

NCJTC- Fox Valley | Ask the Expert: What Does it Mean to be Victim-Centered?

Welcome to the National Criminal Justice Training Center's first in a five part series, Ask The Expert, What Does It Mean To Be Victim-Centered? My name is Greg Brown. I will be moderating for you today.

This project was supported by a grant awarded by the Office of Violence Against Women, US Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this program are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women. For today, our learning objectives during this Ask The Expert session are to explain the concepts of victim-survivor centered approaches, describe the fundamental goals of being victim-survivor centered, and identify best and promising practices in the field.

In an effort to learn more about who's joining us today, we would like to ask you all to take a poll question. Which of the following best describes your role? Your choices are victim services-victim advocate, probation-community corrections, law enforcement, child advocacy worker, social worker, mental health worker, or other.

So it looks like today, about 39% of the audience are victim services-victim advocates, about 22% of the audience are probation or community based corrections, about 5% of the audience is law enforcement, about 17% of the audience is child advocacy workers, social workers, or mental health workers, and about 17% is other.

Today's webinar is an Ask The Expert session focusing on what it means to be victim-centered. This session is designed to be a roundtable discussion in which participants can ask questions of the panel experts. After a brief introduction of today's panel, we will begin with the Q&A portion of this webinar.

So for today we have an amazing panel of experts in the field of criminal justice, victims' rights acts, probation, and parole. And I'm going to start off with just introducing each of our panelists briefly. Robyn is the Director of Gender and Family Justice Initiatives at the Center for Court Innovation. She provides assistance and strategic planning to courts and communities who are interested in enhancing their response to gender-based violence. As an attorney, and as the Director of CCI's Gender and Family Justice Initiative, she has significant experience working in the field of intimate partner violence, procedural fairness, and access to justice.

Rebecca is an Associate Director of Gender and Family Justice Programs at CCI as well. Working from

a perspective of social justice and grounded in collaboration, she assists jurisdictions nationally to enhance their court and community responses to address domestic and sexual violence and abusive partner interventions.

Denise has over 20 years of experience working in the intimate partner and sexual offender clients on probation. As an officer and supervisor of the specialized units and a victim-offender dialogue facilitator, Denise has worked with hundreds of victims, survivors, and offenders. She has significant experience looking for and creating opportunities to heal the harm caused by intimate partner violence and sexual assault.

Danielle is Victim Services Coordinator for the 20th Judicial District Probation Department in Colorado. She serves on the Colorado Restorative Justice Council as the judicial department appointee. In her nearly 20 years of victim services experience with law enforcement and corrections, she has worked to create victim-centered approaches within law enforcement and her probation department and to facilitate restorative practices to include victim-offender dialogue facilitation.

And finally, Marcie Howell has over 25 years of experience working in the field of sexual abuse, intervention, and treatment. She has worked as the victim specialist in the 20th judicial district of Colorado's district attorney's office. She's also been the director of client services at a child advocacy center, and was a victim representative on the Colorado Sex Offender Management Board. Currently, she's a therapist treating sexual abuse and is working as a victim representative on both juvenile and adult sexual offense treatment teams.

My name's Greg Brown. I am a manager with the National Criminal Justice Training Center. My background includes over 30 years of experience in probation as a specialized officer supervising domestic violence offenders, sex offenders, supervisor of those units, and then ultimately, an administrator. With NCJTC, I manage this OVW grant. And we'd like to welcome you all here today.

As you can see, each of our panelists has significant experience working with individuals that have caused significant harm to other human beings. They each bring their perspective and the experience of what it means to be victim-centered and providing a truly victim-centered criminal justice system. As our panelists answer your questions, they will try to cover the benefits, challenges, and best practices in being victim-centered. We, again, encourage our participants to send us your questions, comments, and feedback throughout the session. We will answer as many questions as we can in our brief time together today.

I'd like to open up our discussion and start the Q&A by asking our panel their first question. In your professional role and perspective, what does it mean to be victim-centered? And I thought we would start this question with Robyn. Robyn?

Thanks, Greg. Welcome everyone. And it's fabulous to see so many folks from the victim services field on the call today. And many of you know, probably, some of the pieces that I'm going to talk about in terms of research that we have seen in domestic violence and integrated domestic violence courts where they have implemented procedural fairness types of tenets, including voice neutrality, respect and understanding, and helpfulness.

And that research has shown that with increased focus on those tenets, there is increased victim satisfaction, more victims understand the process that's happening. And that's a huge issue for folks, especially for survivors understanding what's going to be happening next in their case. And seeing improved outcomes and understanding more about their case and having more of the respect and the voice that they need in these cases are often more interested in participating with the prosecution in these cases, so definitely improved outcomes and increased victim satisfaction

Thanks, Robyn. Denise, could you provide us your professional perspective? What does it mean to be victim-centered?

Sure. Thanks, Greg. Hi, everyone.

From my spot here in probation, I recognize that we can get very offender focused, which is understandable, of course, because that's a huge part of our job. But another part of our job is to try to be victim-centered. So here in Boulder, specifically with the sex offender unit, we've tried to implement some specific strategies to involve victims in the post-conviction supervision process with clients to give victims more of a voice, to provide them information, and just make sure that they aren't left out or forgotten once a person is placed onto probation.

Additionally, I think that these strategies that we've utilized have helped the probation officers on my team keep more at the forefront the very important victim-centered responsibility that we have. And it helps us keep the victim piece on the top of our minds as we go about decision making and working with our clients.

Thanks, Denise. Rebecca, how about brief comments from you on what does it mean to you to be victim-centered from your perspective?

Sure, great. I'm so glad to be here. Thanks for including me.

So one of the projects I work on is an OVW-funded training and technical assistance project that's really looking at abusive partner intervention and engagement. And so coming from that end, one of our guiding principles is that survivor voices are centered in this work. And part of that is because we know intimate partner violence can cause harm to the survivors in so many ways, physically, mentally, emotionally, and economically. And that we really want to make sure in all of the work that we're doing with the abusive partner, that the safety and healing should be defined by that survivor. So creating ways in which each agency can hear what the survivor is saying would bring healing to them, that would create a safe environment for them. And we so we really think, especially around abusive partner and intervention and engagement strategies, to collaborate with community-based victim advocates and survivors to really understand and address those identified needs.

Thank you. And Danielle?

Thank you, Greg. For me, to be victim-centered is really holding the care and concern for the victim as our primary consideration, our focal point, head of our center. It's really about making sure that victims are aware of the available opportunities that we have to offer them, meetings, restorative processes. Making sure that they know they have choices whether or not they want to participate in any of these opportunities. Making sure that they are safe both physically, emotionally if they are going to participate. Making sure that they feel supported and that we're connecting them to the resources that are going to help them the most.

Thanks, Danielle. And Marcie.

Hi. I'm Marcie. And from my perspective, really having worked in the field primarily with victims as a therapist and currently, as a person working on a team with sex offender specific victim services, I think a couple of things have come to my mind. One of them is that we always need all of us who work in this field to remember that there's a victim. And we want to start that from the very beginning and have it go all the way through the court proceedings and then in the post-conviction arena as well.

One of the things that I think has helped all of my work at doing this has been working as a team, having a CST, a community supervision team, or an MD team, multidisciplinary team, who are working are working together and communicating with one another so that I as a victim advocate and representative have good information to communicate with them. And ultimately, I think, that's to echo what everyone else has said, engaging victims, communicating with victims, giving information

to victims all along the way and treating them with respect. We've had so many types of responses from victims and victims' families from the beginning through the post-conviction. I think we just have to remember that as we're dealing with each individual case.

Thanks, Marcie. So I'd like to start, I think, with Danielle on this next question. What benefits have you seen in your experience of being victim-centered for victims and survivors, Danielle?

So I've seen a lot of benefits. A lot of victims can feel forgotten in the system. And by being victim-centered, we can give those victims a voice. We can let them feel heard. We can get them involved if they want to be involved.

And I've seen many victims really feel empowered by the opportunities that we're offering. We can build relationships with the victims. A lot of times we have people on probation for years and years. So we're able to really build that relationship and keep that building throughout someone's supervision.

Another impact and benefit is just for them to know that someone is listening. Someone is concerned. We've had a lot of positive feedback from victims from all the programs that we offer. And we wouldn't be continuing some of the things that we're going to talk about during this panel today if we hadn't gotten that positive feedback, that the victims really appreciate the opportunity to be involved, to give input, to feel heard, to feel cared about. I think that's super important.

Thanks, Danielle. Rebecca or Robyn, from your perspective and the work you do around the country, can you talk about some benefits that you may have seen, some of the programs that you've worked with in this area?

Sure. This is Robyn. What we're also really talking about on this panel is really victim autonomy and making sure that victims know about their options and choices. And that's a lot of what I talked about in the tenets of procedural justice.

And it really applies across all different types of case types, criminal. We're not going to really talk about civil cases as much today and family law cases, but certainly impacts there. And we've seen higher rates of protection order filings in the research, 82% when people have a better understanding and support of those options. So the benefits are, I think, all of my colleagues on the panel have been saying that really the satisfaction and the support that people have to follow whatever choices are right for them at that particular time and also knowing that at any point in the process that they can go back and seek additional assistance or services is critical.

Thanks, Robyn. How about Marcie? I know you have a lot of experience working with victims that have been involved in some of the processes around repairing harm. Marcie, do you any comments on that question?

Well, again, kind of echoing what's already being said, the importance of just having each individual have the opportunity to have information to make those choices. And one of the things that I've seen is in the role that I can have is breaking down the barriers to actually making the calls and feeling OK about calling their GA, or their social worker, in the beginning-- or the police or detective. So that's one of the things that I know I work on in my role is really supporting people in doing what's available to them and having their important voices heard.

Thanks, Marcie. Shifting gears a little bit, Denise, how about benefits for the offender client that you're supervising. We know that a lot of this has to do with being able to objectify people and not see them as human beings and that building empathy and helping someone walk in someone else's shoes is so important. Could you talk a little bit about benefits that you've seen with the clients that you've worked with when we have a more victim-centered approach?

Sure, of course. I think on a more broadly speaking basis, our outreach and our communication with victims has really opened the door for some pretty amazing restorative justice-related processes which, of course, have a positive impact on the victims. But we also find that they have a pretty profound positive benefit for the offenders who participate in those processes as well.

My experience with sex offender clients specifically, in regards to some of the activities we do in terms of making sure that we offer clarification letters, and I think, hopefully, we'll get a chance to talk more about this process a little bit later in this panel, but just the fact that our clients know that we will for sure be offering their clarification letters that they work on in treatment to the victim. I found that many of them are kind of surprised but actually happy about that fact. I think when we ask victims, for example, if there are specific locations or businesses or places where they don't want the offender to go, that helps the victim feel safe and better about being out in the community. But I think it has a similar benefit to our clients, who know it helps them feel some sense of relief when they know that they have less of a chance to run into their victim while they're in the community.

And I also think kind of just not necessarily for the offender, but for the probation officers or the supervising agents who are working with the clients, during our outreach and our communication and our collaboration with the victims or the victim's families, we often get more information about our clients during those conversations that didn't appear in the documentation, the presentence reports,

or the psychosexual evaluations. Those documents are based on self-report largely. So that's kind of been a side benefit, maybe, a little bit of an unforeseen benefit for the probation officers that I work with. That we just learn some information that not necessarily was in the court documentation. So those are just a few of the benefits for the probation officers and for the clients.

So I'll throw this question out and probably start with Danielle. It's how do you maintain the mentality, and I think that they're speaking to a victim-centered approach, when charges need to be brought but the victim's uncooperative? And I think Marcie and Danielle may have some experience with this. So Danielle, go ahead and start. And then I'll toss it to Marcie.

Yeah, I think that's a great question. I think we've all had experience in dealing with and working with victims who may not be cooperative. And I think we just do the best we can in showing care and concern and treating them with respect and listening to them and giving them a voice about why they're not cooperative, what's going on, really, really listening to them. And also, I mean, if there's a point where we're in charge of maybe having to file a revocation when they're in an opposite view, really providing the information about why we have to do that.

So I think it's really being clear and transparent, really listening to that victim, showing that we're caring about them, we're caring about their concerns. We can try and understand where they're coming from, but also explain our role in what we have to do. And we may disagree on a few things, you know, as far as the charges go, but really explaining to them and providing them as much information as possible and doing it in a really respectful and careful way.

Thanks, Danielle. Marcie, did you have anything to add to that question?

Well, I guess I would just say, since I actually work as an independent and not within one of the systems here, I try to give people room to be uncooperative and try to flesh that out a little bit about what's going on there for them. And you know, ultimately, at least from the level of cooperation that they need to have is kind of show up and work with the people that I can personally recommend to them. Because I know my team. And I feel like, again, it goes back to what I said earlier. Having relationships within a broad spectrum of those of us who work together in this field has really helped with that uncooperative-- or just the communication with victims.

Thanks, Marcie, and it sounds like trying to do some matching for people and seeing who might be a good fit is a piece of starting that relationship and this journey for people who may be not wanting to come forward or not pursue charges in the criminal justice system. Rebecca, would you like to add anything to this question?

Sure. And Robyn, feel free to chime in. I think a lot of times what we're hearing, and one of the reasons why in New York state we helped to create an integrated domestic violence court where one judge was hearing both the criminal and all of the civil or family matters, is that oftentimes our experience was that survivors, their needs weren't really being met. So when you think about Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a lot of times survivors need their rent to be paid. They need really concrete things that the criminal legal system is sometimes not set up to provide or offer them and so where we've seen success is really having those community-based confidential advocates who can provide those services and those remedies in court or have collaborations with probation, with the community-based advocates, also making those connections with civil legal services.

There's some research out there that indicates when survivors are connected with advocates and those needs are being met, what we found in the court, in the integrated court, is when the family court case was resolved and those needs were being met, those victims were much more likely to quote, unquote, "cooperate" with the criminal legal case that was going on. So I think really making those connections and allowing those confidential advocates to do that work can be of help.

Thanks, Rebecca. Robyn, anything to add to that?

I was just hopping on to what Rebecca said. For many people, they want the violence to stop. But they are not necessarily interested in our criminal justice system participation. And I wouldn't want anybody to-- this is a victim-centered conversation. So victim blaming, there are many reasons, as Rebecca said, why we wouldn't want to do that.

But often what we do here, as Rebecca pointed out, is that people are much more interested sometimes in the family law system, wanting to make sure that there is custody, visitation, child support. And certainly those pieces, we have found, as long as people can really be supported and understand their options. This is a very confused-- all of these systems, and I'm sure if I could see all your faces, I bet you would be nodding. For people who are not like us and don't work in these systems, it is really confusing.

And at the same time, people are dealing with lots of trauma, and they're in crisis. And understanding how to navigate all these systems are incredibly it's incredibly difficult for them. And it's important to understand all that. So connecting to advocates, and we're so thrilled that many of you are on the call today, because your job is critical in all of these components. So thank you.

Thanks, Robyn, Rebecca, and everyone else who responded to that. It really is a critical area. And we

have been a system that does a lot of blaming. And we really want to, in these victim-centered approaches, move away from that.

I think you'll see in this 10-part series that we have, we completed a session last month and this is the first Ask The Experts, we have a motivational interviewing session that is designed to help engage victims and meet them where they're at and work with them on what's going to help them heal. And that may or may not involve the criminal justice system. And it may or may not involve the civil system. But meeting them where they're at, honoring where they're at, and helping them navigate this very difficult journey that's ahead of them.

So another question that we have, I think, Denise, this goes back to you, and maybe, Danielle, you'd like to weigh in on it, is a clarification letter, like a victim impact statement.

Yeah. I'll grab on to that one. A victim clarification letter, no, not necessarily-- when I'm talking about victim clarification letters, what I'm referring to is these are letters that are a required part of often specific sex offender treatment as per the Colorado Sex Offender Management Board standards and guidelines. These letters typically contain some kind of statement of accountability, taking responsibility for their offense by the offender, as well as some sort of expression of victim empathy or understanding of what the potential impact could have been from their behaviors.

And historically, in our state in Colorado, the reviewing and approving of these really important letters has been the responsibility of the sex offender therapist in conjunction with the supervising probation officer. And I always thought that was super odd because I know, as a probation person, I don't feel like I am even close to being a victim expert. And I know the majority of sex offender therapists, at least in Colorado, aren't victim experts, either.

So what we have started doing in Boulder is we've started including the people who are much more, in my opinion, equipped to help with these letters. And that's people like Danielle, our victim advocate, and people like Marcy, who are victim representatives for some of the sex offender treatment agencies. So those are the people that are guiding this process with the probation officers and with the sex offender therapists in charge of reviewing and making suggestions and finally approving of these letters.

But we've taken it also a step further. And Danielle can speak more to this, perhaps, is that she actually reaches out to the victims while our clients are in the process of formulating these letters. Because it takes a while to write a good letter.

And Danielle reaches out to the victims and asks them if they even want to see a letter. Many of them don't. And that's completely fine. The client still has to write a letter.

But if they do want the letter, Danielle asks them if there's anything specific is there any specific answer or specific situation or something that you want the client to address in the letter. And then she comes back and conveys that to the therapist, to the probation officer, and to the client. So that's our process that we've tried to implement in Boulder.

And I think some of the benefits of that process, given that I've worked in the sex offender field with Boulder probation specifically for about 17 years now, is that it definitely helps the probation officers because it takes some of the pressure off of them to help their clients write good letters. But then most importantly, this process, involving the people who are more qualified to do so, I am 100% sure that we're helping our clients write better letters. And that's ultimately the main goal here

Thanks, Denise. Danielle, anything to add?

Thanks, Greg. And great job, Denise, explaining our process. I just wanted to add that, as Denise mentioned, one of my roles and opportunities is to ask victims if they want a letter. And then, if they do, yeah, is there anything that they'd like to see in that letter. Do they have questions they want answered?

And we've had a number of victims give us a list of questions that they do want answered in that letter. And we bring that back to the offender and his therapist. And they answer them.

And then we can give those back to the victims. And victims are very appreciative and have found that it's very helpful for them to finally have a chance to ask these questions that have been sitting with them for so long and get these answers. So it's just been a really powerful technique and, I guess, strategy that we've been using now for several years in Boulder. So thank you.

Thanks, Danielle. So we have another question. And I think I will start with either Rebecca or Robyn and then move my way through the panel. What do you recommend for advocates who are DA-based and who may not be able to share all of the information, and who then find themselves at odds with victims of crime who now feel that we are holding back from them?

This is Rebecca. I can answer that. It's funny. I hope reincarnation is real. Because I started off as an advocate for the prosecutor's office in Boston and really want to go back and do that job over.

Because I think that in many ways I failed victims. And I'm going to sound like a broken record. But

because I did not trust the community-based advocates to do what they can do.

And I felt like I needed to do it all. I was scared. I mean, I stayed up at night thinking, oh, my gosh, what's going on with this client, at night. And I didn't trust the community to respond in a more holistic way.

And so I think the more that we can really make those collaborative relationships with the confidential advocates so that, in your role, you can stay in your lane and be confident in your role. You're providing such a great service to the criminal legal system. But I think so many survivors have needs that we can't respond to and the system wasn't created to respond to. So where we can make those connections, those high risk management teams that have been set up around the country, places where they're doing lethality assessments and really making those connections either on site or shortly after the crime has been committed, I think those types of things are really helpful.

And being in the position where you can communicate to the prosecutor, like, here's where this frustration is coming from. And it's real. What can we do to remedy this situation? And being clear with the victim where you can't be helpful.

OK. I think we'll move to a question and start with those people who are providing direct victim-centered services. What challenges have you faced in providing victim-centered services to victim survivors? And I think that that probably goes to Danielle, Marcie, Robyn, and/or Rebecca. So let's start with Danielle.

All right. Thanks, Greg. Yeah. So I think one of the big challenges is we're asking victims what do you need, what would help you most, what are your wishes with this case, what can we do for you. And then, we're not always able to deliver what they want.

We have limitations. We have things that the court has ruled that can happen, that need to happen. And we might not be able to change those things. And if the court said it, we probably aren't.

So we also don't have the capacity. I'm one victim coordinator for our whole department. So really being able to provide all of the victim centeredness that I would like to to every victim I come in contact with, I mean, I can fall short. And that doesn't feel good to say. But that is a challenge.

Also, I would say, by the time victims reach our program in probation, another challenge is I think victims can be really tired of the system by that time. Or they might have had something bad happen within the system and they don't want to talk to us. They don't trust us. So I would say that those are a couple of the biggest challenges, is not being able to deliver what they need and want, not having

the capacity, and also just victims who are tired and/or have had a bad experience and don't trust us, and just don't want to be involved, which is their right to not be. But then we're not able to, I think, provide the best services we can to them at that point.

Thanks, Danielle. How about Robyn, Rebecca, comments on that question?

Hi. It's Robyn. Actually, I'm going to refer to something that someone actually wrote in the question about one of the challenges is often victims feeling, survivors feeling that they have to tell their story over and over again to multiple aspects of our systems. And that's a real challenge. And there's real reasons behind some of that, even though I think it is really traumatic for victims. And something I think, coordinated community responses, we should work to alleviate that burden on victims.

But as many of you have already pointed out, there are different roles and responsibilities depending on who you work for. We have advocates here on this call who probably work for systems, who work for a prosecutor's office, or who work for some related entity to law enforcement. And they, obviously, do not have the same level of confidentiality. They have to tell the people that they work for what the victim is telling them, right?

And hopefully, they are doing that in a way that's making sure that victims understand, once again going back to our procedural justice fairness principles, that they understand that that person that they're speaking to is not confidential. And obviously, there are advocates who are confidential. And there are all these other system players within all of our system. And so knowing all of those different roles and responsibilities, thinking of ways that we can make our systems more trauma informed and streamlined so people don't have to tell their stories over and over, which go back to what my colleagues on the panel continue to say, that those are just compounding barriers and challenges for folks.

Thank you, Robyn. How about another question. What happens when a victim keeps returning to the defendant? And I guess I would put that in the context of being victim-centered. And I think some of you have talked about that in meeting them where they're at. But who would like to take that question on?

This is Rebecca. I can maybe answer it also in the context of another question that came up around the role of better intervention programs and being victim-centered. And I think one thing I've learned and heard folks say is that they often need to just assume that this relationship is going to continue in one way or another, because they're parents, because they can't afford to separate. You know, we

heard that a lot in New York City. If there was more affordable housing, then people would separate. But they can't actually afford to leave that living situation.

And I think, thinking about what the survivor is saying, that that person who caused them harm, their abusive partner needs, is really important. More programs are looking to include wraparound services. So in addition to programming on coercive control, they're also providing employment readiness. They're providing some kind of treatment readiness type of thing. We have a judge in DeKalb County who requires this workforce development class if someone can't afford to go to the APIP, or the abusive partner intervention class, and is having trouble paying for it, she'll sign them up for workforce development and created a great collaboration there.

Thinking about other types of things that would make it safer for them to stay together, and I think that's where it's great to know, are there folks who are doing lethality assessments and safety planning with that survivor if they are going to stay together. So really understanding why that's happening and then ways in which programming can address that and probation responses and court responses can kind of support that.

Thanks, Rebecca. We have another question. How do battering intervention programs keep victims at the center? Is there more that we can do besides connecting them to services? I think maybe go back to Rebecca or Robyn on that, since you have kind of that national perspective on accountability courts and some family justice centers. And then I'll go to our direct service providers.

Sure. I can touch on that briefly. It's interesting. We just did a podcast on this. And so, again, it gets to some of the things I just mentioned. But many programs are looking to do a more comprehensive intake and assessment. What we've heard from survivors is that they want programs to also address the trauma that their partner experienced as a child.

So a lot of programs are looking at their comprehensive assessment and including ACEs or an ACEs expanded. They're looking at the HOPE scale and finding ways. Is our program actually addressing the needs and the safety concerns that survivors are experiencing?

Having those collaborative relationships with victim advocates, many have, like, a victim liaison with whom they meet on a regular basis, just to check in. What are you hearing from victims and survivors in the community? They have victim advocates observe their class to see is what we're doing actually survivor centered? They're engaging the community in interesting ways, having the men in program bring in a community member during certain classes so that these ideas of being healthy manhood and respectful manhood is something that's supported outside of this class and is something that

other people can support and hold this person accountable in living a life of dignity and respect and living a life in which they are not causing harm to their intimate partner.

So there are a lot more creative ways of doing that. Having the classes be free so that it's not a financial cost either to the client, or oftentimes we were hearing that survivors were paying for the class. So those are some of the things that programs are doing.

Thanks, Rebecca. So in the interest of time, I think I'm going to-- looks like this question may take a little bit of time from each person. The question is can you share an experience you have participated in with respect to providing victim survivor-centered services, interactions, processes, court experience, restorative practices that you'd like to share with the audience today, just to give them some ideas of what's going on in your specific jurisdiction, those of you from Colorado, and then Rebecca and/or Robyn, kind of nationally, some of the things that you're seeing. And so let's start that with that question with Denise, please.

OK. Thank you. I'm so excited I get to answer this question. And there's a few different things I could talk about. But I'm going to talk about a specific model or format that Danielle and I were able to utilize in order to conduct an in-person, face-to-face clarification meeting between an 18-year-old victim and her stepfather perpetrator.

The model that we use is called the high risk victim offender dialogue, or HRVOD. And it has its roots in restorative justice. Traditionally, HRVODs are used in high impact cases when the victim or victim's family requests an in-person meeting with the offender. Several years back, Danielle and I had the opportunity to go through a pretty rigorous training to become HRVOD facilitators.

And then this opportunity to use that format in an in-person sex offender victim clarification meeting, it really just fell into our laps. And I'm so, so glad that it did. Because it was one of the most kind of profound, memorable experiences of my career.

And it fell into our laps because Danielle had done a reach out, had reached out to the victim after she had turned 18. And we had had ongoing communication with the victim's mother through the many years this client was on probation. And so Danielle reached out to her for some totally different reason. And then she indicated that she wanted to actually meet with him and she had some questions for him.

So then Danielle, then our HRVOD facilitator training kicked in. And we ended up doing a bunch of what was called preconference meetings with the victim and then with the offender until we felt

everyone was ready to have the actual dialogue. And we met. And it was pretty amazing.

Definitely the victim conveyed to us the impact. And she definitely got what she wanted out of this meeting. And Danielle might be able to speak a little bit more on that. But she really wanted to close that chapter in her life, and she felt she was able to do that.

And then, on the flip side for the offender, who did a really great job, and he ended up writing about his experience, he ended up sharing that with all of the other sex offender clients at his treatment agency one evening. We all got together there. And he was able to read aloud what he wrote.

And I mean, you could hear a pin drop in that room when he was talking about it. He was very emotional. It was super intense. And I think I'll try to wrap up here. I could talk forever about this. It was so freaking cool.

But I think, really, it was such a victim driven, victim initiated, victim driven process. And not only that, but the offender got so much out of it as well. So it was really amazing to be a part of that.

Thanks, Denise. Danielle, do you want to add anything to Denise's answer?

Yeah. Well, Denise did a great job of explaining that. It was an amazing experience. The victim was able to-- this is so important for her to have this meeting and to tell her stepdad in person things that he had never heard from her before, how this had impacted her childhood, things that she had done, she had tried to commit suicide, she had been told as a child never to talk about this.

These were important things that she'd been sitting with for years and years and years. And it was so important for her to be able to share these things in person with him, see the emotion that came across his face when she shared these things, and for us to be able to help hold the space so that she could do that. And then for her to say, yeah, I'm closing this chapter. I'm moving on. I'm super grateful that I had this opportunity to do this.

Denise and I were so grateful to be able to help have this space for her. And like Denise said, also, the offender got so many positive impacts and benefits from going through this process as well. So it's super awesome that we have the support of our department to be able to offer these programs to victims.

Thanks, Danielle. How about Rebecca or Robyn? Would you like to speak to this question from the work that you do around the country?

Sure. This is Robyn. You know just giving an example of the times that we're living in right now, a lot of courts and stakeholders that we've been working with, as I'm sure all of you have been so impacted by the pandemic and how to make sure that things remain victim-centered.

And we've been really amazed at the work of some of the courts and stakeholders that we work with around the country, where they have insisted, really, that even during their virtual hearings support victim advocates are there and trying to bridge that digital divide and making sure that that support continues, even in this virtual world. So I'll let Rebecca add some pieces, too. But it has been incredible. And that's what we want to see, obviously, in person and virtual.

So I can just talk about the work that we've been also really heartened to see around the country with the culturally responsive groups and language access, making sure that that remains a cornerstone. That's an incredibly important component of victim-centered work. And we didn't really get a chance to touch upon it as much as we would like to today.

But that remains at the cornerstone. And we have a lot of examples of courts and sites that we work with where they've really centered the language access and the cultural responsivity by having listening sessions in the communities that include the voices of survivors. So we always want to mention that and say that that's definitely a best practice.

Thank you. So this concludes our webinar for today. Thank you again to all of our panelists for the excellent discussion. And thank you, all attendees, for participating.