



# Nationwide Justice Trends: Crime Victim and Witness Initiatives Byrne JAG Purpose Area

The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant program (Byrne JAG) is the nation's cornerstone public safety grant program. Under the law, states and localities may invest the funds across the entire justice system under eight broad purpose areas.\* One of those, the **Crime Victim and Witness Initiatives** purpose area, may include funding victim advocate positions, domestic violence prevention initiatives, support for child advocacy centers; witness protection programs and other community victims service programs. This purpose area does not include victim compensation.

States and territories have used, or plan to use, Byrne JAG funds to implement and support a broad range of such activities, including, but not limited to:

- Responding to victims of sexual assault through coordinated community efforts
- Addressing sexual assault cases involving victims identified as minors
- Behavioral health services for victims of crime, including counseling and clinical services in secure facilities and in communities
- Services to address adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)
- Support for Children's Advocacy Centers that provide child-centered locations for investigating possible crimes of child abuse
- Support of victim advocacy and enhanced resources to provide transparent, understandable information to victims of crime
- Comprehensive forensic medical examinations and support for shelter for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault

NCJA provides training and technical assistance (TTA) to the state administering agencies (SAAs) in each state and territory responsible for planning how Byrne JAG funds will be allocated. This brief provides a high-level **overview of trends and agency needs** in the Crime Victim and Witness Inititatives purpose area that states may find valuable as they conduct strategic planning.

#### National Crime Victim and Witness Initiatives Trends

A scan of national Crime Victim and Witness programming trends found several current areas of focus. These include:

Family Justice Centers (FJC) are multiagency, multi-disciplinary, co-located service centers that provide services to victims of interpersonal violence, including intimate partner violence, sexual assault, child abuse, elder or dependent adult abuse and human trafficking.¹
FJCs focus on increasing access to services and support for victims and their children and reducing

the number of times victims must tell their story and the number of places victims must go for help. In California, the <u>Alameda County FJC</u> is made up of more than thirty onsite and fifty offsite agencies.<sup>2</sup> Together, they advocate for and construct a future with zero tolerance for all forms of interpersonal violence in Alameda County.

<sup>\*</sup> To learn about the Byrne JAG program and the eight purpose areas, see NCJA's <u>Investing Byrne JAG webpage</u>. (https://www.ncja.org/investing-byrne-jag)



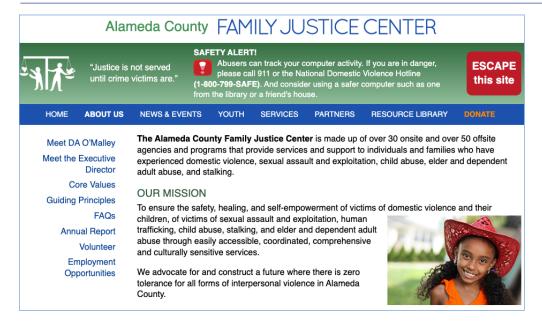
## National Criminal Justice Association

The restorative justice approach emphasizes accountability and making amends by, repairing the harm caused by crime. This occurs through facilitated meetings between victims, people accused of and convicted of crime, and other community members. There are a number of restorative justice organizations across the country, including Restorative Response Baltimore, through which 95 percent of the community conferences (facilitated meetings) have resulted in written agreements created by all participants with over 95 percent compliance with those agreements.

Hospital-Based Violence Intervention
(HBVI) programs are multi-disciplinary programs that partner medical staff and credible community-based partners to support victims of violent crime through safety planning,

services and trauma-informed care.<sup>5</sup> New Jersey allocated \$20 million in federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding to <u>launch seven new HBVI</u> <u>programs and expand two existing initiatives</u>; the nation's largest single investment in this violence-intervention model.<sup>6</sup>

Trauma Recovery Centers (TRCs) serve victims impacted by multiple crimes, who have multiple needs, by providing wraparound services that include connections to safer housing, medical care and treatment. TRCs also provide assistance to crime survivors that can help them return to work sooner and navigate the criminal justice system more effectively. The TRC model originated in California, and the premier example is located at <u>University of California</u>, San Francisco.



The Alameda County (CA) Family Justice Center is a model in providing support to individuals and families in need.

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### National Crime Victim and Witness Initiatives Needs

Justice systems face policy, training and programmatic needs in the crime victim and witness initiatives area, many of which may be addressed with Byrne JAG funding, including:

Workforce hiring and retention—An increase of counseling and other services, driven in part by a shift away from handling certain cases through law enforcement, has increased the need for trained victim and witness service providers. This, coupled with overall staffing shortages following the COVID-19 pandemic, have led to a dire need in this field.

**Data integration and information sharing**—Victim and witness services initiatives often suffer from the same lack of integrated information and ability to share across agencies as other segments of the criminal justice system.

<u>Trauma-Informed implementation training</u>—It is critical that victims, witnesses and their families are treated in ways that recognize the harms they've endured and avoid creating additional trauma. Increased and regular training is needed to achieve this.

**Mental health and support for providers' vicarious trauma**—Exposure to victims' trauma on a daily basis can create trauma for providers. These professionals are healthier and more effective when they, too, have access to support.

### **Endnotes**

- 1 Family Justice Centers. (n.d.). Family Justice Centers. Retrieved October 8, 2021, from https://www.familyjusticecenter.org/
- 2 Home Alameda County Family Justice Center. (n.d.). The Alameda County Family Justice Center. Retrieved October 8, 2021, from http://www.acfjc.org/
- 3 Restorative Justice. (n.d.). The Centre for Justice & Reconciliation. Retrieved October 8, 2021, from http://restorativejustice. org/restorative-justice/
- 4 Restorative Response Baltimore Collective Action To Resolve Conflict. (n.d.). Restorative Response Baltimore. Retrieved October 8, 2021, from https://www.restorativeresponse.org/
- 5 The Health Alliance for Violence Intervention. (n.d.). The Health Alliance for Violence Intervention. Retrieved October 8, 2021, from https://www.thehavi.org/
- 6 NJ Spotlight News. (2020, February 21). State to Expand Hospital-Based Programs to Help Victims Break Cycle of Violence. Retrieved October 8, 2021, from https://www.njspotlight.com/2020/02/state-to-expand-hospital-based-programs-to-help-victims-break-cycle-of-violence/
- 7 TRAUMA RECOVERY CENTERS: Addressing the Needs of Underserved Crime Survivors. (2020, January). National Alliance of Trauma Recovery Centers. http://traumarecoverycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/TRCBrief-R3.pdf
- 8 Trauma Recovery Center. (n.d.). The Trauma Recovery Center. Retrieved October 8, 2021, from http://traumarecoverycenter.org/

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