Supporting a Safer Community in Charlotte

Secondary Victims and the Beginning of Homicide Support Groups

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COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

CNA
ANALYSIS & SOLUTIONS

Supporting a Safer Community in Charlotte

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This project was supported, in whole or in part, by cooperative agreement number 2019-CK-WX-K005 awarded to CNA Corporation by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. The opinions contained herein are those of the author(s) or contributor(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific individuals, agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the author(s), the contributor(s), or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.

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Recommended citation:
Carleton, Benjamin, and Rodney Monroe. 2020. *Supporting a Safer Community in Charlotte: Secondary Victims and the Beginning of Homicide Support Groups*. Homicide Support Groups. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

Published 2020

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Introduction

A homicide is a traumatic event that leaves family members and close friends of the victim (also known as co-victims, homicide survivors, and secondary victims) in a state of shock and uncertainty over the violent and unexpected loss.[1] Secondary victims may experience a range of short-term and long-term psychological effects in the aftermath of a homicide, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety.[2] These effects are in addition to their grieving and other emotional states (e.g., rage, guilt, isolation), as well as the negative impacts a homicide can have on their productivity (e.g., academic, vocational, social).[3] Despite the impact that a homicide has on secondary victims, the needs of this group are often neglected, as the focus of the police investigation is on apprehending the individual responsible for the crime. As the procedural requirements of the investigation take over, many secondary victims find themselves trying to cope with the loss of their loved ones while navigating the unfamiliar processes of the criminal justice system.[4] In the aftermath of a homicide, secondary victims want answers from police officials and help understanding the forthcoming legal process. However, this information can be hard for them to access, which only leads to increased frustration and trauma.[5]

Existing research has established that effective law enforcement requires engagement with and cooperation from the communities they serve.[6] Voluntary support and cooperation from the community is essential for law enforcement agencies to maintain order and solve crimes.[7] Studies on what affects community members' willingness to come forward with information to support an investigation are less prevalent.[8] Research is also limited on evaluating how community-policing strategies increase community cooperation and the quality of investigations that may lead to an increase in cases cleared. Little is known about how support from homicide detectives can affect the level of cooperation received during an investigation. This work by CNA will serve as the first step by building the foundational knowledge for further evaluations of this topic.

1. Reed 2020; Aldrich and Kallivayalli 2013; Armour 2002; Rynearson 1994; Sharpe and Boyas 2011
2. Aldrich and Kallivayalli 2013; Asaro 2001; Connolly and Gordon 2014; Malone 2007; Rynearson 1994; Wijk et al. 2016; Zinzow et al. 2011
3. Metzger et al. 2015; Sharpe and Boyas 2011
4. Asaro 2001; Connolly and Gordon 2014; Malone 2017
5. Armour 2002; Connolly and Gordon 2014
6. Tyler and Huo 2002
7. Murphy, Hinds, and Fleming 2008; Tyler and Fagan 2008
8. Mancik, Parker, and Williams 2018

Given the profound impacts that a homicide has on secondary victims and their communities and the need to improve how these survivors are incorporated into the investigatory process, the Richmond (Virginia) Police Department implemented the first Homicide Support Group (HSG) in 2006. This is not to say that support for secondary victims did not exist before. Prior to the implementation of the HSG, secondary victims received support through U.S. Attorneys' Offices, District/Commonwealth Attorneys' Offices, victim advocates, courts, nonprofit organizations, and their own communities. However, law enforcement agencies lacked formalized internal policies, procedures, and services to specifically support secondary victims. Since the start of the Richmond HSG, a growing number of police departments (Fayetteville, North Carolina; Boston, Massachusetts; Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina; and Louisville, Kentucky) have adopted similar approaches to supporting secondary victims.

Overview

The HSG is an innovative program that leverages community-policing principles to address violent crime. HSGs emphasize empathy and support for victims and their families while increasing community trust in and cooperation with law enforcement. HSGs provide compassionate policing services to families and secondary victims during a time of suffering and great uncertainty. HSG victim advocates respond to the scenes of homicides and serve as mediators between police investigators, families, and community members. These advocates assist in making family notifications, explain police processes and procedures to families, and provide information on victim services. Throughout the investigatory and prosecutorial phases, HSG victim advocates work closely with case investigators, district attorneys (DA), and victim services to discuss updates to the case and to ensure that the family is kept informed of the status of the investigation and legal proceedings. The integration of this program into the homicide investigation process has likely influenced the resulting increased clearance rates experienced since the implementation of the HSG as well as better police-community relations and greater witness cooperation for those law enforcement agencies with established HSGs.

In 2019, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office), provided CNA with funding to develop case studies on the organizational impacts of HSGs in an effort to produce a field guide documenting promising practices. CNA will conduct case studies of two agencies already benefiting from HSGs: Richmond, Virginia, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina. Each case study report will explain how the HSG program started as well as examining program operations and achievements and documenting lessons learned. These reports from three exemplary programs will form the basis for *Engaging Victims of Crime with Empathy and Compassion: A Field Guide for Establishing Homicide Support Groups*, a field guide to support law enforcement agencies in developing a strategic approach to implementing a successful HSG program in their communities. *Engaging Victims of Crime with Empathy and Compassion: A Field Guide for Establishing Homicide Support Groups* will likely be available for release in the spring or summer of 2021.

Methodology

To gather detailed information on the HSGs, CNA visited Charlotte, North Carolina, to learn about its program. CNA worked closely with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) to coordinate the site visit and the necessary data collection activities. Before the visit, our team requested CMPD materials used in policy, training, and program operation. During the site visit, we conducted interviews with key personnel and stakeholders, reviewed related documents, and observed a monthly HSG meeting. CNA sought information on why the CMPD established the program, how it was implemented, and its impacts in the community. CNA used this information to develop the case study and to document the department's innovative use of HSGs.

During the site visit, the CNA team interviewed the following:

- CMPD Homicide sergeant
- CMPD major in command of Violent Crimes
- Former CMPD HSG supervisor
- CMPD cold case detective (formerly Homicide)
- CMPD Homicide detective
- CMPD Victim Support Specialist
- District Attorney for Mecklenburg County
- Current CMPD HSG supervisor
- HSG family members
- Youth/Child psychologist (Youth HSG)

Background—CMPD's Homicide Support Group

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department began its HSG in December 2009[9] to centralize victim services available to the families of homicide victims. The CMPD recognized that police departments often become so focused on investigating and solving homicides that the victims' families and the pain they are suffering become an afterthought. The implementation of the HSG demonstrated a broader cultural shift for CMPD that fundamentally changed how the department treated and interacted with victims' families. One former HSG supervisor described the implementation of the HSG as a transition from "a culture of ignorance" regarding what victims' families experienced to one of understanding and sensitivity. This more compassionate approach led to increased community trust and provided the encouragement needed to better engage the community in solving homicide cases. The HSG also created a safe and nonjudgmental environment for grieving families to share their experiences and to feel part of the homicide investigation process.

Both the department and the community have experienced positive impacts of the HSG. Ongoing communication between detectives and victims' families has strengthened trust between the two groups and has turned prior challengers of the CMPD into allies. Detectives are able to devote more time to investigations and spend less time fielding calls from families, likely influencing the improved case closure numbers and decreases in annual homicides that the CMPD has experienced. Finally, the dialogue between the CMPD and families has fostered internal policy review and change that gives victims and their families the respect and consideration they deserve.

This case study describes how the HSG at the CMPD functions and the characteristics that have contributed to its success. We offer lessons learned from the CMPD's more than 10 years of operating the HSG to help law enforcement agencies that wish to implement their own HSGs. Finally, we highlight a number of achievements that can be attributed to the implementation of the CMPD HSG.

9. Chief Rodney Monroe (retired) brought the HSG program to the CMPD from the Richmond Police Department, where he previously served as chief of police. The initiative has continued and grown under the leadership of the current chief, Kerr Putney.

HSG Structure and Operation

The structure of the HSG at the CMPD is calculated and meaningful, yet the group has evolved in its staffing and scope since its inception in 2009. Today, the HSG consists of one HSG supervisor (a uniformed sergeant with the CMPD) and three full-time civilian victim advocates. The office of the three victim advocates is right inside the entrance to the CMPD headquarters to ensure that they are easily accessible to community members. Each victim advocate has their own focus area. One focuses on youth, one on traffic fatalities, and one on homicides. It is important that all three of them sit together, because the three focus areas often intersect and provide an opportunity for information sharing and collaboration across specialty areas. Monthly meetings are led by the victim advocates in collaboration with the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office and the nonprofit organization, KinderMourn, for the youth group. In addition to the monthly meetings, the HSG hosts regular events for families, such as holiday celebrations. Victim advocates engage with victims' families every day to provide ongoing support and services.

Meetings take place every month

The HSG hosts three meetings per month—one for adults, one for youth, and one for Spanish speakers of all ages. Victims' families have an opportunity to share their stories with one another and ask questions of the CMPD detectives and the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office.

The adult HSG meeting, led by two victim advocates, is held in the chief of police's conference room to convey to the community that their input is a priority for the department. Before the meeting begins, participants have the opportunity to chat over coffee and snacks. To start the meeting, one person is chosen to light a memorial candle, followed by a moment of silence. All participants then introduce themselves, stating their names and the names of their loved ones who were lost. A Q&A session follows with a Homicide sergeant or detective and an assistant district attorney (ADA) from the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office. This is an opportunity for participants to ask non–case specific questions. The Homicide sergeant or detective and ADA leave after the Q&A session, and the victim advocates hand out relevant literature such as "The Grieving Person's Bill of Rights" for the group to read and discuss. Finally, the meeting is open for general discussion, moderated by the victim advocates.

The CMPD victim advocates produce a monthly newsletter for distribution to participants at the meetings. The newsletter consists of meeting and contact information, notices of one-year anniversaries of lost loved ones, and dates for upcoming events. Participants include people who are attending for their first time to people who have been attending for more than 10 years. Participants use the monthly meetings as an opportunity to share their stories, grieve, and better understand the investigation and legal processes. For some, the meetings are the only place they feel comfortable sharing their feelings of sadness, frustration, and confusion. The meetings are filled with tears, hugs, and words of encouragement.

Victim advocates provide ongoing support to victims' families

Although the monthly meetings are the most central and visible elements of the CMPD HSG, they do not represent the totality of the group's activities. The three victim advocates also provide active support to victims' families. Victim advocates are always on call for homicides and receive an alert when one has taken place. The advocates take turns responding to homicide scenes to connect with families and provide them with immediate resources.

> *"Meeting them in that moment, they will remember you," stated one victim advocate, stressing the importance of connecting with families early.*

One family told us that during the notification to them, the victim advocate "treated us like humans [and] showed us the most humane way to tell something so tragic."

Victim advocates also accompany detectives to make notifications to families. Advocates use city phones and vehicles, and they make sure to keep their cars stocked with bottled water, teddy bears, blankets, coloring books, and folding chairs.

When victim advocates are not conducting monthly meetings or responding to the scenes of homicides, they follow up with detectives and families to help them stay updated on cases and navigate and complete necessary paperwork such as victim compensation applications. Advocates remain in touch with families as much as the families desire, through phone, email, and in-person meetings. Families also come to CMPD headquarters to meet with victim advocates. Advocates work with funeral homes and help families secure funding for the funerals of their loved ones. One detective said that an advocate has even helped with witness relocation. Finally, victim advocates regularly attend court hearings with victims' families to provide them with support during the difficult process.

Volunteer unit provides expanded program capacity

Given the small size of the HSG staff, a volunteer unit was created to provide additional assistance. Volunteers go through a four-hour training program and receive a training manual that has extensive information on key resources that volunteers will need. Trained volunteers are on call for homicides and go to the scene with the CMPD victim advocate. Volunteers also mail out postcards to invite family members to monthly meetings, and they accompany families to court hearings to provide much-needed support.

HSG Achievements

The implementation of the HSG at the CMPD has proved to be beneficial for the CMPD and the community alike. The CMPD has experienced reductions in homicides while improving community engagement and relations. Similarly, the community has benefited from such crime reductions and a closer relationship with the department. Following are some of the achievements to date of the CMPD HSG.

HSGs provide valuable support to allow detectives more time to focus on the law enforcement aspect of investigations.

One of the greatest benefits to the CMPD detectives is that having the HSG team allows them to spend more time focusing on homicide investigations. Prior to the establishment of the HSG, detectives regularly fielded calls from families wanting answers. These requests took place both over the phone and on the scene of homicides. Now, detectives are able to direct families to compassionate victim advocates who have been trained to communicate with and assist families. Rather than families having to wait long periods of time to have their phone calls returned, victim advocates continue to follow up with families until they make contact.

The HSG has been beneficial for detectives not only by enabling them to focus more on homicide investigations but also by providing detectives with crucial information for their investigations. Victim advocates know how to talk to families and are able to build a rapport with families that detectives sometimes cannot. This has led to families providing victim advocates with additional avenues of investigation. Victim advocates pass this information along to detectives, who are able to follow up with the information provided. Families who are involved in the HSG can also play a critical role in encouraging witnesses to come forward. This encouragement has happened after families see how much the CMPD is invested in the cases and the well-being of the victims' families.

HSGs support families throughout the criminal justice process.

There is often a gap in understanding between law enforcement and the communities they serve. The HSG has allowed participants to gain a deeper understanding of detectives' jobs and the difficulty of solving homicide cases. Because families are able to directly ask questions to CMPD detectives and representatives from the DA's office, they have gained a deeper understanding of the legal and investigative processes.

Prior to the establishment of the HSG, families would not have much contact between the initial investigation and any resulting trial. Thus, the CMPD and the DA's office would need to rebuild their relationships with families when it came time to proceed to trial. The implementation of the HSG has eliminated the need to start over at building relationships and has helped to fill the communication gap between families and the CMPD and the DA's office. Families are in regular communication with the CMPD and the DA's office through monthly meetings, communication with victim advocates, and other events hosted by the CMPD.

HSG likely influences case clearance rates and furthers efforts for crime reduction.

Reducing crime and keeping communities safe are the major goals of any agency. The CMPD has seen benefits in crime reduction since the implementation of the HSG. In the five years before implementation of the HSG (2004–2008), annual homicide totals ranged from 59 to 85. In the five years directly after the implementation of the HSG (2010–2014), annual homicide totals ranged from 42 to 59. One detective said that the HSG also adds a lot of value to the CMPD's ability to clear cases. In the five years before implementation of the HSG (2004–2008), homicide clearance rates ranged from 65 percent to 74 percent. In the five years directly after the implementation of the HSG (2010–2014), homicide clearance rates ranged from 76 percent to 88 percent.

These figures demonstrate a dramatic decrease in the average number of homicides per year and a substantial increase in annual homicide clearance rates, as shown in table 1. Although we cannot say at this time whether the decline in homicides and increase in clearance rates are a direct result of the HSG, CMPD personnel expressed confidence that there was an association between the implementation of the HSG and these results.

Table 1. CMPD annual homicide totals and homicide clearance rates 2004–2014

Year	Homicide totals (N)	CMPD clearance rate (%)
2004	60	65
2005	85	74
2006	83	72
2007	74	69
2008	83	68
2009*	53	91
2010	59	85
2011	46	83
2012	52	76
2013	58	77
2014	42	88

*HSG started

Data received from CMPD

Community-involved programs can turn police challengers into allies.

HSG participants, who may have once been challengers of the CMPD, have become allies. Families are able to see how hard the department is working for them and have built bonds with the CMPD personnel. One detective described a time at a community council meeting when a community member came to his and the CMPD's defense. The community member was an HSG participant and was able to explain to other community members the positive work that the CMPD was doing to help victims' families.

HSG Lessons Learned

The implementation of the HSG at the CMPD has been a growing experience. The CMPD has learned and adapted in the more than 10 years it has operated the HSG. In the following sections, we detail a number of lessons that the CMPD has learned and that have proved to be vital to the successful implementation of the HSG. These lessons are the result of both the natural progression of the HSG and certain challenges that the CMPD faced in its implementation of the HSG. Law enforcement agencies looking to implement their own HSGs could benefit from the information contained in the following lessons.

Leadership buy-in and support are critical to successful HSG implementation and operations.

Buy-in and support from the top levels of the department were key factors in successfully implementing the HSG and its operating ethos. Several CMPD personnel noted that the HSG would not be successful if viewed simply as a program or theory within the department. Having the leadership support of the chief helped to provide legitimacy for the HSG and gave the detectives a lead to follow. This leadership buy-in allowed for the cultural transformation necessary to fully embed the HSG and to place an emphasis on victim services in the CMPD's policing ethos.

To be successful, departments must make a cultural change to fully support HSGs.

One of the most important lessons the CMPD has learned is how to appropriately treat victims' families. The HSG has taught the CMPD personnel to separate families from the circumstances that may have led to the victim's death. With this understanding, the CMPD is able to see family members as someone's loved ones and not as people who may or may not have been involved in lifestyles that they believe may have contributed to the homicide. This compassion relates to the earlier discussion of the broader cultural transformation that has taken place in the CMPD. The success of the HSG at the CMPD has validated the notion that the HSG cannot simply be viewed as a program. One detective put it well when he said, "Your passion is where you put your money;" the CMPD has made it a priority to invest in the HSG.

Consider the personal qualities and temperament needed for staffing the HSG.

An important lesson learned concerns those who are involved in the HSG from the CMPD and the DA's side. Several of the people interviewed stressed the importance of victim advocates' possessing certain qualities. Victim advocates must be compassionate, caring, able to relate to the community, and able to work well with sworn personnel. The CMPD has found that using a victim advocate is a quick way to get around any community stigmas associated with sworn personnel. The victim advocate helps to bridge and build trust between the community and the department, and the CMPD noted that being able to direct families to someone not in a uniform is very powerful. Having victim advocates who possess relevant skills is also extremely important. For example, one of the victim advocates is a Spanish speaker, which allows her and the CMPD to connect with and serve Spanish-speaking families of victims.

When the HSG supervisor first searched for a director of the program, he knew it had to be someone who could work well with the community and someone the community would accept. One of the initial challenges the director faced was the need to sell herself to the HSG group and show the community that she was truly invested in its members. For detectives and representatives from the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office, not everyone will have the "bedside manner" that is necessary to build quality relationships and ensure that the monthly meetings are effective. Therefore, the overall success of the program hinges on having the right personnel for this critical role and ensuring that the program increases the community's engagement in investigations and public safety.

Consistency in HSG representation fosters relationship building.

The CMPD and the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office both ensure that different personnel have the opportunity to be a part of the monthly HSG meetings. However, both also like to have consistency in who attends the meetings. As noted earlier, not every detective or ADA has the "bedside manner" for the meetings, and consistency in attendees helps foster relationship building. The initial atmosphere of the monthly meetings was tense, and detectives greeted families with handshakes. Over time, the community has built relationships with these detectives and ADAs, and both sides now greet one another with hugs and friendly conversation.

Consistency is just as important for the maintenance of the HSG. The HSG is supervised by a sworn CMPD sergeant, and it is critical that the HSG have some staff with institutional memory. Even as other personnel have come and gone, the supervisor has remained consistent, which has been critical for the functioning and growth of the HSG. In addition, having a sworn supervisor is key because he is able to foster connections between the sworn detectives and the civilian victim advocates.

Remain flexible to the changing needs of the HSG and victims' families.

The HSG staff members at the CMPD have learned that the HSG will grow and evolve with time. For the CMPD, this has been a result of what community members have requested. Initially, there was a single HSG for adults. Today there are three HSGs: one for adults, one for youth, and one for Spanish speakers of all ages. The HSG also started the previously mentioned volunteer unit to help with the large workload of the victim advocates. This responsiveness helps to ensure that the HSG will grow with the department, and the community's needs.

Build partnerships with community service organizations and local businesses.

Crucial to the operation of the HSG are the many partnerships that have been formed. The CMPD HSG works with the Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office, the Crisis Assistance Ministry, funeral homes, hospitals, local businesses, counseling agencies, and many other social service agencies. These partnerships have had positive implications for community relations. CMPD victim advocates have found local businesses to be extremely receptive to donating resources such as food and water in the aftermath of a tragic event.

Just as important as these external partnerships are the internal partnerships. Detectives and members from the HSG team both stressed the importance of regular communication with one another. One victim advocate said that when she arrives on the scene of a homicide, she makes herself known to the detectives so that they know her value and that she is there to assist. At the CMPD headquarters, victim advocates and detectives maintain regular communication and make frequent trips to one another's respective floors in the building to discuss families' needs.

Structure HSG meetings to make the best use of detectives' time.

It is important for the HSG to be cognizant of detectives' time. The HSG at the CMPD has demonstrated this awareness by structuring the monthly meetings so that Q&A sessions are at the beginning of the meetings. In addition, detectives are included only for the portion of the meetings in which they are needed. Ensuring that detectives' time is valued can have important implications for the degree to which they buy into the concept of the HSG.

HSGs are an opportunity to build and strengthen public trust.

The HSG plays an essential role in establishing trust with victims' families and the broader community. The HSG fosters early and ongoing communication between the CMPD and victims' families. Victims' families have an opportunity to get answers to their questions, which often are very general in nature—an attempt to understand the investigation and legal processes. The ability for the victim advocate to meet a family on the scene is critical because the family will not forget that moment. One detective ultimately summarized the lesson by stating, "You can't establish trust by keeping your cards close to you."

HSGs are a "lifeline" for victims' families.

One HSG participant described the monthly HSG meetings as being the only place she can go to unload some of her pain. She is not able to get the same support from extended family and friends because they cannot relate to the tragic experience of a homicide the same way other victims' families can. This participant, who has been attending the monthly meetings for 11 years, described the HSG as her "lifeline." She said that the monthly meetings are a place where one does not even have to say a word because each person knows what the others are going through.

HSGs provide a sense of hope and normalcy to victims' families.

Being surrounded by other secondary victims who can relate to the experience of losing a loved one to homicide is critical for victims' families. One longtime HSG member said that she is able to help other families by providing them with hope that they can get through this difficult time. She is able to express to others that she "didn't go crazy," and that she "survived this." Relatedly, the HSG helps victims' families regain a sense of normalcy and helps to break down feelings of isolation. Speaking about instances when she attends monthly meetings, one HSG member said, "I know that somebody else shares what I feel." She went on to say, "I feel normal when I hear others express this," referring to their experiences of losing loved ones to homicide.

Seek out the most vocal victims' families to participate.

One CMPD detective interviewed said that key to implementation of the HSG was initially seeking out the most vocal victims' families to participate, irrespective of whether those families were fond of the police department. These families are the ones who will open up, share their stories, and encourage other families to participate.

Gather participant feedback for ongoing improvement of the HSG.

The implementation of the HSG has had real implications for the CMPD policies. The department has used the feedback received from community members during HSG monthly meetings and other avenues to make modifications to existing CMPD policies. One former CMPD detective gave the example of how the CMPD conducts its investigations on the scene of a homicide. Prior to the establishment of the HSG, detectives would work a path around the body and slowly make their way to the body. This would result in the body lying out on the scene for hours. After hearing how bothered victims' families were about the bodies lying out for so long, the CMPD changed its policy; detectives now start with the body and work their way out. The detective said that the conversations with victims' families directly "changed our philosophy to 100 percent respecting the victim lying there."

Finding funding to sustain the HSG operations is critical.

Another challenge that the HSG has faced concerns its resources. For several years, the HSG operated without a designated budget within the police department. Initial funding for the HSG came from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), which allowed the HSG to hire a director. Sustaining the HSG using grant funds proved to be difficult because of the resources that the HSG requires. The HSG since has been absorbed by the CMPD and has a designated budget. This dedicated funding has ensured that the HSG has the financial resources necessary to staff the critical roles to operate and that the level of service provided meets the needs of victims' families. Departments considering establishing a similar program should seek opportunities and pathways for sustained funding through grants, other partnerships, and internal funding.

Develop a clear training curriculum, and ensure that all HSG members receive consistent training.

The quantity and types of training that the victim advocates of the HSG receive at the CMPD do not appear to be consistent. The victim advocates complete the North Carolina Victim Service Practitioner training and the National Organization for Victim Assistance certification, but other trainings are completed based on interest and availability. This may be because HSGs are still being newly implemented across the country and there is not yet uniformity in what constitutes necessary training. One victim advocate mentioned that the victim advocates could use more training in youth advocacy.

Make goals and objectives of the HSG clear and continually work to socialize the program with all key stakeholders.

Some of the detectives interviewed at the CMPD noted that they did not really know what the HSG was when it started or what their level of involvement would be, and they wondered whether this was just another task for them. The CMPD also noted that it was challenging to ensure that social service agencies understood the goals and direction of the HSG. Initially, some social service providers interpreted the introduction of the HSG as an attempt by the CMPD to take over what the providers had already started. However, once the social service agencies understood the scope of the CMPD's program, a strong partnership was formed between the CMPD and these agencies. These examples demonstrate the challenges of garnering acceptance and overcoming the learning curve associated with the implementation of the HSG.

Conclusion

The CMPD HSG is one of the most comprehensive groups in the United States. Serving adults, youth, and Spanish speakers of all ages, the HSG supports victims' families through monthly meetings and daily assistance (e.g., attending court hearings, victim compensation paperwork). Since 2009, the HSG has evolved to meet the changing requests of victims' families, and as a result, both the CMPD and families have experienced considerable achievements from the HSG. The HSG's more than 10 years in operation have revealed a number of lessons learned that the CMPD uses to make improvements to its existing HSG and that other law enforcement agencies should consider when implementing their own HSGs.

The valuable achievements and lessons learned from this case study, along with those from the Richmond (Virginia) Police Department (RPD) case study, will form the basis of *Engaging Victims of Crime with Empathy and Compassion: A Field Guide for Establishing Homicide Support Groups*. This field guide will support law enforcement agencies in developing a strategic approach to implementing a successful HSG program in their communities. *Engaging Victims of Crime with Empathy and Compassion: A Field Guide for Establishing Homicide Support Groups* will likely be available for release in the spring or summer of 2021.

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About CNA

CNA is a not-for-profit organization based in Arlington, Virginia. The organization pioneered the field of operations research and analysis 75 years ago and today applies its efforts to a broad range of national security, defense, and public interest issues, including education, homeland security, public health, and criminal justice. CNA applies a multidisciplinary, field-based approach to helping decision makers develop sound policies, make better-informed decisions, and lead more effectively. CNA is one of the technical assistance providers for the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services' Collaborative Reform Initiative for Technical Assistance.

For more information, visit CNA online at https://www.cna.org.

About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services** (**COPS Office**) is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than $14 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 130,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- Nearly 700,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office–funded training organizations.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.
- The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, round tables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement.

COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, www.cops.usdoj.gov. This website is also the grant application portal, providing access to online application forms.

A homicide is a traumatic event that leaves family members and close friends of the victim in a state of shock and uncertainty over the violent and unexpected loss. Given the profound impacts that a homicide has on secondary victims and their communities and the need to improve how these survivors are incorporated into the investigatory process, the Richmond (Virginia) Police Department and Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department have established Homicide Support Groups (HSGs). The U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) has provided CNA with funding to develop case studies on the organizational impacts of the HSGs in these two departments in an effort to produce a field guide documenting promising practices. This case study covers the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department HSG and explains how it started, its operations, notable achievements, and lessons learned. The information contained in this case study should prove to be helpful for other law enforcement agencies that wish to implement their own HSGs.

COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

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e082017960
Published 2020