

# Supporting a Safer Community in Richmond

*Secondary Victims and the Beginning of Homicide Support Groups*

Keri Richardson, Rodney Monroe, Benjamin Carleton, and Tammy Felix



**COPS**  
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ANALYSIS & SOLUTIONS



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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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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).<sup>3</sup> 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 one while navigating the unfamiliar processes of the criminal justice system.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

Existing research has established that effective law enforcement requires engagement with and cooperation from the communities they serve.<sup>6</sup> Voluntary support and cooperation from the community is essential for law enforcement agencies to maintain order and solve crimes.<sup>7</sup> Studies on what affects community members' willingness to come forward with information to support an investigation are less prevalent.<sup>8</sup> 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.

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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 two 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 Richmond, Virginia, to learn about its program. CNA worked closely with the Richmond Police Department (RPD) to coordinate the site visit and the necessary data collection activities. Before the visit, our team requested RPD materials used in policy, training, and program operation. During the site visit, our team conducted interviews with key personnel and stakeholders, reviewed related documents, interviewed HSG members, and observed a monthly HSG meeting. CNA sought information from the department on why they established the program, how they implemented the program, and the impacts of the program within their 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:

- Richmond Commonwealth Attorney Witness Victim Specialist
- RPD Chief of Police
- RPD Homicide commander
- RPD Community Services commander
- RPD Community Services sergeant
- RPD Homicide sergeants
- Current and retired homicide detectives
- HSG family members
- Deputy Commonwealth Attorney

# Background—Richmond's HSG

The RPD implemented its HSG program in 2008 to address the city's high volume of homicides and low case closure rates, which were seen as reflective of the low levels of cooperation and communication between the RPD and the community. The low clearance rates also reflected RPD detectives' priorities, which were focused on investigatory tasks rather than on making strong connections with families and the community to gather information that would help solve cases. Seeking to enhance the relationships between the department, secondary victims, and the community, RPD division leaders knew they needed to make significant changes both to their operations and to the culture of the police organization.

Some of the operational changes that the RPD made include restructuring the department divisions to create teams of detectives who would receive more resources and time to dedicate to homicide investigations. Prior to this change, investigators were assigned to investigate other violent crimes in addition to homicides and would work in pairs rather than in teams. Another change the department made was implementing Sector Policing, which placed a lieutenant in charge of addressing crime and deploying resources in small geographical areas. This also provided community members with a direct contact to reach out to when they needed police services. The department also increased its involvement with the community by attending homicide vigils in large numbers and organizing community walks in neighborhoods impacted by violence.

Changing the culture of the police organization would require a shift in how RPD officers viewed their mission and role. To establish and institutionalize this new approach, division leaders began to facilitate conversations with personnel in the Homicide unit to discuss the need to increase awareness and sensitivity in working with family members during the investigation process. They discussed how the division could make changes to better support families as the secondary victims of crime. They also provided training to detectives to help them understand how to better approach their work with secondary victims. The department encouraged detectives to connect with family members on the scene, collect contact information, provide updates, follow up with family members, and remain engaged with families throughout the investigation. While making these changes to both the operations and culture, detectives also looked for ways to expand the department's partnerships with both the Commonwealth Attorney's office and victim and witness service providers to better connect families with resources. They understood that these new partnerships could provide the Homicide unit the tools to demonstrate its strong commitment to serving the families of homicide victims.

The department looked to use the new partnerships and available resources to support its new mission. A group of detectives and officers at the RPD met with the City of Richmond's Victim/Witness Services program to discuss how they could better serve as a resource to victims' families. The Victim/Witness Services program was established to work with the Richmond Commonwealth Attorney's Office to provide services to victims and witnesses of crime. The department learned that the Victim/Witness Services program had facilitated a meeting with family members of homicide victims providing them with the opportunity to share their own stories and to have their voices heard. RPD detectives attended one of these homicide support meetings and witnessed the importance of providing families a safe space to share their experience of trauma and to receive answers to questions about the investigatory process. As a result, the RPD worked tirelessly with the Richmond Commonwealth Attorney's Office and the Victim/Witness Services program to develop the HSG to provide this critical resource to a community in need.

In addition to providing a much-needed public service, the RPD understood that the HSG would be a valuable tool in gaining the community's trust through promoting improved public safety in Richmond. Recognizing the correlation between community engagement, violent crime, and case closure rates, the RPD understood that improving services to victims' families in the community is critical to solving cases and maintaining community safety. The RPD leadership established the HSG program to create a direct link between the department, homicide victims' families, and other members of the community to provide the necessary information and resources to address their individual and collective trauma. The operating ethos of the HSG program is to show dignity, respect, and compassion to those affected by homicide. HSGs create a safe space for secondary victims to share their stories and to feel a sense of belonging and inclusion through regular meetings.

# Homicide Support Group in Operation

The HSG is a community that gathers regularly to promote encouragement, compassion, and solidarity. HSG members include homicide victims' parents, spouses, siblings, children, friends, and other loved ones. Family members often join the group after feeling frustrated, isolated, and misunderstood following their loved one's murder. These meetings provide an outlet for family members affected by homicide and trauma to escape their regular routines that may leave them feeling trapped. HSG members can feel secure knowing they have a safe environment where they can be heard, receive information from the department, and obtain resources that can help promote healing.

The HSG meets once a month on Wednesday evenings at the RPD Training Academy. The HSG team works to ensure that the meeting location and time remain consistent to help maintain some stability in the lives of families experiencing upheaval after a homicide.

The RPD leads the HSG program operations through collaboration with its partners at the Commonwealth Attorney's Office and the City of Richmond Victim/Witness Services. These partners work closely as coordinators to plan meetings and events, identify resource needs, and develop plans to advance the program. In guiding program operation, the coordinators manage collaborative efforts, hold internal meetings, and convene HSG meetings. The partners contribute to the program operation by providing important resources from their agencies and serving in their distinct roles to engage families.

## Key partners of the Homicide Support Group program

The operation of the Richmond HSG program involves participation from key leaders and stakeholders of the public safety community, including members of the Virginia Commonwealth Attorney's Office, Victim Services, and the RPD. Although these partners work collectively to plan and conduct monthly meetings for the group, their individual contributions are equally important. The program's effectiveness depends on strong collaboration that ensures the consistent delivery of resources and services.

- **RPD.** The department's role is essential—it is the key sponsor for the HSG. Thus, in addition to funding the program through the department budget, RPD provides the meeting location. The Major Crimes unit takes the lead in securing the meeting space and sharing program information with Homicide detectives, who play an essential role in promoting the program. The RPD detectives are often the first to contact the family following a homicide. Thus, they have a key role in demonstrating the department's commitment to supporting victims' families. They do so by

referring them to the HSG, offering them rides to monthly meetings, and attending the meetings with family members. The consistent presence and support from the detectives is what allows the community to develop strong relationships and trust in law enforcement.

- **Virginia Commonwealth Attorney's Office.** The Commonwealth Attorney's Office has an important role—working closely with families to address their questions and concerns relating to the criminal justice process. Prosecutors will speak to HSGs about important steps in the criminal trial and offer tips on how to prepare for procedures that may be difficult for families. Members of the Commonwealth Attorney's Office will attend HSG meetings to support and engage with grieving families. As more community members become familiar with prosecutors, they begin to feel comfortable sharing information that strengthens criminal cases. The Virginia Commonwealth Attorney's Office has observed that improved relationships between prosecutors and the community members has led to increased levels of cooperation with investigations that have helped secure more convictions.
- **City of Richmond Victim/Witness Services.** The Victim Witness Services program works closely with the Richmond Commonwealth Attorney's Office to provide comprehensive services to victims and witnesses to support them as they navigate the criminal justice process. The Victim/Witness Services program works with those affected by homicide to identify their needs. This unit has numerous resources available for families and witnesses such as court accompaniment, burial assistance, medical services, counseling service referrals, and financial assistance through the Virginia Victims Fund. This program plays a key role in directing families affected by homicide to the HSG. For example, when family members of homicide victims visit the Victim/Witness Services program seeking emotional support services, they will receive a referral to the HSG program. In addition, the Victim/Witness Services team attends HSG meetings to share information about available resources for the group. Victim/Witness Services' participation in the HSG program enhances the level of assistance for grieving families.

## Monthly meetings

### Internal coordinators

Each month the HSG coordinators hold their own meeting to discuss logistics for upcoming events. These internal meetings are a central piece in confirming that monthly HSG meetings are properly equipped and organized. During these meetings, coordinators plan next steps, identify guest speakers and activities for the next meeting, and make changes to enhance the program. The group also discusses budgets and costs related to operating the program, which are funded from the RPD budget. Costs related to organizing reoccurring meetings and events include paying guest speakers, supplying food and drinks, and producing any written materials. These internal meetings are also used as an opportunity to discuss feedback from HSG members, which are used to guide their decision-making for changes to the program. For example, the Richmond HSG started to organize more group outings such as cookouts and holiday parties after receiving feedback from members that they would like more opportunities to meet with one another outside of the meetings held once a month.

### Public HSG

Monthly meetings are the center of the HSG program. These public meetings focus on supporting grieving family members who have lost a loved one to homicide. HSG members can attend the meetings anonymously and participate voluntarily. The HSG meetings were designed to make family members in the community feel comfortable and safe as they participate in group discussions and activities. Richmond has recommended that other agencies create additional activities for the group to participate in that occur between the monthly meetings to increase the opportunity for engagement each month. The HSG also sponsors activities such as holiday parties, cookouts, and bowling outings, allowing group members to build relationships with one another outside of the monthly meetings and maintain community support.

The HSG program coordinators facilitate the meeting, make announcements, and introduce the guest speakers. Each month, guest speakers present to the group and guide them in activities to help the healing process. These activities can include memorial vigils or group exercises that help participants to express grief in a healthy manner. The HSG coordinators find that families prefer to hear from

speakers and facilitators who have personal experience in losing a loved one to homicide rather than professionals who provide lecture-style presentations. Guest speakers present on topics such as managing grief, offering forgiveness, and developing healthy coping skills. The speaker then opens the meeting for discussion, where members have the opportunity to share their personal stories and reactions.

HSG meetings provide a number of resources and opportunities, including the following:

- Meet members of the community who share similar experiences.
- Receive guidance and suggestions for managing grief.
- Learn about what to expect in navigating the criminal justice process.
- Share personal experiences with other families.
- Speak with detectives about ongoing investigations.
- Connect with service providers to receive resources such as counseling and financial assistance.



# Program Achievements and Lessons Learned

Following the implementation of the Richmond HSG program, the city started to see positive changes in both its community interactions and its crime reporting. One year after making significant changes in the department and establishing the HSG program, the city saw improved partnerships within the community and started to experience fewer homicides and more cleared cases. While it is not conclusive that the implementation of the HSG alone created these results, many have acknowledged that the program was one of the important changes that RPD made that may have led to this improvement. The department believes that the positive changes observed in the city were heavily influenced by the implementation of this program.

In addition to the program successes and achievements, the RPD overcame many challenges as it developed and implemented its HSG. In doing so, Richmond identified several lessons that law enforcement agencies should consider when establishing their own programs to ensure their success. The RPD's HSG achievements and lessons learned are presented in the sections that follow.

## **HSGs have helped the RPD improve homicide clearance rates.**

Since implementing the Richmond HSG program in 2008, the RPD has experienced increased clearance rates. The RPD was able to increase its clearance rate from about 47 percent in calendar year 2004 to 84 percent in 2008, as shown in table 1.

**Table 1. RPD homicide clearance rates**

Year	Homicide totals (N)	RPD clearance rate (%)
2004	95	47
2005	86	70
2006	81	71
2007	55	82
2008	32	84

Data received from RPD

RPD detectives have attributed this improvement in their clearance rates to their increased level of engagement with family members who are now willing to share information, serve as witnesses, and encourage others to come forward with information. One detective said, “Clearance rates are an indicator of how the police interact with the community.” Improving how detectives view and interact with the community has helped them gain community cooperation to complete their investigations.

### **Homicide rates in Richmond decreased significantly after the HSG program was implemented.**

Upon adopting the HSG program in 2008, the RPD observed a significant decrease in their homicide rate. In 2006, the RPD experienced 81 homicide incidents. In 2009, one year after implementing the program, homicides dropped to 39 incidents. This represents a decrease of about 52 percent. The improved partnerships with the community, within the department, and with the Commonwealth Attorney’s Office have been credited with playing a significant part in sustaining the decrease in Richmond homicides, according to RPD detectives. The HSG program is considered to be an important piece in helping to strengthen these relationships and build partnerships through regular positive engagements with the group. These positive engagements have assisted in enhancing the role of the community in the investigation process, which has been a force multiplier in reducing violent crime and making neighborhoods safer. Richmond has experienced considerable improvement in homicide incidents and cleared cases since the department implemented the HSG program and made changes in police culture and operation. The department was clearing more of its annual cases in addition to clearing more cases from previous years. Table 2 provides a summary of homicide rates since the inception of the HSG in Richmond.

**Table 2. RPD homicides and incident-based clearance rates 2008–2019**

Year	Homicide total (N)	Incident-based reporting clearance rate (%)	Clearance rate (%)
2008	32	116.0	84.0
2009	39	105.1	74.4
2010	41	82.9	68.3
2011	37	94.6	78.4
2012	44	77.3	61.4
2013	37	91.9	75.7
2014	42	100.0	76.2
2015	41	95.0	63.4
2016	60	80.0	66.7
2017	66	57.6	56.1
2018	54	64.8	55.6
2019	60	56.7	41.7

By establishing a successful program, Richmond sustained overall success in retaining these positive impacts observed in its communities.

### **Having a full-time family liaison officer improves community trust.**

The department found the liaison officer position to be necessary to connect families with law enforcement and available services. The Homicide Family Support Liaison (HFSL) officer's purpose is to engage families in navigating services, receive anecdotal information about open cases, and support detectives in bridging communications with family members. The RPD created the position to be an active part of the community, serving as the direct connection for family support services on a regular basis. The HFSL plays a major role in coordinating the HSG meetings and conducting outreach to new family members. This position continues to be a valuable role in the department as it has helped to keep connections between the community and the department strong.

The RPD recommends that this position should be a full-time assignment from the Homicide unit. This staffing will make it easier for community members to have daily contact with detectives. Assigning this position as a part-time role outside of the unit can make it more challenging to achieve this regular interaction with detectives.

### **The HSG has helped improve the community's willingness to cooperate with homicide investigations.**

As HSG members and other members of the community have become more familiar and comfortable with the RPD detectives and prosecutors, they have been more willing to share what they know. RPD detectives have found that engagements with community members through the HSG have been more positive and less combative than before the HSG program was operationalized. They believe that the HSG program has helped promote the enhancement of positive partnerships and relationships with the community. The more information that family members were able to share, the more evidence detectives would gather, which helped identify additional witnesses and helped prosecutors build strong cases.

The HSG program has demonstrated how police detectives can build relationships with families outside of their routine law enforcement activities. The program has focused on looking for ways to direct families toward supportive services, representing their commitment to improving the lives of community members. A member of the HSG said their "communities now know who their detectives are." HSG members feel that detectives are genuine in their intentions to protect and support families. Building these relationships has allowed family members to become ambassadors who communicate to their communities the positive benefits of working with the RPD. These community partners help to promote the image of positive police-community relationships, which help to motivate other members of the community to become engaged.

**Garnering buy-in from key criminal justice partners and stakeholders is critical for new program implementation.**

To ensure ownership, consistent engagement, responsibility, management, and coordination of the HSG program, agencies need buy-in from key partners. During the early stages of planning the program implementation, a law enforcement agency will need to gain support from all partners who could provide valuable resources that will support program operations and key goals. For example, the RPD received buy-in from the heads of its partner agencies and has recommended that agencies establish Memoranda of Understanding that clarify the roles different agencies will adopt in these partnerships. The Richmond HSG found it critical to ensure that all key partners shared the same understanding of the responsibilities, mission, and goals of the program. The department collaborated with various victim services to understand the different resources and support that families would need and emphasized establishing strong partnerships and agreements to ensure consistency in delivering program services to families.

**Including youth in HSG programming is critical to healing generational trauma.**

In creating the HSG program, the RPD met challenges in building the program to be as effective as it intended for engaging youth. It was difficult to engage younger community members who lacked an outlet to manage their grief and frustration. The HSG meetings were tailored more toward adults, and guest speakers presented guidance that may have been difficult for younger community members to comprehend. This made it difficult to provide peer support to younger family members suffering from homicide-related trauma. Without a strong support network, this group may seek unhealthy coping mechanisms such as drug and alcohol use. Richmond has learned that it is very important to develop programs and activities designed specifically for engaging younger community members in the HSG program and ensure that all members of the community have a place in the program.

**Understand that it takes time to engage and connect with families.**

During the implementation of the HSG, the group struggled to gain interest from family members in the community. As the RPD worked to establish the HSG program, the department learned that family members experienced and responded to traumatic experiences differently. Some family members were ready to engage with the HSG program at different stages in their grieving process. For example, some families were uninterested and unwilling to speak to detectives and prosecutors, especially shortly after a homicide. Others were not ready to speak with anyone until the trial was over. The HSG had hosted and supported various activities and events throughout the community to gain more interest. The RPD

continued to make efforts to support these family members, because strengthening the relationship with any community member would improve the relationship with the overall community. The HSG detectives took time to speak with family members, learn what resources they needed, and make those resources available within the program. The RPD found that building the program took time, but the dedication to the mission and goals helped push the program toward success.

**Limited access to resources will make completing regular program operations difficult.**

Limited budgets will pose the risk of making HSG operations more challenging. The RPD budget outlines the cost for operating the program and hosting monthly meetings. Situations have arisen where these costs have outweighed the allocated budget. A large portion of these costs are associated with hosting the meetings, including purchasing food and materials. On some occasions where funding for the program has been limited, HSG coordinators have struggled to pay for the associated expenses within budget. In response, HSG coordinators seek ways to increase their allocated funding for the program through managing the RPD budget, as it is important that HSG participation continue at no cost to the community or the coordinators. It is also important to maintain sufficient funding to avoid compromising the quality of the program or access to resources.

A shortage of funding for staffing also makes it difficult to strengthen engagement with families and the community. Limited staffing and limited hours to allocate to the program mean that partners may not have time to participate in HSG meetings. This could mean fewer opportunities to engage with family members and provide the HSG services that families need. Being able to fund the resources necessary to provide support is what allows the group to continue to grow and allows for community relationships to become stronger. Public safety providers understand that being present for the community is one of the key ways they strengthen these connections.

**It is important to create more opportunities for detectives and officers to show empathy and support to victims and families.**

Before the RPD made changes to its Homicide unit and implemented the HSG program, detectives were not aware of the level of empathy and support grieving families wished to receive. Detectives would often focus on carrying out routine investigative procedures rather than offering supportive resources to families. Because police officers and detectives are often the first to notify families that their loved one has been harmed or murdered, it is important for this interaction to demonstrate compassion and sympathy. Families often clearly remember these interactions with law enforcement. They feel that they can recognize when officers and detectives are sharing genuine empathy. Collaborating with service providers and establishing the HSG program has created the opportunity for detectives and officers to show sincerity, empathy, and support for those experiencing the loss and trauma from homicide.

One HSG member recalled their experience with a RPD detective, sharing that the detective “has not left my side throughout the process and explained everything.” The HSG member also shared that this detective continued to call and check in after the case had been closed. They also said the close relationship with the detective allowed them to feel comfortable with regularly sharing information that they receive in the community or through social media.

It should be noted, with many homicides occurring within the same communities over time, that seeing a detective who investigated the loss of a family member of one family can serve as an enabler to others to trust and assist in another family’s loss.

# Conclusion

The HSG is among the RPD's most innovative programs as it has indicated significant success in improving police investigations and community safety. The program focuses on supporting family members as the secondary victims of crime through enhancing the resources that the department can provide. The RPD implemented numerous changes throughout the department, impacting police culture and operation in efforts to enhance the relationships between the department and the community. An important piece of this change was establishing the HSG program in 2008 to address the needs of the families, enhance community partnerships, and build stronger homicide cases. Since making these changes, the city experienced substantial decreases in homicide rates and unsolved cases, suggesting that the program could produce valuable impacts. The program has revealed a number of lessons learned that the RPD has discovered while operating their HSG and will be important for other law enforcement agencies looking to implement their own HSGs.

The valuable lessons learned from the RPD cases study, along with those from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department (CMPD) 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 serve as an important tool for law enforcement agencies to develop their strategic approach toward implementation of their HSG program. *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](http://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 Richmond 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*

U.S. Department of Justice  
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services  
145 N Street NE  
Washington, DC 20530

To obtain details about COPS Office programs,  
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**CNA**  
ANALYSIS & SOLUTIONS

3003 Washington Boulevard  
Arlington, VA 22201

703-824-2000

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