

## 2005 INNOVATIONS AWARDS PROGRAM

### APPLICATION

Deadline: April 4, 2005

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1. Program Name - "Focus on the Victim Program" (FOV)
2. Administering Agency - New Jersey Department of Corrections,  
  
Division of Programs & Community Services,  
**Office of Victim Services**
3. Contact Person (Name and Title) - Melanie Boston, Coordinator
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9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.

Focus on the Victim (FOV) is a voluntary offender program employing the restorative and reparative justice principles as its main focus and provides the offenders the opportunity to examine the impact of crime on the victim and the community. Through unique role-playing techniques and face-to-face interaction with survivors of victimization, this program has provided the opportunity for victims to be empowered in the process of potentially changing future negative behaviors of offenders and ultimately preventing future destructive behavior.

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? **Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on May 1, 2005 to be considered.**

The program was implemented in May of 2001 and remains operational to date.

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address? **Indicate how the program applies to the “change driver” that you listed above.**

As the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) and, within it, the Division of Programs and Community Services, holds to the tenet that restorative justice is best served when the victim, the community and the offender receive attention and all gain tangible benefits from their interactions with the department. Towards that goal, the NJDOC Division of Programs and Community Services incorporates restorative and reparative justice principals through the availability of programs and services offered to offenders and the community. Specifically, FOV was developed out of the department’s recognition that the victims’ voices must be heard and their concerns addressed. Via this process, not only does the department uphold the rights of victims of crime by providing forums in which the impact of crime may be shared, the offenders are challenged to take accountability for their actions and begin the process for making amends.

Thus, NJDOC contributes to the role of government as a “change driver” through the mandating of guaranteeing victims’ rights as documented in the **New Jersey’s Crime Victims Bill of Rights, based upon the New Jersey State Constitution.**

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

Offenders voluntarily enroll for the 14-week program that is offered throughout all NJDOC adult correctional facilities and Stabilization and Reintegration Program (SRP), with the exception of Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center (New Jersey Department of Correction's Sex Offenders Institution). Trained facilitators who screen the applicant and also conduct the groups are staff members from the following disciplines: social work, chaplain, and education. Each group has two facilitators and relies on the following medium to present the victims’ plight; education presentation of 12 crimes, ranging from property crime to homicide, use of videos, role-playing, and open dialogue between offenders and guest speakers (i.e. victims of crime and victim service providers from the community). Guest speakers are screened and provided with an orientation of the program and the institution for which they will volunteer to present. Offenders are asked to maintain journals with weekly assignments surrounding their experiences, thoughts, and methods for making amends relevant to the victim. Accountability is stressed both in the offenders’ verbal communication during group, along with any and all written assignments. Guest speakers are monitored closely to determine if support is needed and that they do not experience any re-victimization. Both guest speakers and offenders complete

an evaluation survey to provide future recommendations for change within the program. Upon the successful completion of the fourteen sessions the offender is awarded with a certificate of completion.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

The FOV Program is both new and creative in its approach by offering this voluntary restorative program to all adult offenders. The program allows the offender to hear, see, and understand the pain, suffering and effects that crime has on victims. It triggers an understanding of why he/she should change their behavior towards others and often promotes a sense or need to seek ways to give back to society. This process encourages and challenges the offender to take responsibility for his/her actions. Through poetry, artwork, and video production, offenders express their need to make amends to victims, the community and their family.

Another unique facet of the program is the participation of Victim advocates and other agencies throughout the state. This process promotes a better understanding of goals of NJDOC in creating a safer environment for the public and efforts in assisting the victims of crime. FOV is designed to bridge the gap between the department and the community while creating a network of alliances for victims of crime.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

Staffing for the office is under the auspices of the Division of Programs and Community Services. The implementation of the FOV Program was made possible through outreach efforts of this office. Administrative staff assigned to oversee this program includes the Coordinator of the Office of Victim Services, Executive Assistant, and Contract Administrator. Institutional staff from the Social Work, Education and Chaplain Departments is charged with the responsibility of direct facilitation of the program. In 2003, the NJDOC received grant funding from the National Institute of Corrections to provide training and technical assistance from the California Youth Authority to evaluate the ongoing development of the program. Additional start-up costs include training materials, i. e. videos, resource manuals and relevant books and equipment.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

Annual FOV operational costs are incorporated in budgeted positions previously allocated through the NJDOC. The Office of Victim Services staff provide other victim service responsibilities in addition to overseeing the FOV program, which address the needs of victims of inmates who are incarcerated in its fourteen institutions such as restitution issues, providing information and/or making necessary referrals.

16. How is the program funded?

The NJDOC receives their budgetary expenditures via funds established by the State of New Jersey.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

N/A

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

Equipment, technology, and software used to operate and administer this program include television, VCR/DVD players, and video camera.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

While the concept of victim / offender programming spans just two decades of development and growth throughout the country, the NJDOC only recently adopted this methodology to its adult offender population.

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

During the early development phase of the FOV Program, NJDOC staff traveled to Connecticut to observe their victim impact program. While Connecticut's program proved instrumental in the laying the foundation of FOV Program, we decided to adopt a psycho-dynamic approach that encouraged participants' self-disclosure both in group and during their individual counseling sessions (which has not typically been the practice for most states). Further, staff researched similar programs in Pennsylvania and Ohio and incorporated elements of their teaching approach into our curriculum.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

As of 2003, the Office of Victim Services' mission to implement the FOV Program throughout the New Jersey Department of Corrections has been fulfilled. Fourteen institutions inclusive of Stabilization & Reintegration Program.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

23. Comments received from the guest speaker surveys consistently indicate our guest speakers' strong support of the program and its healing and therapeutic component in their own personal lives.

Below are direct comments from guest speakers provided following their presentations:

Miss Trudy: *"I have truly enjoyed speaking to the inmates. They are very sincere to me and the tragedy I am living with."* *"The inmates received me warmly and listened very intently".* *"I saw deep concern on the inmates' faces and tears as I spoke".* *"They were truly concerned".*

Mr. Lorry: *"I have always found these sessions to be of great therapy for me. Over the years, instead of diminishing value, I have been gaining in personal benefits, to the extent that I have volunteered to do this even more times".* *"I went at first merely to help out, but have found this experience to be a vital part of my life."* *"As indicated, it is great therapy for me, actually an opportunity to express all of my feelings about the loss (daughter) for the first time."*

The aforementioned remarks from guests speaks mirror the many similar remarks made from other FOV Program guest speakers. To date, the FOV Program is supported by thirty-five active guest speakers (both victim and service providers) from throughout the community. Given the initial start-up of three guest speakers, great strides continue to be made to actively recruit, support, and maintain this network of stakeholders.

24. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

This program has evolved as a pilot project in one institution to its presence now in fourteen institutions. Each institution maintains a lengthy waiting list, based on word of mouth from past graduates; therefore, staff no longer is required to recruit participants. In total, the FOV Program is proud to report graduating over **600 offenders** from this program. In effort to further convey the message of the impact of crime on victims, for both staff and offenders, the Office of Victim Services has begun to develop a video library incorporating victims' and offenders' personal reflections of the program and how it has impacted on their lives.

25. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

NJDOC has been vigilant in providing ongoing training for group facilitators. This process is time consuming and requires staff to continue to explore and identify current training topics and speakers that lend to the overall learning process of victimization. This process can be impeded due to staff turnover or reassignment. Secondly, identifying funds that can support guest speakers' travel would support the program significantly, even though victims and speakers continue to give of their own

time, expense and effort without complaint. Lastly, without endorsement from top administration that is often conveyed through the ranks at NJDOC, the success of this program would be greatly diminished. Ongoing research, review and evaluation of the entire process are pertinent for the successful continuation of the process.

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