▶ Absolutely.
- ▶ There was only myself to poll, so the survey was not utilized, and no data was collected.
- ▶ I looked at what VT-ORG recommended in each area and implemented changes in my area of influence.
- ▶ I focused on Pillar 5 - Staff Health and Wellness and incorporated Pillar 4 - Training and Professional Development.

# Immediate Outcomes

- ▶ A trauma-informed and vicarious-trauma informed training was developed specifically for the CVR Hearing Officer and the CVR Committee and training will be required on a yearly basis.
- ▶ Onboarding procedures for new staff that include training on vicarious trauma are under development.
- ▶ Conversations have been initiated with the Commission Victim Support and Program Coordination Team on additional ways that the VT-ORG can be utilized within the Crime Commission.
- ▶ Links to and information on the VT-ORG are now published monthly in the CVR Connections newsletter as a resource for advocates in the field.
- ▶ A slide about the VT-ORG has been developed and inserted into the CVR informational PowerPoint.



This language and graphic was featured in the February 2023 CVR Connections newsletter (distributed to advocates across Nebraska) and remains on the resources page

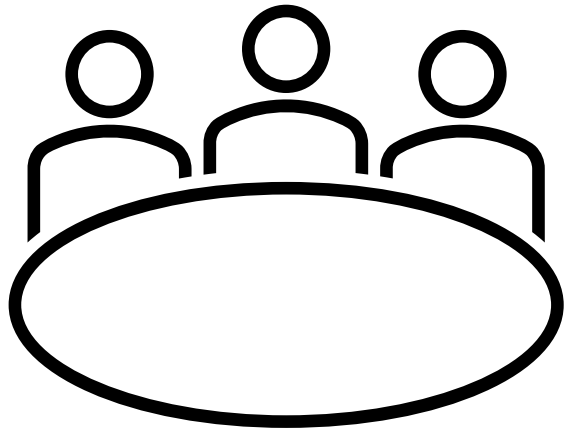
### VICARIOUS TRAUMA INFORMED WORKPLACE

Victim services organizations are paying more attention to how doing this work can impact their staff. There are a number of resources available through [OVC Training and Technical Assistance Center](#), including webinars, training and videos. OVC TTAC also provides customized TTA to help organizations implement the [Vicarious Trauma Toolkit](#), an online resource from OVC that includes an assessment tool to guide organizations and a step-by-step Blueprint guide to become vicarious trauma-informed. If you would like more information about that TTA, contact Victoria Shelton ([vshelton@ovcttac.org](mailto:vshelton@ovcttac.org)) to talk about the availability of no-cost TTA options.



*I'll include talking points about the benefits of participating in this workshop and what the VT-ORG can offer organizations at the Nebraska Victim Assistance Academy and other speaking engagements.*

# Future Action Plans



- ▶ Continue formal and informal discourse and dissemination on vicarious trauma and its impact.
- ▶ Become a resource leader for advocates in the field in Nebraska by connecting them with applicable OVC resources upon request.
- ▶ Onboard all new CVR staff, administration, and Committee Members with empowering trainings on vicarious trauma and the immediate understanding that though we may be a small staff and committee - we are vicarious trauma and trauma informed and will keep current with training.





**Lessons Learned:**  
The Nebraska CVR program currently doesn't have the capacity to run the entire VT-ORG process. However, modifications can be made to fit any size program to help enhance compensation or advocacy programs and ensure staff wellbeing is taken seriously and in consideration.

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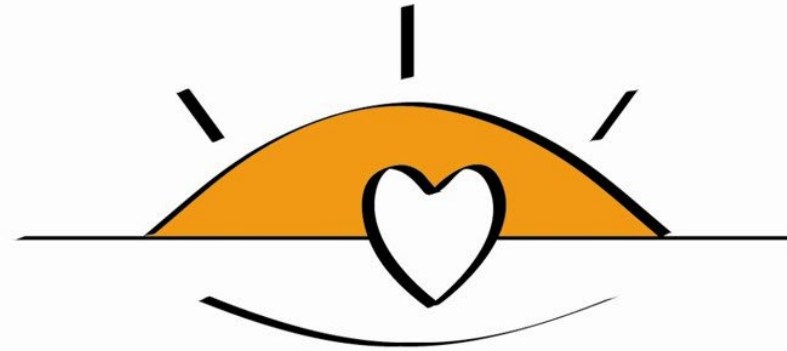
Jim Pillen, Governor



# State of Connecticut Judicial Branch

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- Victim Compensation Unit
- Victim Services Unit
- Education Unit
- SAFE Program
- Fiscal Administrative Unit

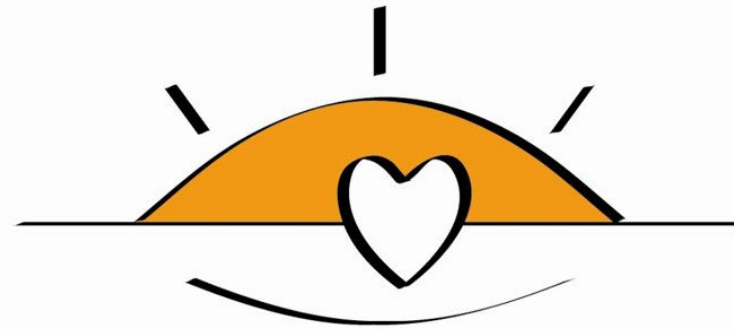


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# Initial Survey Summary

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- Methodology
- Implementation
- Training and Professional Development Pillar



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# Initial Survey Results

VTT-ORG TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PILLAR	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	Avg
1. My organization orients new staff members to their job role and tasks.	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
2. My organization provides training and education to all staff on—							
a. work-related vicarious trauma and its impact on work performance;	3	3	4	3	4	4	3.5
b. strategies on how to address work-related stress and vicarious traumatization.	4	3	3	4	4	3	3.5
3. My organization provides onsite opportunities for training and professional development.	4	4	2	3	4	4	3.5
4. My organization supports attendance at outside meetings and trainings.	5	5	3	3	5	3	4
5. I am prepared to cover for coworkers who are absent.	3	4	3	4	4	5	3.83
6. My organization informs staff about expectations, opportunities, and steps necessary for advancement, including additional training and/or certification requirements.	4	5	3	4	4	3	3.83
7. I am encouraged to network and collaborate with coworkers and other organizations.	5	5	5	3	3	3	4
<b>OVERALL TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCORE</b>							<b>3.90</b>

# Initial Results

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- Perspective of respondents
- Interpretation of survey questions
- Agency considerations

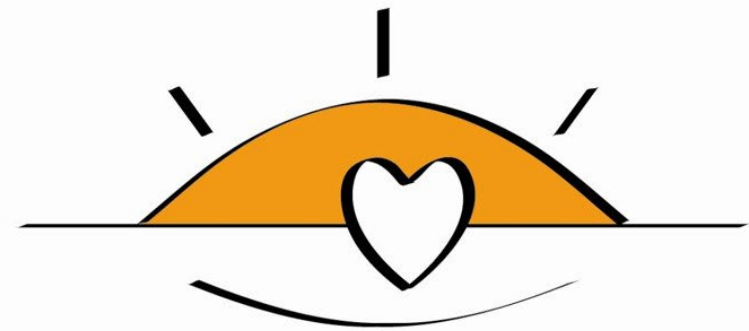
# Next Steps

- Administer to direct service staff
- Re-administer to management with clear perspective

# Expanded Survey Summary

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- Methodology
- Implementation
- Training and Professional Development Pillar



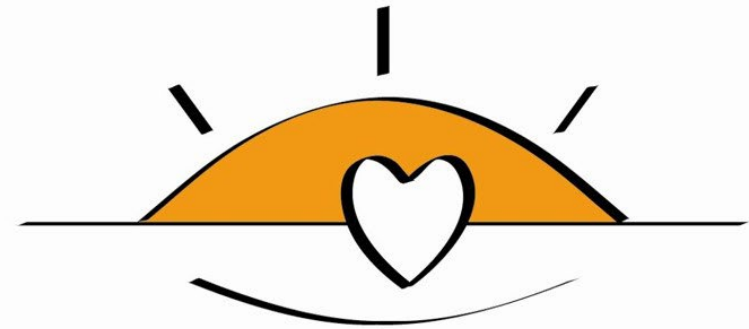
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VTT-ORG TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PILLAR	Avg	Comparison to MT Survey	Priority Area
1. My organization orients new staff members to their job role and tasks.	4.48	Significant decrease from 5 in MT survey but still significant area of strength	
2. My organization provides training and education to all staff on—			
a. work-related vicarious trauma and its impact on work performance;	3.59	Up from MT survey result- 3.5	*
b. strategies on how to address work-related stress and vicarious traumatization.	3.27	Down from MT survey result- 3.5	*
3. My organization provides onsite opportunities for training and professional development.	3.68	Up from MT survey result- 3.5	
4. My organization supports attendance at outside meetings and trainings.	3.87	Down from MT survey result- 3.83	
5. I am prepared to cover for coworkers who are absent.	3.72	Down from MT survey result- 3.83	
6. My organization informs staff about expectations, opportunities, and steps necessary for advancement, including additional training and/or certification requirements.	3.29	Significant decrease from 3.83 in MT survey result	*
7. I am encouraged to network and collaborate with coworkers and other organizations.	3.95	Down from MT survey result- 4	
<b>OVERALL TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCORE</b>	<b>3.73</b>	Down from 3.9	

# Expanded Results Analysis

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- Points of Consideration
- Potential Influences
- Comparison to Initial Results



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# Organizational Practices Implemented

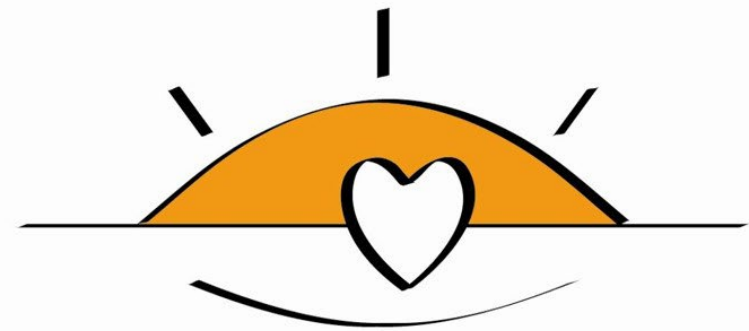
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- Team Meetings
- Agency Meetings
- Job Shadowing
- Monthly Training Opportunities
- Recognition Awards
- Birthday/Anniversary Recognition
- Post-Orientation Survey
- Collaboration with OVC-TTAC

# Next Steps

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- Administer Remaining Pillars Agency-Wide
- Analyze Results
- Implement Additional Organizational Practices



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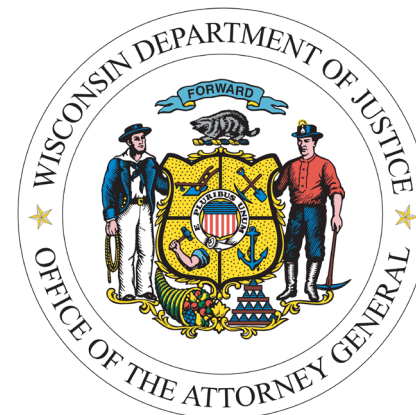


# Wisconsin Department of Justice

## Office of Crime Victim Services

### Crime Victim Compensation Program

**Keri Berling, Program Director**



# Makeup of the WI DOJ Office of Crime Victim Services

38 total staff members in OCVS with a couple vacancies

Executive Director, Deputy ED, Executive Staff Assistant

## 5 Primary Programs:

- Grants Programs and Operations (12)
- Crime Victim Compensation (9)
- Victim Resource Center (7)
- Safe at Home Program (5)
- Policy Initiatives (5)

# How did WI deploy the VT-ORG?



Everyone is understaffed and drowning in their work. We want to make survey response as convenient as efficient as possible.



We utilized Qualtrics to deploy the survey. We manually entered the entire VT-ORG into Qualtrics.



We are hopeful that we can share the survey with other agencies that utilize Qualtrics as well.

Restart Survey

Place Bookmark

Tools



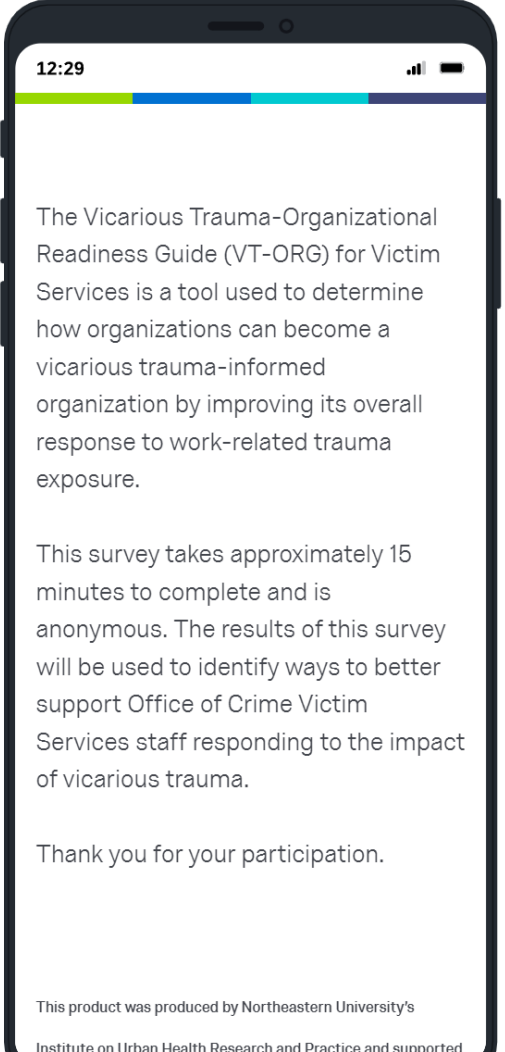
Share Preview

The Vicarious Trauma-Organizational Readiness Guide (VT-ORG) for Victim Services is a tool used to determine how organizations can become a vicarious trauma-informed organization by improving its overall response to work-related trauma exposure.

This survey takes approximately 15 minutes to complete and is anonymous. The results of this survey will be used to identify ways to better support Office of Crime Victim Services staff responding to the impact of vicarious trauma.

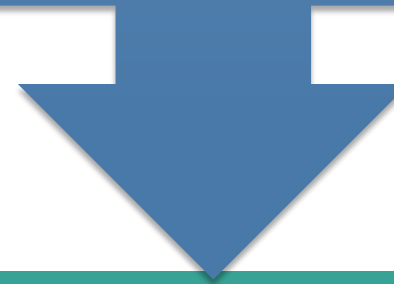
Thank you for your participation.

This product was produced by Northeastern University's Institute on Urban Health Research and Practice and supported by grant number 2013-VF-GX-K011, awarded by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this product are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. For more information about vicarious trauma, visit <https://vtt.ovc.ojp.gov/>.



# Initial VT-ORG Test Deployment

After completion of the learning community, the VT-ORG was deployed to a small subset of OCVS staff, including a managers and front-line staff. There were 7 staff respondents, which is approximately a quarter of our total staff.



We chose to distribute Pillar 3, Employee Empowerment and Work Environment. This pillar was chosen due to recent high levels of turnover within OCVS, and DOJ in general, with a hope to get more insight on employee satisfaction and avenues to staff retention.

# Initial findings and Action Plan



WI DOJ participants gave an overall response to Pillar 3 of 4.13 out of 5.



While this is overall positive, there were certain questions with a very low score, such as:



Q4: “When needed, my organization uses a written procedure that provides guidance for quick, effective, and confidential resolution of staff conflict”



Score was only 1/5.

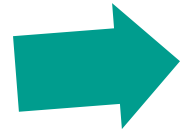


Action plan: based on this feedback, it is clear that staff are not aware of written procedures for this issue. This one has an easy fix- remind everyone via email and at staff meetings where to find this information, and do so on a regular basis.



# Overall Takeaway & Future Action Plan

The entire VT-ORG will be deployed to all of OCVS (approx. 38 respondents) in June 2023.



Based on the data results, we will start with focusing on the lowest scoring responses. We will assemble a focus group of staff to identify action plans accordingly.



Depending on how that goes, we will move forward with the other pillars to identify needs for change, or shift our action plan based on the feedback from the focus group.

# Vision for WI DOJ



Once OVCS has fully implemented the VT-ORG, analyzed the data, and firmed up a workable action plan, we would like to present our results to the AG.

It is our hope that with guidance from OCVS, all divisions of DOJ will have the opportunity utilize the VT-ORG to better serve all Justice staff in addressing vicarious trauma.

# Full Deployment of VT-ORG via Qualtrics

We had an  
**EXCELLENT**  
response to the  
survey



36/38 possible  
respondents

The lowest scoring 7 responses were pulled from the survey, with an average response score of under 3.5

My organization provides training and education to all staff on strategies on how to address work-related stress and vicarious traumatization 3.3

My organization provides training and education to all staff on work-related vicarious trauma and its impact on work performance: 3.41

My organization uses a protocol used to address staff affected by concerning behaviors (low morale, substance abuse, absenteeism, etc.) 3.41

# Questions?

- ▶ Share any steps either formal or informal that your organization has taken to address the impact of this work on the people who do it.
- ▶ Where does what you're doing fit into the five pillars?
- ▶ Would you like to participate in an OVC VOCA Center Learning Community like this one?

# Session Wrap-Up



Contact us at: [VOCACenter@ncja.org](mailto:VOCACenter@ncja.org)  
or Call: 202-480-5551

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