

## VICTIM IMPACT CLASSES

*(What kind of a program is it? How does it "fit" with Restorative Justice?)*

The goals for offenders who participate in Victim Impact classes include the following:

- ◆ to accept responsibility for past criminal actions,
- ◆ to understand the impact of crime on victims,
- ◆ to develop personal safety skills with a focus on crime prevention,
- ◆ to learn how to bond with positive, healthy people, and
- ◆ to contribute to their communities in a way that will prevent future victimization.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and the California Department of Youth Authority (CYA), in conjunction with the US Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime, recognize the value of Victim Impact classes/panels in working with both juvenile and adult crime offenders. All three sponsoring organizations are highly committed to program development and delivery in the areas of victim awareness and victim services and have joined forces in creating Victim Impact Classes/Panels.

Because the Restorative Justice philosophy includes victim representatives in the development of all types of offender programs, the models for Victim Impact classes are intended to assist in developing a victim-centered curricula in a consistent manner. For most crime victims, telling their experiences to an audience of offenders is a healthy and healing opportunity. Ground-breaking research on a large number of drunk driving crash victims has revealed that 82% of victims who tell their stories to offenders say that speaking has aided them in their recovery. It is also, sadly, not uncommon for youth or adult offenders in the US to serve an entire sentence without being provided the opportunity to begin to understand the impact of crime upon victims.

The curriculum developed by MADD and CYA covers eleven topics:

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| Chapter 1 - Property Crime             | Chapter 7 - Assault                       |
| Chapter 2 - Drugs and Society          | Chapter 8 - Sexual Assault                |
| Chapter 3 - Violent Crime              | Chapter 9 - Robbery                       |
| Chapter 4 - Domestic Violence          | Chapter 10 - Drunk Driving/Death & Injury |
| Chapter 5 - Crimes Against the Elderly | Chapter 11 - Homicide                     |
| Chapter 6 - Child Maltreatment         |   |

The order of presentation was selected to begin with the least sensitive areas (property offenses) in order to build rapport and openness with offenders and to establish an adequate understanding before entering into more sensitive areas. Although each chapter is crime specific, there are underlying themes that pertain to most victims. Most offenders are familiar with additional crimes other than the offense(s) for which they are incarcerated. Teaching methods recommended include: short reading assignments, large and small group discussions, written exercises, videos and case examples (victim speakers).

MN Correctional Facility at Shakopee began Victim Impact classes in mid-November, 1996. The target group is inmates in the Reception and Orientation program, offenders who are either new to the institution or who have re-offended and returned. Classes run Monday through Friday, Noon to 4:00 p.m. daily, alternating weeks with Cognitive Restructuring. Two Shakopee staff were trained by MADD and CYA in San Francisco in August, 1996 and returned to train additional facilitators.

Staff at Shakopee are proud to be a part of the Minnesota Department of Corrections Restorative Justice philosophy and have incorporated this philosophy into the institution vision statement:

".. to create an atmosphere where individual differences are recognized and respected and each of us is challenged to work toward a commitment to restorative justice."