

Being Victim/Survivor-Centered - Working with Sexual Abusers - Webinar Transcript

Welcome to the National Criminal Justice Training Center webinar, Being Victim-Centered, Survivor-Centered, Working with Sexual Abusers. My name is Greg Brown and I will be moderating for you today.

Before we begin the presentation, there are some items I need to go over. 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.

So again, welcome today. This is the ninth webinar in the 10-part series where we've been talking about victim-centered approaches to community-based corrections. Let's talk a little bit about the learning objectives for today. So we want to talk about some strategies to better increase collaborations between community supervision professionals and victim service providers. Want to describe some approaches to develop effective victim survivor-centered approaches, and then identify how these victim-centered approaches specifically support victims and survivors.

So with that, I'd like to introduce you to our presenters for today. Denise Metz is an associate with the National Criminal Justice Training Center. She's the current supervisor of the Sex Offender Unit with the 20 Judicial District Probation Department. She's a state-certified trainer in the VASOR/SOTIPS Sex Offender Risk Assessment Instruments, as well as high-risk victim-offender dialogue facilitator.

Danielle Fagan is also an associate for NCJTC. She's the victim assistance coordinator for the Boulder County Probation Department and sits on the Colorado State Restorative Justice Council. Danielle currently facilitates restorative justice processes, high-risk victim-offender dialogues, and provides support and services to victims whose offenders are on probation.

Finally, we have Marcie Howell. She's also an associate with NCJTC. She currently works as a therapist treating sexual abuse and is working as a victim representative on both the juvenile and adult sex offense treatment supervision teams. Marcie has worked as a victim specialist in the district attorney's office, as a client service coordinator at a child advocacy center, and was a victim representative on the Colorado Sex Offender Management Board for three years.

My name is Greg Brown, and I will be moderating for you today. I'm a program manager with NCJTC, and my background includes a little over 30 years working in probation with domestic violence offenders, specifically sex offenders, and supervising and managing those programs. So with that, we're going to try our first poll question. Which of the following best describes your role? Community corrections/law enforcement, court system personnel, social worker, victim service provider, or other?

Today we have 35% of our audience is community corrections or law enforcement; 6%, court personnel; 17%, social workers; 26%, victim service providers, and 16% of the people today are from other professions. With that, I'm going to turn it over to Denise, Danielle, and Marcie for the presentation.

Thanks, Greg, and thanks, everyone, for joining us today. I know we're excited to be here and to present this material. We're going to go ahead and get started with this quote. This quote, it's not very long, but it sure does say a lot, right?

I think it's a situation described in this quote, along with the all-too-common victim experience of feeling left out of the criminal justice process, or even worse, feeling re-victimized by the system that are some of the reasons why folks get into victim services professions in the first place. They want to try and fix this situation or at least help improve it. To help victims have better experiences and improved outcomes when they come into contact with them.

That being said, as a probation person, I have to admit, I didn't get into probation because I wanted to work with victims. That just wasn't my motivation back then. But fast forward 22 years, and after having had many opportunities to work directly with victims, trying to involve them in the post-conviction supervision process, being able to find ways to empower them in different ways, I can say today that it's these moments and experiences that get me energized and keep me going in this career now. We have another quote that we wanted to share. Danielle?

Thanks, Denise. Working with victims now for about 23 years as an advocate and a victim assistance coordinator, I can certainly attest to the truth in this quote. I have fortunately been able to see firsthand how increased involvement empowers victims and survivors and how important their input is to making informed decisions about sex offender case planning and supervision.

We're going to talk about specific ways we've invited victims and survivors to the table in the supervision process. Marcie will begin today about talking about the session benefits.

We're very happy to be here today to talk about some of the victim-centered work being done by Boulder County Probation. It's our hope that the strategies and practices we are talking about will give you and your teams some ideas, perhaps help you to start or to continue conversations about the way you can develop and implement your own victim-centered practices.

Connection and communication are the foundation of this work. Outreach to victims post-conviction is a powerful way to demonstrate that their input is important, that their concerns and questions matter. We will also provide some examples of some of the tough conversations we've had and talk about some of the barriers we faced in developing and implementing these practices.

But ultimately, it is our hope that you come away from our presentation today feeling excited and motivated to take some of these ideas back to your programs. And now Denise is going to introduce the next poll question.

Thanks, Marcie. Yeah, we wanted to do a quick poll question to get a sense of how folks feel about how well your agency or department practices victim-centeredness. How would you rate your agency's victim-centered practices?

So, 16% said excellent, 49% said good, 28% said fair, and 8% said poor.

OK. Well thanks. That's a good number. I think it's probably a good thing we're all here together, to learn more about these practices. Where we'd like to talk now about what it actually means-- and what do we mean specifically when we're talking about being victim-centered. Danielle?

Yeah. So there are a lot of different definitions out there that I'm sure you all have seen. But for us, for victim-centeredness, we like this particular one the best, because it really incorporates the key values that support the work that we do. From our experience, these components are central to being able to help involve, empower and engage victims and survivors in the criminal justice system.

Before we get into the specific strategies that we use here in our department, Denise is going to talk about the idea of having specialized teams or units that work with this population.

Thanks, Danielle. Yeah, this is a fairly common recommendation in this field for all sorts of groups, from supervising officers to district attorneys who prosecute sexual crimes to probation victim advocates who don't rotate out of that position. We certainly feel that this specialization has helped us, having that experience and the specific training to be able to implement the practices we're going to tell you about.

We also think simply having folks who do specialize in working with sex offenders or sexual harm cases is being victim-centered in and of itself. For example, with probation pre-sentence report writers, their role is so important, because they create a document that will follow a client theoretically throughout their entire time in the criminal justice system and even beyond.

So having someone in that role who is really familiar with sex crimes able to feel comfortable with reading and reviewing what can be some pretty tough material to incorporate into their reports, but at the same time being able to show compassion and understanding during the interview process so we can get the best possible information from the person for the report. And finally, so they understand the importance of getting and incorporating victim input into the report.

Also, someone who knows and is familiar with sex offender supervision is going to be far better equipped to make the appropriate and necessary recommendations regarding supervision terms and conditions.

We have one primary sex offender pre-sentence investigation writer here, and she and I have developed a very close partnership and relationship. While I make efforts at the beginning of the pre-sentence investigation process to receive input from the victim, she always follows up with me as she's finishing her report if she hasn't received any input, and I will make another attempt to reach out to the victim, which really just emphasizes how valuable and important their input is.

Another thing regarding this specialization from the supervision side of things, I would just caution people who are responsible for assigning folks to this caseload, because it is not for everyone, and that is completely OK. Sometimes people can be really clear and understand they don't want to have this caseload. Other times it's not quite as clear, but I can say, it becomes pretty darn clear soon enough when it's not a good fit.

And if we oversee others in his field, I also think it's really, really important for us to look out for struggles with secondary trauma or burnout. And of course, to model self-care for others and have awareness about that in ourselves and in our colleagues. We're going to return to this idea of burnout when we discuss challenges a little later on.

OK. So we're going to dive right into our first specific strategy, which is offering to victims and/or their families a face-to-face, in-person-- or virtual in this day and age-- meeting with our probation victim advocate Danielle and the supervising probation officer assigned to the case. We offer these meetings right away, as soon as someone is placed on probation, and I imagine, if Danielle has been working with the survivor during the pre-sentence process, she's probably mentioned the possibility of having one of these meetings if the person gets probation.

So what are the goals of this meeting? One basic fundamental goal is simply to put faces to names. So the victim and their family have a face to the name of the probation officer, not just a name on a business card, and vice versa. So the PO has a face to the name of the victim, not just a name in the police report. I think this face-to-face interaction is so, so important to building relationship and trust.

OK. So what happens during these meetings? Well, we go over the sex offender terms and conditions. We answer any questions they may have. We talk about the realities and even the limitations of probation supervision. And we touch on what often specific treatment may look like for the client.

One unforeseen benefit of these meetings for probation has been in almost all of them, we have learned new information about the client from the victim or their family, information that just didn't get into the pre-sentence report or the psychosexual evaluation, both of which are based quite a bit on self-report. So this has been a nice side benefit for the POs on my team. Danielle has participated in all of these meetings in our department and she's going to take it from here and give you more details.

Thanks, Denise. So how I begin this process is when a client is sentenced to probation, I reach out to that victim, introduce myself and my role as the victim assistance coordinator. I offer and explain what our victim notification program is per the Victims Rights Amendment, as well as offer the opportunity to meet myself and the supervising probation officer. I let them know that we can go over the lengthy three pages of terms and conditions that the client must follow.

I think these can be very overwhelming and confusing. It took me a while to understand them all. We try to answer any of their questions. We also talk about, address, and listen to any safety concerns that they have. We can share where the client is living and where they're working, which can be very important for a victim to know. Most of the time they would like to stay as far away as possible from both locations.

We also go over what if situations and what our possible response could be. These scenarios include if the no contact is violated. Or if the client were to accrue a new criminal charge, which would result in us filing a complaint. We explain what the revocation process looks like. We talk about what a technical violation is, such as a positive UA, and what could happen in that situation.

We explained that some violations are handled internally by the probation officer and some are handled in court. We really try to paint a picture of what sex offender probation and treatment looks like, including what a clarification letter is. Lastly, we try to dispel the myths of probation. Many people feel that being on probation is a slap on the wrist, but after we go over all the terms and conditions, usually they come to understand that this type of probation is very intense and difficult.

We've received so much positive feedback from the victims and survivors that we have met with that we wanted to share some of the feedback with you. It helped me navigate the legal language that was very difficult to understand and the implications for my girls and me. It helped me emotionally with a sense of direction and personalized support in a difficult, emotionally-charged context. I felt supported and heard. It seems simplistic, really, but they genuinely cared about the outcome-- my outcome.

We wanted to be able to trust that this part of the sentencing would be carried out with fidelity. This meeting was important to us to be able to establish trust with the probation process and probation officer. Being able to process all the conditions of probation and to be able to ask questions and help probation with implemented and overseeing was important to us.

I also wanted to share an example of a meeting we had with a family whose offender was a youth pastor for their church. Not only was there a direct victim, but the entire family was harmed and impacted. The victim chose not to come to this meeting, but her mom, fiancée, and sister all came to meet with us. It was important for them to hear this information, ask questions, and to be able to bring that back to the victim.

I just want to emphasize how beneficial these meetings are for both the victims and survivors as well as myself and the supervising probation officer to set the tone for this relationship going forward, as many of our sex offenders are on probation for many, many years. Marcie?

This early outreach is a tangible example of focusing on the needs of individual victims. What is expected of the offender while on probation is one of the questions I hear most frequently from victims. What happens now? And for so many, this case may be their very first interface with the criminal justice system. Having someone who takes the time to answer questions, listens to their concerns, and helps explain what is going to happen next and through the course of probation is important to them.

This personalization makes the difference in the victim's experience. The invitation to meet with Danielle and the supervising officer following the case disposition to review the terms and conditions of probation, gaining some understanding of what sex offender treatment entails, and address questions victims and families may have opens a very valuable conduit of communication throughout the offender's probation term.

Yeah, I totally agree with that, Marcie. I wanted to just come back to this feedback for a moment, because when you get this kind of feedback, it really does make you think and feel like what you're doing is worthwhile, and that we're actually accomplishing one of the goals of involving survivors in supervision.

I'd also like to expand on how probation benefits from these meetings. I already mentioned the benefits of putting the faces to the names. Getting new information about our clients. And I think on a broader level, there's another benefit. And it's related to the fact that if you're in supervision, we can get-- we tend to get very offender-focused, and that makes sense, because that's such a huge part of our job working with the offenders.

So I think these meetings have helped the probation officers on my team keep more at the forefront another one of our big responsibilities, and that's to be victim-centered, and to keep the important victim voice in our minds as we go about supervising and decision-making on our cases. So we're going to head into our next specific strategy about clarification letters, and Danielle is going to introduce another poll question.

Thanks, Denise. Yeah, so if you wouldn't mind responding to this question, does your jurisdiction have a clarification process? Yes, no, or I'm not sure.

All right. So, 14% of the audience said yes, 12% said no, and 74% said they are not sure.

Wow, OK. Well, that leaves a lot of room for improvement, and I'm not quite surprised just in talking to other colleagues across my state. Yeah, thank you, everyone, for filling that out.

OK. So yes, we're diving into our-- what I like to call our enhanced process with victim clarification letters. And just so we're all clear, what exactly is a clarification letter? Well, it's-- at least in Colorado, it's. A required part of offense-specific treatment. These letters typically contain some kind of statement of accountability or taking responsibility for their offense, as well as some sort of expression of victim empathy or understanding of what the potential impact could have been from their behavior.

Historically, the reviewing and approving of these important letters here have been the responsibility of the sex offender therapist in conjunction with a supervising officer. This always has struck me as odd, because as a probation person, I know that I am not a victim expert, and I know the majority of sex offender therapists aren't either.

So what we've done here as one part of our enhanced process, is we include our victim advocate, Danielle, and any victim representative from the sex offender treatment agencies, like Marcie, in this process. In fact, they as the victim experts who are driving this process for us, doing the reviewing, suggesting revisions, and finally approving these letters.

Additionally as part of this process, Danielle reaches out to the victims to ask them if they want a letter or not. And if they do, she asks them if there's anything specific they'd like the client to address in the letter. So as I said, Danielle has been working with this enhanced process with our department for many years now, and she's going to take it from here and share more specifics.

Thank you, Denise. So when a client is at the point of working on their clarification letter in treatment, which is usually many years down the road after they've started treatment, the probation officer reaches out to me to inform me. I then call the victim and let them know that we're at that point where this clarification letter process is beginning.

I explain to them what a clarification letter is. As Denise mentioned, it's a letter to the victim from the offender taking responsibility and accountability for the offense. I ask the victim if there's anything specific they would like to see in the letter, any questions they would like answered-- would they like an apology? I inform them that is their choice to receive the letter or not. It will be kept in her file if they don't want it now, but change their mind down the road. I explain that the process of writing this letter could take several months, including many revisions.

After the first draft is written by the client with their therapist, they forward it to the probation officer and myself for feedback. Then we send it back to the client and therapist to work on. This back and forth can happen many times. When we feel that a letter is complete and appropriate, I then reach out to the victim and offer it.

On a rare occasion a letter isn't appropriate and it will not be offered. We will not offer a letter that can potentially cause more harm. I encourage victims that if they are in therapy, to read the letter over with that support around them. I want to reiterate what a collaborative process is between the therapists, probation officer, and myself.

I worked on a case once where a victim wanted these questions answered from her offender. Why did you do this? Why did you destroy our future together? What were you thinking? Why did you do this incredible violation to me? Did you have any intent on killing or hurting my daughter? She had been carrying these super important questions for years and finally had the opportunity to ask him. He was able to answer these with the help of his therapist and she was really relieved at his answers. Marcie, anything you'd like to add?

This example of these kinds of questions is really a stark reminder of the kinds of questions and concerns that may linger for victims over time, questions they have likely wrestled with and perhaps had hope someday to get answers for. And offering this process gives them a way to ask these very personal and perhaps triggering questions of the offender in a safe environment. This can be an important part of that person's healing.

Doing outreach to victims at the time offenders are beginning to write clarification letters also gives them an opportunity to be in a part of the whole process. And it takes the commitment of the sex offender treatment providers, probation officers, and the advocates and victim representatives to see this long process through to the end as these are very important letters, and we want them to benefit the victims that are receiving them.

OK. I wanted to chime in again here from the probation perspective about this enhanced process. I really think it's helped the POs on my team because it takes some of the pressure off of them to determine whether the letters are acceptable or not. But most importantly, I am 100% certain that since we started this enhanced process, we are helping our clients to write much better letters, which, in turn, help survivors.

All right. Moving right along into our final specific strategy for the day, and that has to do with a specific model or format that Danielle and I utilized in order to conduct an in-person face-to-face clarification meeting between an 18-year-old victim and her stepfather perpetrator. The model we used is called the High Risk Victim Offender Dialogue or HRVOD.

HRVOD has its roots in restorative justice and are traditionally used in high-impact cases when the victim or victim's family requests an in-person meeting with the offender. Several years ago, Danielle and I had the opportunity to go through the rigorous training to become HRVOD facilitators, and then this opportunity to use this format for an in-person sex offender victim clarification session really just fell into our laps.

And I am so, so glad that it did, because this was an amazing and humbling process to be a part of, and definitely one of the highlights of my career. Danielle is going to tell you much more about this process we completed.

Thanks, Denise. So I was speaking to this victim about something involving her case, and she said to me, I have questions I would like to ask my stepdad in-person. Is there a way to make that happen? And I said, yes, we will try to make this happen. So Denise and I met with her several times to find out what her needs were, what she wanted out of this face-to-face meeting, what kinds of questions she wanted to ask, and what she wanted to express to her stepdad.

We then met with the offender several times to first find out if he was willing to meet, which he was, and then to work with him on how it would be for him to see his daughter again after all of these years. To sit in the room with her and see her raw emotion, hear the impact that this had on her, and to answer her tough questions.

After meeting with both the victim and the offender several times and waiting until everyone was prepared and ready to meet, we scheduled our dialogue in a place where the victim felt comfortable. Her number one need was to share with him face-to-face the impact this had on her, things he didn't know. That she had tried to commit suicide. That she was hospitalized. That her childhood was impacted in so many ways.

She was told not to share with the world what had happened to her, so she had to keep all of this inside of her. She wanted this meeting to, in her words, close this chapter of her life. After the dialogue, she shared with us how important this meeting was and how happy and relieved she was to have had it. Denise and I were honored to help provide the space for her to have this. Marcie?

As Danielle said, these face-to-face meetings are very powerful. They have a strong emotional impact on everyone attending. It's really important to stress how critical it is to have had the HRVOD training and the commitment to the time it takes to prepare for these meetings. Boulder County is fortunate to have this awesome team of two, Denise and Danielle, who have the experience and expertise to do this work.

Danielle's long history of working with victims and Denise's expertise working with offenders reflects back to what we said earlier about the benefits of professional specialization. The success of these meetings depends on effective collaboration and experience working with both victims and offenders.

One epilogue to this story I'd like to share is in regards to the offender. At the time of the dialogue, he was just about done with his offense-specific treatment program. After the dialogue, he took a couple of months to digest and process what had happened, and he then ended up writing a letter of his own about his experience with the dialogue.

Then his treatment agency did a great thing and decided to get the whole agency together. All of the clients from all of the groups went to the agency one evening-- and I was there, too, because I wasn't going to miss it for anything. And we gathered in a group room while the client read aloud his letter.

It was very, very emotional for him and it was-- he had done a great job writing the letter. When he read it, could literally hear a pin drop in that room. After he was done, several of the guys asked really great questions of the client wanting to know more about his experience. And then after the group was totally over, several more of them came up to me and were like, how do I get to do something like that? I would love to be able to do that, and put me on the list, which was pretty cool to see.

But I think the main point with that story is that this was a totally victim-initiated and driven process, and yet the offender was so clearly, profoundly positively impacted as well, which is, frankly, not uncommon in restorative processes in general. I had a few expert excerpts from his letter that I wanted to share from what he wrote.

Quote, "To be able to sit across a table from the person that you have hurt the most in your life is a really difficult thing to do emotionally. The shame and guilt were overwhelming, and the balance between hope and fear about what they are going to say and tell you is nearly debilitating. However, the final results were another thing entirely."

And then another quote. "So I sat and listened, and really, that was a good thing. I learned that although I had hurt her badly, that she had overcome her struggles and that she had moved on and was strong now, and was moving on to the next stage of her life prepared, strong, and ready. It was inspiring to see some ways, and has definitely inspired me to keep trying to be a better man in life."

Danielle and I are currently working on another dialogue between a daughter and the father that sexually abused her about 10 years ago. We are still in the pre-conferencing or preparation phase of that process, and we are hopeful to have an in-person dialogue soon. OK. So we're going to transition now to sharing some real-life examples, but before we do that, I wanted to first comment on what I think benefited us here in Boulder and allowed us to put these practices into place. I call it our special sauce.

We've had supportive chiefs, one in particular who made restorative processes and victim-centeredness a priority in our department, and allocated resources to these areas. We have an involved and supportive DA's office with whom we have a strong relationship. We have sex offender treatment providers and evaluators with whom we collaborate exceptionally well. And generally, we have people who want to put time and effort into this work.

And even with all this experience and great circumstances, we all have still had some really tough conversations that didn't go as well as we'd hoped. And some have had results we couldn't have predicted. We're calling these teachable moments. Marcie, would you like to share our first example?

Well, I've experienced many teachable moments doing this work. My very first began probably the first month I started my job as the victim representative on Boulder County's Juvenile Supervision and Treatment Team. I called the father of the juvenile victim in this case and left a brief message to say who I was and why I was calling.

Several hours later I received a call back. Not from him, but from the police department that had investigated this case. The officer wanted to know exactly who I was, who I worked for, and why had I contacted this family. The father had called them after listening to my message wondering these same things.

I then learned from the officer that the father thought I was a private investigator working for the offender. Apparently they had been contacted by one during the course of the investigation and he was suspicious about my call, thinking that I was doing the same, somehow working for the offender. And here I was one month on the job, and I was the one being contacted by the police. How would I ever explain this?

Well, it worked out in the end. I worked with this family through the whole term of the juvenile's probation term. And it was a very important teachable moment for me. In my message, I believe I mentioned the word offender, and I think this is likely what triggered this father's distrust of me, who was at this time an unknown caller based on his previous negative experience.

So it's important to remember that these were essentially cold calls and how I introduced myself and what I say about my role and the support and services I can offer needs to be very carefully thought-out before making contact with anyone.

Thanks, Marcie. And a teachable moment for me is when I reached out to a victim about two weeks before Christmas. The client in this case was ready to start the clarification letter process. I wanted to reach out to her and see if you had any questions that she would like to see answered or anything else you wanted to see in that letter.

I actually didn't hear back from her until the end of January. She replied and told me that I had wrecked her holidays by reaching out and asking her this. Of course, I felt completely awful. One of those moments where I wanted to crawl into a hole and bawl. To know that my reaching out had impacted and ruined her holidays was too much.

I apologized profusely, letting her know, of course, that was not my intention. Just another example of how our calling victims can really come at bad times even though that isn't our intent. I really need to-- in my teachable moment of learning, how to be extra cognizant of the timing of my phone call. In the end, she did want a copy of that clarification letter and we continued to work together throughout the case.

I definitely remember that case, Danielle. So yeah, one of my stories and really anxious moments as a probation officer came when I had to talk to a victim on the phone about an early term motion I was filing on a client. I had supervised the client for eight years. He had a 10-year sentence, and I was asking the court to release him two years early. The victim was not in favor of this.

So Danielle and I scheduled a conference call with the victim so I could give him more information about why I was filing the motion. The victim had been 16 at the time of the offense, and at the time of this conversation, he was in his mid-20s with a family of his own. He had also been on juvenile probation as a teenager. When he told us-- and when he told us that he was still adamantly opposed to the early term, one of the things he said to us over the phone was that no one had let me off early.

So all I could really do was really listen closely and be respectful, but I also told him that I would still be filing the motion and that it would ultimately be up to the judge, and that he was welcome to come to the court hearing, which he said he planned on doing. At the hearing, I spoke up, first explaining to the court another reason why I was requesting this, why it would be really meaningful to the client was that he was the caretaker for his elderly parents. And they really wanted to go RVing around the country with the client while they still could.

Then the victim went up to speak, and he said that he had every intention of being strongly opposed to this early term, but when he heard more about why the client wanted to get off, he said he changed his mind, because he understood how important family was, and he didn't want to be the one to stand in the way of this client being with his family.

Then the judge said, well I was going to deny this motion, but since he heard that from the victim, he ended up granting the motion. And then after court was totally over, we were all standing up in the courtroom. The victim comes over to the client, extends his hand, they shake hands, and the victim says, good luck. And I am sure that I'm not giving that story the justice it really deserves, but it was definitely a goose bump moment for me.

I have just one other teachable moment story. It came in a case we supervised in which the victim's mother in the case, the client's ex-wife, was just really, really challenging for all of us to work with. She was also a victim of the clients, although not a charged victim. She certainly had suffered significant emotional harm from this man for a very long time, and then, of course, the added trauma from having her daughter be a victim of his.

She was someone who several of us involved in the case spent a great deal of time speaking with. Danielle, the victim advocate, the supervising probation officer, as well as myself. She was also someone who wanted a lot of information about the client's supervision. On top of that, we had a lot of contact with her because of the client's issues with compliance. We had filed several revocations on him over the course of his time on supervision, and ultimately he did end up going to the Department of Corrections.

She was a person who struggled to understand how a client could remain on supervision despite violating his probation terms and conditions. She was someone who no matter what we said or did, she was not going to be satisfied or happy with the outcome. Those can be really challenging and difficult conversations when you know that the person is not going to like what you have to say.

She wasn't happy when he remained on probation after his first revocation. She wasn't happy with the length of his prison sentence when he eventually was revoked and not reinstated. And she really, really wasn't happy when just about six months after being sentenced to five years in the Department of Corrections, he was already up for consideration to be transitioned out of DOC to one of our halfway houses.

This had been explained to her at the time of sentencing because he was receiving a lot of credit time served, that he was going to receive day-for-day good time while incarcerated, but she was still incredulous when she received this notification from the Department of Corrections that his case was coming before the halfway house board for transition.

Although he was no longer a probation client-- we had built this relationship with her over about the 14 months or so that we supervised him. And when she called me to vent and try to understand, of course I took that call. I knew that nothing I was going to say would make her feel better or really even make her understand, because to her, this was just a complete injustice.

I spent nearly an hour on the phone with her that day, and in the end, although she was definitely not happy about the situation, she was extremely appreciative of me simply listening to her, acknowledging her frustration, and also encouraging her to speak at the board hearing. It was a hard conversation, but I also felt there was no way. I couldn't have it. I know she also had a really lengthy chat with Danielle around that same time. It's really a lesson to me about the importance of survivors-- of anyone, really-- being able to express themselves honestly and to feel heard.

OK. So in thinking about how our department was able to implement these practices, of course we also had to consider what some of the challenges or hurdles that exist in putting these practices into place. First and foremost, all of these strategies do take time and effort of officers, certainly of the victim advocates, the victim representatives.

And at the same time, it seems we all have to contend with higher and higher workloads. So how do we possibly make time to do all of these things? This is a real issue. As I've said, we have leadership that put real emphasis on this work and gave resources to it. Without those things in place, implementing these practices would have been more challenging.

I've also really tried to carry that torch with my team and have made these practices being victim-centered a priority for the probation officers I supervise, and I think it's really become part of our culture. Another challenge to operating in a victim-centered fashion has to do with working within teams. And here I mean with people outside of our immediate department or agency.

When we work with this population, we often collaborate with many different professionals, such as community corrections case managers, parole officers, work release deputies, family members, friends. And we need to get their support and buy-in as well, which isn't always easy. It doesn't always translate to other members of the supervision and treatment team because they may not be as enthusiastic or in favor of these practices. So that can be a difficulty as well. Danielle, what do you think?

Yeah, I really agree with what you said, Denise. I mean, having enough time can be a real challenge to do everything that we want to do. As a victim assistance coordinator, we have so many responsibilities supporting the Victims Rights Amendment, mandated notifications to the victim, and the list goes on and on. Many VACs around the state also rotate out of that role rather quickly, so there isn't an opportunity to become specialized.

In addition to those challenges that Denise and I mentioned, being victim-centered means asking what a victim needs and wants. And, well, we can't always give a victim what they want. I'm sure most of us have experienced being lumped into being the system, and when speaking with victims and survivors, we can be everything wrong with the system.

I had been working with a victim where the offender has two active warrants. One was a new case of violating the protection order against her, and another for violating probation because of this new charge. After a couple of days of him not being arrested, she called me very upset wanting to know why we weren't doing our jobs, why we weren't physically going and finding him.

She shared with me that she had heard he was harming other people in the interim and it was our responsibility to make him stop by having him arrested. Even though I explained our role in this and the role of law enforcement in actually arresting him out in the community, I became everything wrong with the system and the target of all of her frustrations.

Lastly, another challenge is feeling burned out on what we do. Burnout, defined by Herbert Freudenberger, has three components. One, emotional exhaustion, the fatigue that comes from carrying too much for too long. Two, depersonalization, the depletion of empathy, caring, and compassion. And three, decreased sense of accomplishment, an unconquerable sense of futility and feeling that nothing you do makes any difference.

Feeling burned out is highly prevalent and a real issue in our line of work. Have you felt any or all of these things? Are you aware of what it looks like in yourself and in your colleagues? And then what do you do when you see it? Wellness can be defined differently for all of us, but I like this definition the best. As a state of action. Of practicing healthy habits on a daily basis to attain better physical and mental health outcomes. Instead of just surviving, you're thriving.

I think most of us have different activities, hobbies, exercises that we might do that help us feel good. In our department, we've organized a wellness committee where members offer fun activities, games, small incentives to everyone on a monthly basis. We also have a counselor we can reach out to as well as the assistance employment-- EAP program. We all lean on each other for support and debrief sessions. Our culture is aware of how important each staff member's wellness is. So please, take some time to think about what your wellness plan looks like.

Yeah. And to add on to that, I think it's important to acknowledge that working with individuals who have harmed others and with those who have been harmed, it's just not easy work. It can be stressful and draining. I should say as well, though, that it can also be incredibly rewarding and fulfilling. But I would strongly urge folks to think and talk about wellness and how to stay healthy in this field early on in your career and not wait until you see those red flags in yourself or a colleague. I've seen that happen, and often, once those red flags are happening, it can be too late.

One image about burnout that really has resonated with me-- it's one I got from a therapist that I worked with when I was feeling burnt out, and it's this idea of a burnout bridge. We want to put into practice a wellness and self-care plan that helps us avoid walking over that bridge, because once we do, it can be really hard to get back across it. So I would really encourage people to go to trainings on secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, and to know the signs of burnout.

And as sort of a shameless plug here, we have a webinar just on this very topic of vicarious trauma coming next month, so you can be on the lookout for that. We really just need to understand that if we prioritize our own wellness, that is going to help ourselves, but we will also be in much better positions to help our staff and our clients.

So true, Denise. I'll never forget what I was doing the late morning of Tuesday, April 20, 1999, when my supervisor and myself got called out to one of the worst mass school shootings at Columbine High School. I had only been with the Sheriff's Office for a couple of months [AUDIO OUT] and as an on-scene advocate and was still learning what my job entailed. I had no idea what we were about to step into, the time, energy, and endless hours we were about to give.

I was assigned to work with several families who had lost loved ones and several other families with children who were injured. I gave more death notifications and attended more funerals than I had ever been to before. I witnessed and heard enormous amounts of grief and devastation, not to mention anger and rage the families were experiencing. It was overwhelming at times to say the least.

Surrounded by this intense level of trauma can take an emotional toll on your professional life and your personal life if you aren't careful. I definitely felt emotionally drained at times and was grateful to have opportunities to have regular debriefings with colleagues and professionals, and started understanding the huge importance of self-care and what that really looked like for myself and my coworkers. Marcie?

Compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma can affect all of us who work in this field, and it may have a cumulative effect over the years. It's not something to bury or deny, to have concerns that talking about this reality may somehow reflect negatively on our professional abilities. It's an occupational hazard that no hardhat will ever protect us from.

In my experience, a therapist that I've worked with made some very good suggestions which I'll share with you now. Number one was laugh. Find ways, watch comedies, read funny novels, but laughter, really, it can be an antidote. Spend time in nature. Engage in things like ball sports or activities that engage both your body and your mind. And make time to routinely care for yourself long before the signs of burnout appear.

So now, really, what's going to bring this together is the idea of relationship, and that really, relationships are the foundation for everything we're talking about today. Relationships with victims and survivors and their families, and our professional relationships as well. The first example we gave today about working-- having the victims meet with Danielle and the supervising probation officer was our way of working to build relationships between them.

And with the enhanced clarification letter process, typically Danielle has had some previous contact with the victims. So at least there's familiarity there. And that goes back to the advantages of having had contact with them early in the case.

Yeah, I love this slide. Relationships are just the root of what we do. They're always growing and they're just incredibly important, and they build on each other. They open the door for so many wonderful opportunities, partnerships, and collaborations to occur. So I really encourage you to build relationships with your district attorney's offices, including the DAs who prosecute sex offense cases, as well as your DA office victim witness specialists. They can share with you some important information about the cases that are coming your way.

Get to know and build relationships with your community advocates as well. Your probation advocates as well as your parole victim advocates. Seek out specialized trainings and share resources with each other. Get together with colleagues from other areas to learn what they're doing. Share ideas and stories.

Educate your supervising probation officers about victims' rights, confidentiality, and notification responsibilities. Have your treatment providers be familiar with the techniques around victim centeredness. Learn and understand everyone else's roles as much as you can and teach them about yours. OK. We're going to transition now into giving some implementation tips for these practices. Denise?

All right. Thank you. So some tips for the victim and family meetings. The number one-- my number one suggestion would be to attend sentencings for probation officers and victim folks. I have really tried to make this a priority for myself and for the team to attend sentencings whenever possible. Of course, we can't attend every sentence, but it should be a priority, because whether or not the victim is there in court, there are things that are said, there are things that you can see that occur at sentencing that you may never know about otherwise.

If the victim is there, it's a great opportunity to introduce yourself, mention this meeting, and let them know that Danielle will be reaching out to them about it. If you don't have contact with the victim at sentencing, we still try to offer these meetings as soon as possible, but also let them know that we can do it whenever. It doesn't have to be right away. And that we'd be willing to accommodate their schedules whenever possible.

And I really do want to highlight Danielle's importance in these meetings. Of course, she's there to help and support the victims and the victim's family members, but she really is quite helpful and supportive to the probation officers as well during these meetings.

Yeah. So really, take time and create partnerships with your probation officers. Again, these relationships are so key in both of you being victim-centered. As Denise mentioned, our sex offender supervising probation officers try to attend all the sentencings where the client will be there to supervise. This is an amazing asset.

Since I'm the only victim assistance coordinator here and I'm working with victims on all the case loads, there is no way I can attend these sentencings. But I know my probation officers will connect with me after the sentencing happens and fill me in. Some amazing communication. They might have met with the victim and let them know I'm going to connect with them. They may have told them about our possible meeting and had talked to them and see if they were interested. They can also share with me what that victim shared and what their input was in court. This information is super helpful in beginning the relationship we will try to have with the victims and survivors and remain victim-centered.

So for the enhanced clarification letter process, we felt some important things to do include reading and get very familiar with the police report and what the victim reported as well as any victim impact statements. That way, you can make the best revisions and give the best feedback. Secondly, if you're a victim advocate, bring up the possibility of receiving a clarification letter early on in your relationship with that victim and survivor.

And make sure that your community supervision team members are aware of the enhanced process and set the expectations for them. We recently had a meeting with all the evaluators and treatment providers in our district that we work with to tell them about our process and get their buy-in.

Yeah. And I would add that I think it's also very important for the probation officer and the treatment provider to be transparent with the client about this process as well. So they know what to expect. So they understand why other people like Danielle or Marcie are involved and why.

So for implementation tips for the face-to-face clarification and HRVOD meetings, really, you've got to connect with those High Risk Victim Offender Dialogue facilitators in your area, seek out specific HRVOD training for yourself and your staff. And think about how are you going to make the victims and survivors you're working with aware that this option exists.

And in addition to acquiring the basic skills, principles, and values of restorative justice, the facilitators of high-risk victim offender dialogues should have both an understanding of sexual trauma and its impact as well as an understanding of the psychology of the offender and a working knowledge of the dynamics of sexual offending.

All of the strategies we've talked about today, the things we are doing in Boulder County, would not be possible without the collaboration and commitment of our professional partners. We are working together to deliver victim-centered services to our mutual clients. Our connection and communication is critically important. Probation officers, sex offender treatment providers, victim advocates, victim representatives, victim therapists, and victims themselves or important people to involve in the conversation about developing and implementing victim-centered services.

Providing victims and their families the opportunity to meet with probation and their victim advocate, review terms and conditions of probation, and address questions and safety concerns; talking with victims during the clarification process to find out what is important to them for offenders to address in these letters; and having the HRVOD format to offer victims face-to-face clarification if they're requesting this, all of what we've talked about today are ways we are working to engage, involve, and empower victims in Boulder County. We hope we have inspired you all to join us in cultivating victim-centered practices in the work that you do.

OK. So we couldn't get out of here without talking and sharing some thoughts that we have in regards to the use of restorative processes in cases of sexual harm. And first, we really should acknowledge some of the most common concerns we hear when it comes to using restorative practices with these types of cases.

These concerns include worry about victim and survivor safety or causing more harm. There's concern about how the offender might try to manipulate the process. There's concern of the victims feeling somehow pressured to participate in one of these processes. And then especially with intrafamilial cases, there's concern about the potential of having conflicting loyalties by the victim or the victim support people.

And then there's this idea that restorative justice, restorative practices in these cases somehow sends the message that sexual violence should be a private matter rather than a crime that should be resolved in the public sphere. These are certainly valid concerns. And here in Colorado, we also have statutory issues. There are currently three provisions in Colorado law that prohibit the use of restorative practices as a condition of probation or as an alternative sentence in cases involving unlawful sexual behavior.

Despite these concerns, when we were doing research for this presentation, and as part of the exploratory group Denise and I are part of here in Colorado that is looking into other programs, states, and countries utilizing restorative practices in cases of sexual harm, we actually came across quite a robust amount of information from other countries where they're using restorative processes in cases of sexual harm.

They are also being used in pockets within the US as well. And what some facilitators are saying is that they believe that not allowing restorative processes even as a consideration for a victim or survivor is a profound disempowerment of and disservice to the victim by the system and the professionals involved.

They talk about the idea of victim rescuing, which is when professionals make decisions on behalf of the victims, suggesting they know what is best for them rather than being accountable to them. Done well by highly-trained and experienced facilitators, restorative practices can allow a victim and survivors' voices to be heard for the impact and aftermath of the harm to be more profoundly and widely considered. To ask questions and hear answers and to create more meaningful levels of accountability as well as offer the potential for more healing to occur.

And when I say healing, as is so often the case with restorative processes, I am talking about both the individual that was harmed as well as the person who caused the harm, as we saw with the remarks from our completed high-risk victim offender dialogue.

Yeah. And isn't healing what we should be aiming for? And unfortunately, our criminal justice system just does not do a great job with this. It's commonly understood that sex offenses are incredibly underreported. In fact, it's generally estimated that approximately only 40% of all sex crimes get reported. And yeah, there are many reasons that factor into that lack of reporting.

But if you think about it, we have this criminal justice system that focuses largely on the individuals who commit crimes, on punishment, rehabilitation, and community safety, which are certainly valid and important, but that focus still leaves victims largely without a voice in determining what they actually want and need. And we've also all heard the stories of victims feeling re-victimized by the system in a variety of ways.

Offering restorative processes is one way to help correct that imbalance in the criminal justice system. This is demonstrated by the cases Danielle and I have and continue to work on, and victims are asking for these kinds of options.

Being restorative can look so many different ways. Denise and I have been working with a client who caused harm and his victim where the clarification letter has gone back and forth probably three times now. And each time, the victim asks for more specificity in his answers and a few more questions. He actually completed his sex offender treatment a long time ago. So Denise, his probation officer, and I have supported him through his responses to her as a result.

Victims compensation, which had helped her with paying for therapy sessions, had run out, and it was really important to her to be able to work with her therapist on this process. We talked to the client about how he could be restorative and asked if he'd be willing to pay for some counseling sessions for the victim so she could have support working through the additional clarification letter responses he was providing. Thankfully, he was open to this idea. We suggested he pay for five sessions and he has done that. He comes in and drops up a check to me and I forward it to her therapist. We actually have another client who is doing something similar for the victim in his case.

Another example of being both restorative and victim-centered was when I was speaking with the victim about a client who'd been released from prison who had started his probation sentence at the nearby halfway house. When I was speaking with her about her options to stay informed about probation, she asked me about the \$400 that was stolen out of her top dresser drawer the night this offender had broken into her home, burglarized it, and stolen her intimate apparel.

I looked to see if restitution had been ordered in this case and it had not. She was adamant that the money had been stolen by this person and really wanted him held accountable for it. Even though it wasn't ordered in the case, we decided to ask him about it. He actually offered to pay her back, and several months after he began working, he had saved up enough to do so. I remember taking the money to her and meeting her at the hospital where she worked. She honestly was so surprised he had done that and equally grateful that he was holding himself accountable and was doing the right thing.

OK. We are very close to wrapping up here, but before we do, I wanted to share these comments with you. So these comments came to me in an email from a woman who Greg and I did one of these dialogue processes with. The kicker with this story is that the perpetrator in this case never came to the table.

Greg and I reached out to him and tried to engage him in the process, but he never responded. So Greg and I met with this woman and her mom about seven or eight times over the course of nearly a year. And it's just incredible to know how much her healing was furthered by just our meetings with her even when the offender wasn't there. And again, this is another one of those experiences I mentioned at the very beginning of this presentation that really served to keep me energized and engaged in this career over two decades in.

And now for our final poll question. How likely is it that you will take back any or all of these strategies to your organizations and have further conversations about them? Definitely, very likely, somewhat likely, not likely, or no way.

OK. The results from this poll are 27% said definitely, 45% said very likely, 25% said somewhat likely, 3% said not likely, and no one said no way. We are going to move into our question-and-answer period. So one person said, how might you go about finding out if your jurisdiction does have a clarification process? Do you guys want to weigh in?

Yeah, this is Denise. I would-- depending on where-- I'm not sure where the person is working, but certainly I would hope that the supervising entity, whether it's parole or probation officer and/or their treatment provider, would know what clarification-- that process is and wherever you work. Those would be the folks most directly involved, I would think, at least understanding that clients are working on some sort of clarification document or process.

I would say just on my experience in restorative processes, I think about 20 states have laws that relate to restorative processes, and you will often see language around clarification in sexual offenses included in that. So that's a place to look. Check with your district attorney's office, check with your probation department or parole division to see what's available, but they are becoming more widely used throughout the system.

Some states rely on privately-based victim service providers exclusively, not very many system-based. And so there's opportunities there to reach out to those agencies and providers to see what might be available in your area. So the next question is, when the offender is a family member, what support or resources are given to the family members to help with the healing process to move forward after the case? So often victims and their families struggle with relationships and lose their support system due to the trauma.

I would say-- so in our district we have some advocacy programs that will work with all family members. So I would reach out and see what is available in your district. I mean, there are a lot of victim advocates, as well as community advocates, DA's office, probation, community-based. So I would say try to reach out to any and all of those kinds of advocates, and then look and see if your community has those specific advocacy centers that offer different kinds of support programs for family members.

In Boulder County, we have a Children's Advocacy Center that offers therapy services as well as therapy referrals. MESA, our adult program, has therapy available on-site and resources. And our victim compensation program also has referrals and names of people who specialize in working with this kind of trauma.

Thanks, Marcie and Danielle. We have a question. With a victim-centered lens, can you give us an example of conditions you've all put in place to protect victim survivors or help them feel safer in the community, especially when the offender might have been placed back in the community on probation?

Yeah. So yeah, victim safety is definitely a priority. We can share with them, like I mentioned in the presentation, where that person is living, where that person is working. We also-- there will be a no contact that's in place, and we'll provide a copy to them and we'll let them know what they should do if that no contact is violated.

In some cases we can ask the court for a GPS condition or maybe an electrical monitoring. We're always encouraging them to call us if they have any concerns. And again, we'll sit down and meet with them and go over all the terms and conditions with them, and hopefully that will help them understand how we're supervising them and give them a better sense of peace.

Yeah. And I would say from more from the probation, the supervision side of things, we can ask-- like Danielle, the victim advocate knows specific grocery stores, specific places that a client shouldn't go to. We can have a client-- I hate-- I don't want to say prohibited, but we can essentially tell the client, look, if you're going to go to a grocery store, that's one that we want you not to go to.

I would also on this question, I just want to be-- I would never want to give a victim any sort of false sense of security in terms of whether it's GPS or whether it's anything that we can put into place. Those things are not necessarily-- we're not miracle workers in supervision. I've had more than one client over the years cut off a GPS or an ankle monitor, and it's really that simple.

So I just want to balance-- I don't like to make any promises to victims or for survivors that I'm not going to be able to keep. And that's where I mentioned earlier on in the presentation that we talk about the realities and even the limitations of supervision. I think that's equally important when we're talking with victims.

And one thing I'll add as a therapist working with this population, not feeling safe is pretty much across the board. And so it becomes really a therapeutic issue in helping victims to restore their own sense of safety. And so kind of to add on to what Denise said, it can be reassuring that there's a GPS or that this person's not going to be allowed there, but really, working therapeutically with the person to restore or to address their internal feelings of safety is very important.

Thank you, guys. In the HRVOD process, how do you know-- and I'll ask this to Marcie and Danielle. How do you know when a victim or survivor is ready for this process?

Well, for one thing, we ask them. And we also make sure that we understand their needs, their questions, what they want to express. And what their emotions, we go through what their emotions could look like if this happens or it's answered this way. So we really-- we explore everything that we can with them about what that dialogue is going to look like, and again, making sure that we've covered and talked about all the things that they would like to see happen that they would-- that they want.

And if they're ready. I mean, if they're ready and we've covered all of that and we're comfortable moving forward, then I think we know that we can move forward with the dialogue.

Denise, could you just speak to from your expertise when is the offender or client ready? How do you make that determination?

Yeah. Well, I would say to both of those last two questions, that's why you're a team. That's why it's a team of facilitators, it's not just one person. That's a critical part of the HRVOD process in terms of having multiple facilitators. And that's where the conversations between Danielle and I, we do so much preconference preparation, like Danielle was mentioning, with the victim and with the person who perpetrated the harm.

So there's no magic-- there's no magic to it. I think you just have very long, lengthy-- I mean, this-- the preparation phase for one of these dialogues can be a year. It can be-- there's no time limit or limit-- no minimum or maximum time. And I just think you get-- the more experience you have with it and having these preconference meetings, you get a pretty good sense.

And in regards to what Danielle was saying with in regards to the victim as well, I don't want to fall into that victim rescuing piece either and put-- I really try hard not to transfer my own feelings or thoughts onto, oh gosh, this person is definitely not ready because of this, that, or whatever, yet the person keeps telling us, no, I'm ready. Really, really, I'm ready. So that's something to just be real clear on with yourself and not your own thoughts and feelings into the situation.

Thanks, both of you, for that. If I'm just a single professional in a system that's not really ready to embrace a victim-centered approach, where can I be impactful as an individual?

Well, I would say that depends. I mean, if you're a supervising person, you meet with the client, you can have restorative conversations. You can learn about what it is to have a restorative conversation with a client, and you can spend your appointment time with clients having those kind of conversations.

And that's pretty-- I don't want to say simple, necessarily, because it does take time and effort, but it's something that you can do that you don't have to necessarily have permission for or have a group involved in that. I would also encourage, again, supervising people to speak with the treatment providers that they work with in terms of what they're trying to do, what they know about restorative processes or what they do to be victim-centered.

And many times, these things are potentially part of probation or parole standards, and maybe they need to be-- maybe you need to review those standards. Because usually there's some victim centeredness or victim responsibilities in state-- even in statute that we have. Victim-- Danielle can speak to victim laws that require certain things. So I think-- yeah. I guess that's what I would say just from the supervision side.

I think as a person who's done a lot of individual work, both as a therapist and actually even partly as a victim representative, I reach out to everyone, the victim that I'm working with, that would be important to maintaining victim centeredness. It could be the investigating police officer, it could be the DA who's been prosecuting the case, it could be the probation officer post-conviction. I'm not shy about working collaboratively, because it's been my experience that that's the best way to do this work.

So the final question is, thank you all for your amazing leadership in this area. Where do you see your victim-centered restorative program in the next couple of years going and where do you hope to expand?

Well, I think we just hope to expand and just keep offering these opportunities and different options of restorative processes and continue to be victim-centered. Continue to-- we love to have more victim assistance coordinators so we could do even more victim-centered practices. We would love to expand our HRVOD program and expand it so that victims and survivors know that this option is available and make dialogues available if that's what they'd like.

I think just expanding and making bigger the things that we've already done, but making it more available to everyone, that's how I would like to see this expanded.

Yeah. And speaking-- going back to our relationship slide, I know Danielle and I are in the process of trying to network and expand our relationships with people on a national or even international level who we've read about who are doing restorative work and who are doing victim-centered practices.

So we're trying to-- we always are trying to-- we've read a lot of articles and listened to a lot of podcasts just to listen and learn ourselves so we can know what other folks are doing and maybe even, like I said, dialogue with other folks who are doing this work and hopefully to improve and expand the processes and practices that we're offering today.

This is going to conclude today's webinar. I want to thank you again Denise, Danielle, and Marcie. Thank you for your contributions and the work that you do. We hope to see you all at future webinars and we want you all to have a wonderful day. Thank you.