



Airdrie and District Victims Assistance Society

2015 Annual General Meeting
Submitted by Lori Rehill – Executive Director

HONORING THE PAST AND SHAPING THE FUTURE

In June of 1993 Airdrie and District Victims Assistance Society, fondly referred to as ADVAS was officially incorporated and by January 1995 volunteer advocates were providing assistance to the communities of Airdrie, Crossfield, Didsbury and Beiseker. Today ADVAS provides services in the communities of Airdrie, Acme, Balzac, Beiseker, Crossfield, Irricana, Linden, Kathryn and the surrounding Rocky View County.

From 1995 to 2015 staff and front line volunteers continue to assist people who have been impacted by critical and unexpected events that can forever change the life of a loved one, a neighbor and our community. Services provided in this time frame include:

- Support, information and referrals to over 26,000 people
- 79,715 volunteer hours dedicated to ADVAS by our front line and board volunteers
- 14,236 cases touched by the frontline volunteers and staff to assist the Airdrie and Beiseker RCMP

ADVAS has evolved and thrives as a provincially recognized policed-based victim assistance unit for best practices when working with victims of crime. Our court support program for victims of domestic violence established in 2007, ongoing advanced volunteer training, and organizational practices are the envy of many units in the province and have shaped our Society into the exceptional Unit it is today. ADVAS programs and services are delivered by highly trained and certified professional volunteers and staff. We believe our founding directors and first volunteers would be extremely proud of our growth and ability to meet the challenges nonprofit organization face today. We remain focused, evaluate our performance and encourage innovation!

ADVAS continues to offer:

- Free and confidential crisis and follow-up support, information, referrals to everyone,
- Victim Impact Statements, Financial Benefits, Request for Restitution, and the Victims of Crime Protocol outlining what to expect when you're involved in the Criminal Justice System
- Court preparation and accompaniment,
- Resources and information specific to people's needs and
- Assistance for individuals affected by assault, family violence and domestic assault, sudden death, theft, break and enter, sexual assault, harassment and more.

This April ADVAS will be recognizing the contribution of past and current volunteers, community partners and funders. The event "Honoring the Past and Shaping the Future" has been funded by the National Victims of Crime Awareness Week (NVCAW) 2015 and will be held in conjunction with the NVCAW April 19th to 25th.

TRENDS AND CHANGES FROM 2012 TO 2014

- Population growth of the areas ADVAS serves has increased by 12%.

- ADVAS experienced a 17% increase in proactive referrals and a 22% increase in non-criminal Domestic Dispute referrals in 2014. This proactive work reflects the evolving services provided to our communities.
- Increase in the number of new RCMP members from northern Alberta detachments & different divisions with different expectations of ADVAS. Building relationships with new members related to physical infrastructure of the new detachment. ADVAS is no longer visible to members.
- The Alberta Serious Incident Response Team (ASIRT), Integrated National Security Enforcement Team (INSET) & Calgary Police Services (CPS) have utilized the ADVAS programs & services to support victims of serious crime.
- RCMP Southern Alberta District has moved into the second floor of the Airdrie RCMP detachment. ADVAS was requested to provide support for a homicide case in the first week of the move.
- Decreased funding from other sources and loss of major fundraising events in 2015.
- Increased expectations by Justice Services of staff & volunteers in court.
- Long term volunteer commitment continues to be a challenge.

FIANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

ADVAS applies for sustainable funding from the Alberta Justice and Solicitor General (JSG) and annual FCSS and other provincial grants. Funding fluctuates and to maintain and sustain our programs and services we continue to fundraise and gratefully accept donations. JSG funds 47% of our annual budget, FCSS and other grants 30%, fundraising and donations make up the remaining 23% each year.

In 2014 ADVAS participated in the very successful sixth annual Rocky Mountain Charity Hockey Night, ninth annual Rotary Tour de Airdrie to end family violence, third annual Airdrie Oilman's Bikes and Bulls, and was the recipient of a number of events held by the community including: the RCMP Regimental Ball and the Gypsiella Christmas event. 2014 was the last Rocky Mountain Hockey Night fundraiser hosted by MP Blake Richards.

Goal 1 of the 2015 Strategic Planning: Achieve long term sustainable funding to accomplish financial wellness. A Community Initiative Planning (CIP) grant was submitted recently to hire a Fund Development Coordinator to assist with this goal.

HUMAN RESOURCES – WHAT HAVE WE BEEN UP TO?

The ADVAS Board currently has seven directors and two RCMP liaison officers. Four new volunteer victim advocates joined the Society in 2014. ADVAS currently has fourteen volunteer advocates and seven new volunteers at various stages of security clearance and training. A total of thirty volunteers and four staff make up the current human resources of ADVAS.

- ADVAS volunteers in partnership with the RCMP, contributed 4,748 hours of their time and talents to support victims in our community.
- Volunteers and staff were available for 24 hour on call crisis support for a total of 20,725 hours in 2014.
- ADVAS assisted 3,740 people (2,697 adults and 1,061 children) in 2014. An increase of 35% from 2013 and a substantial 56% increase in the last 5 years.
- The Society provided 6,637 services to victims in 2014, an increase of 21% from 2013 and a 67% increase in the past five years. These services included; crisis intervention in victim's homes, on scene or at the detachment, providing information during follow up phone calls, victims program packages, referral mail outs and court support.
- Referrals to other agencies increased by 53% and court support services increased by 46% in 2014. Court support has increased significantly by 130% over the last five years.
- Volunteers and staff worked on 2,030 files, a 39% growth from 2013 and 77% growth over the last five years. Domestic violence, criminal harassment, assault, sexual assault and family issues continue to be the greatest number of files referred to ADVAS.
- Domestic Violence files increased by 42% from 2013 and 119% over the last five years.
- Criminal Harassment files increased by 60% from 2013 and 150% over the last five years.
- Sexual Assaults increased by 11% last year.

- The proactive services provided by ADVAS includes: Family issues in communications, relationships and parenting challenges, sudden deaths, next of kin notifications, mental health issue, civil matters, restraining orders and legal concerns.

The board has identified the need to increase the number of board members with specific skill sets to continue moving the Society forward. Front line volunteers will continue to be recruited to meet the operational needs of the organization in 2015 - 2016.

Strategic Goal #3: Develop a human resources strategy to ensure a well-trained, sustainable organization and healthy environment. The activities currently underway include:

- Cross training and succession planning with the staff and board of directors
- Development of a new part time support position to begin in June 2015
- Stakeholders, funders and community partners are aware of the staffing pattern changes for 2015
- Staff proposed wellness initiatives and the participation in the Provincial Wellness Project this fall
- The wellness of our Society is foremost in the minds of ADVAS and APBVSA Boards of Directors. The nature of the work done by frontline volunteers, court volunteers and staff lends itself to vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue. The Provincial Wellness Team Project to address psychological consequences of victim services work will be rolled out this fall.

VICTIM SUPPORT AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

ADVAS strives to insure every person impacted by crime has been informed of the programs and services offered by the Justice and Solicitor General. We also recognize that crime is ever changing and victimization requires current and up to date information.

Online Resources for Victims:

Online resource is reviewed and new resources are updated quarterly to reflect the trends and changes in victimization. The following online resources in the crime and trauma areas include; domestic violence, sexual assault, assault, internet crimes, suicide, bullying, grief and more. Victims impacted by these crimes and emotional trauma can now access support, information and referrals in the privacy of their homes. On line resources in no way replace the front line work of the ADVAS volunteers and staff, they enhance the longer term support people may need or wish to explore. To learn more about online victim support visit www.airdrievictimassistance.com

Social Media:

An administrative page for FaceBook advertising continues to increase public awareness, assist with volunteer recruitment, provide online support for victims and generate online donations.

In the first nine months of 2014 over 8,500 people visited our website with an average of 66% of all our webpage traffic generated through FaceBook advertising. Over 67% of the visits were new visitors. These results were gathered from the Google analytics website dashboard reports.

In the past four years traffic to our website has increased by 78%. The dashboard results indicate that visitor's access the victim's resource page more frequently and remaining on this page for longer periods of time. More people are accessing our website directly, evident in the spike visits after public awareness events. The awareness, recruitment, access to victim's resources and financial support goals of social media advertisement far outweighs all other forms of advertising.

EVALUATING OUR PERFORMANCE

The 2014 outcome based evaluations from victims and volunteer advocates indicate that ADVAS has once again successfully supported victims of crime and tragedy and remains strongly committed to volunteers and their success as advocates.

Victims who completed the 2014 ADVAS satisfaction survey strongly agree or agree that the services ADVAS provided were compassionate, timely, appropriate, professional, and the information provided was appropriate.

Comments from victims: Crisis and Follow up Support

- Knowing they were there to answer any questions or concerns was comforting – excellent service.
- I was nice to have someone to vent with since Social Services was a joke.
- Thank you – your excellent services were professional and caring.
- Excellent, through and very professional.
- Very helpful, kind caring and supportive.
- Because of it I have been able to take the proper steps in dealing with my situation, especially with counselling.
- Were able to answer any question with valuable information.
- I just needed to talk which I did – thank you!

Comments from victims: Court Support

- Court was explained very well to me by Airdrie Victim Services representatives
- Was contacted by people that allowed me to understand court steps and information.
- Made me feel safe and supported, just a phone call away.
- Help on the road to healing and recovery.
- I understand the court process & procedures.
- Helped to give me the strength and support to get through, before, during and after.
- Just to be able to deal with the problems better.
- Thank you very much for your excellent service.
- Was great to have someone explain and be there through it all.
- Thank you for your time and just listening.
- Just knowing someone was there for us helped us along and not made it so hard to get through this.

Volunteer Advocates who completed the 2014 satisfaction survey strongly agree or agree that ADVAS is committed to their success as a volunteer, they are committed to their volunteer role, communication is effective, their strengths are utilized, training opportunities are meaningful and prepare them for their volunteer work and their work is recognized and celebrated.

Comments from volunteers:

- Staff are always available to address questions, training is fantastic
- Always keeping up with training and helping with questions.
- I would like more personal contact (with victims) and individual growth
- Staff is hugely supportive and approachable
- Always offering guidance when asked
- Provide opportunities for training and sharing
- Thoroughly engaged and passionate about the program
- Always learning and wanting to learn
- Attend/share/participate on a regular basis
- Love this role
- Even after 7 years, I am still excited about my role
- I feel I need to believe in myself more
- I am looking forward to finding more ways to contribute
- I like that I'm able to participate in decision making and share ideas
- I do use what I learn, this is why I'm here learning
- Excellent training subjects and opportunities - very well planned
- I always feel appreciated
- Amazing appreciation efforts – from small comments to thoughtful gifts and activities
- Absolutely fantastic appreciation from staff – from informal thank you to large affairs

Major stakeholders and community partners recognize the value of ADVAS programs and services, and the general public is aware of who we are. Victims however have reported that they were unaware of the Society until they needed our support. ADVAS continues to promote programs and services in public forums, through social media, in newspaper reports, at community events and advertisement in the Airdrie Resource Book.

COLLOABRATION

ADVAS has developed strong partnerships with numerous community agencies based on the current and changing needs of victims of crime and tragedy.

ADVAS actively participate as a member of the Prevention of Family Violence Interagency Committee. Stakeholders in this committee include: Provincial Crown Prosecutor, Probation, RCMP Domestic Violence Unit, Home Front, Y.W.C.A. Sheriff King House, Alberta Health Services and Community Links Society.

ADVAS supported approximately 179 victims (124% increases since 2007) whose partners were mandated through court to participate in the Men's and Women's Domestic Violence Treatment Program in 2013. ADVAS provides follow up calls to ensure that victims feel safe and supported during the 14 week program. This work is now reflected in the Justice and Solicitor General Logic Model outcome reports.

ADVAS has linked the following agencies to our webpage for victims to access directly: Community Links Society, Airdrie Mental Health, CCASA, Alberta Solicitor General Victims of Crime Services and Programs.

OUR FOCUS

During the Strategic Goal Planning event held in February 2015, the mandate of the Society was reviewed and resulted in the following revisions:

VISION: A community that assists in bridging the gap from hurt to hope to empower victims to take control of their experience as it becomes part of their life

MISSION: to respect the victims we support by providing a compassionate response, emotional and practical assistance, information on victims' rights and referrals necessary to help reduce the negative impact of victimization

VALUES:

We value integrity and confidentiality

We value and respect supportive community relationships

We value and respect professional relationship with the RCMP, our Board, staff and volunteers

We value diverse, highly trained and skilled people who deliver superior services

We value a sincere, compassionate and timely response for all

We value exceptional services delivered in a diverse, non-judgmental manner for all

We value providing accountable and fiscally responsible quality services

THANK YOU

As this will be the last opportunity I have to prepare the Annual General Meeting report for ADVAS, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the board of directors, liaison officers, staff and volunteers for the exceptional support I have received over the past twelve years.

I became aware of Victims Services on April 7, 2003 when my teenage daughter and I were supported by two complete stranger's at the most devastating time of our lives. Volunteers came to our home with a compassionate RCMP officer who had the difficult task of informing us that our husband/father was found dead that morning.

The volunteers provided us with non-judgmental emotional and crisis support, knew what to say in the moment, had the confidence to listen and let silence fill the air and provided much needed follow-up support. I firmly believe the work of the volunteers contributed to our ability to survive and thrive!

I knew in the back of my mind that what we experienced was an unusual and altruistic gift and I would need to find out more about this victim assistance group.

I was so touched and impressed by the work of our local victim service unit that I submitted my application and started as a volunteer in 2004, was hired part time the same year and in 2007 was honored when our Board of Directors offered me the Program Managers position! Little did I know what I was getting myself into and I have to say, it's been the most exciting ride of my life! Our life altering experience led me to the most rewarding and honorable career I could never have imagined.

Thank you