

ABOUT VOCAL

It began out of frustration. It began out of hope. They weren't the first crime victims, and they knew they wouldn't be the last. Therefore, they had to strive to make the system a little more gentle for the next.

"Somewhere along the way the system has lost track of the simple truth that it is supposed to be fair and protect those who obey the law while punishing those who break it. Somewhere along the way, the system began to serve lawyers, judges and defendants, treating the victim with institutionalized disinterest."

— Lois Haight Herrington, Chairman
President's Task Force
on Victims of Crime
(Final Report — Washington, D.C.
December 1982)

There is no explaining or understanding why innocent people become victims of crime. Why lives are devastated and families shattered, all at the hand of another, often a complete stranger. Spouses beaten and murdered, store clerks robbed and murdered, women raped, vicious assaults, children abused. All criminal acts which, unfortunately, occur every day in our society. It is senseless and it is tragic, and in one way or another, it affects all of our lives.

As tragic as victimization can be, victims are often confronted with the further trauma of the criminal justice system. A system designed to protect defendants and victims, but all too often harboring securely the rights of defendants while leaving victims lost, confused, intimidated, and distrustful.

WHAT IS VOCAL?

VOCAL, Victims of Crime and Leniency, is a non-profit organization established for the purpose of improving the quality of justice for victims of crime. The organization was established as a result of concerned citizens finding the realization of the criminal justice system vastly different than the justice system they perceived was established to protect them. In 1982 a group of citizens began a grass roots effort to organize victims of crime into an organization that could provide victims' assistance.

Today, VOCAL's goals and purposes remain the same. They are, in essence, to provide both victims' assistance and victims' advocacy. Through various projects and programs, VOCAL is working to provide victims of crime with better information concerning the criminal justice system with better information relating to the rights and remedies of victims.

ORGANIZATION ACTIVITIES

The activities of VOCAL are divided into three major areas. They are (1) Victim Assistance; (2) Victim Advocacy; and (3) Education and Public Awareness.

Providing assistance to victims is of enormous importance to the organization. Assistance may take the form of crisis intervention, or community resource referral or attendance at judicial proceedings, or support groups. Sometimes VOCAL can only provide a listening ear.

Advocacy for victims is geared toward eliminating some of the problems that victims face. These would include representation at parole proceedings, referral for legal assistance and legislation aimed at eliminating inequities to victims within the criminal justice system. VOCAL also provides a 24-hour toll-free telephone line in Alabama.

As our efforts continue to improve the plight of victims, we invite you to participate in one of the many avenues of opportunity that VOCAL has to provide. Your participation and commitment will assure victims of crime that there exists those to answer the call when a victim is heard to ask, "Who Is On My Side?"

VICTIMS OF
CRIME AND LENIENCY
VOCAL