

Victim Services in our community.

Rebecca Hellekson
Student Reporter

When people consider opportunities to volunteer, one area that may not come to mind is Victim Services. This is, however, a very important part of our community and is utilized "quite often" according to Carmen Nachtigal, a Victim Service worker in Beaver County. "(The services are used) more than people realize."

The goal of Victim Services is to help victims of crime and tragedy. The Beaver County office helps mostly within the county, but advocates can be called away to Camrose or Edmonton if the need is there. They work along with the RCMP, responding to calls of extremely sensitive natures like domestic disputes and notifying next of kin.

The headquarters for Victim Service can be a whirlwind of activity. "There are days when the phones are non stop and then days where it's quiet." Because of this and the wide variety of issues that advocates can be called to deal with, there is no telling what a day on the job will be like.

Advocates are 'on call' for a week at a time, and during that time may be called to multiple high-stress jobs or none at all. They deal with anything from accidents to sudden deaths.

"We are essentially a brokerage of information." Said Nachtigal. Helping people through confusing times and the court system are major components of the role of Victim Services. They guide victims through the courts, helping them with things like victim impact statements, restitution, and more.

Becoming a part of this 'brokerage of information' and knowing how to deal with the complex situations doesn't come naturally, but it doesn't have to be hard to learn. Advocates are required to take AVS100, an online course that covers all kinds of topics including communication, safety, and the court system. This course can be done at the advocate's own pace.

Once this course is complete, the learning doesn't end. There are always more classes and seminars that advocates can take advantage of, but these are not mandatory. However, many advocates utilize these resources to learn about difficult topics like suicide prevention and helping victims of sexual assault.

Outside of the training, there are many things that make a good advocate. Advocates have to be good listeners, have empathy and always treat the people they work with with as much respect as possible. "You can be called at 3am just to give a hug because you can't fix anything." Said Nachtigal.

She went on to explain that that was probably the hardest part of helping with victim services. The job is incredibly trying on the emotions when you get close to people and see them hurting. "But I think it's a good thing to show that human side of yourself."

That human side isn't the only good thing about the job though. "Knowing you've helped somebody through a really tough time... it's such an honour." Nachtigal said. "You've sat and cried with people but you've also sat and laughed with them."

The Victim Services are always looking for more volunteers. The job is hard and emotionally draining, but the rewards are great. "People can get frustrated with the long

security clearance process, but that time can be used to do the training and workshops." Explained Nachitgal.

If you want to get involved in this amazing service to the community in its hours of need, you can call the Beaver County Victim Services office at 780-662-2258. For more information about Victim Services, what they do, and when they have events, you can visit their website www.beavercountyvictimservices.ca.