From the Director of Victim Services

Dating violence is more common than people think, especially among teens and young adults: one in three teens in the US will experience physical, sexual, or emotional abuse from someone they're in a relationship with before they become adults, and nearly half (43%) of college women report experiencing violent or abusive dating behaviors.

Every February, young people and their loved ones join together across the country for a national effort to raise awareness about the issue of teen dating violence through Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month (TDVAM). This annual, month-long push focuses on advocacy and education to stop dating abuse before it starts.

The theme for TDVAM 2021 is Know Your Worth. Know Your Worth is all about learning about healthy relationships and self-empowerment! Every young person is deserving of a healthy, loving relationship.

If you or a loved one is in a abusive relationship, please get help. Call 866-331-9474 or text "loveis" to 22522.

Tamika Dobbins

Victim Services Mission

To support victims, their families, and the laws that protect their rights, while utilizing recognized principles of offender behavioral change to help reduce the risk of repeat criminal behavior.

Victim Services Provides:
- Information regarding the status of offenders in prison with felony convictions
- Registration for victim notification
- Assistance with threats, unwanted calls/correspondence from an offender

Victim Services Activities:
- Community education programs
- Coordination with the Board of Parole, Attorney General’s Office, and the Tennessee District Attorney General’s Office to respond to victims’ concerns
- Education to TDOC staff to increase awareness of victims’ issues
- Collaboration with other victim advocates
Verna Wyatt, Co-Founder, Tennessee Voices For Victims

Motivated by grief over the 1991 abduction, rape, and murder of her sister-in-law, Verna began her personal journey of activism advocating for the rights of crime victims. She has worked in a professional capacity on behalf of victims since that time, and has gained a solid reputation in Tennessee with victims, law enforcement, and justice professionals. In 2012, along with Valerie Craig and Sara Kemp, she Co-Founded Tennessee Voices For Victims. As a state-wide crime victim advocacy organization, the mission is to speak out for the rights of victims, to help victims find their voice and promote their restoration, and to prevent crime through community education and awareness. Verna and Valerie pioneered Victim Impact Programming for incarcerated men and women in Tennessee, and have been facilitating weekly classes with incarcerated men and women for 15 years. Leaning on their years of co-facilitating weekly victim impact classes in Tennessee prisons and jails, they created a victim impact curriculum centered on, and supported by the evidence-based victim impact curriculum produced by the OVC. The goal of victim impact education is to understand the impact that crime has on the victim, and to awaken awareness and accountability.

Verna has served on numerous Boards and Commissions over the decades including 8 years on the Tennessee POST Commission, The Sex Offender Treatment Board, Governor Haslam’s Task Force on Recidivism and Sentencing, and the Judicial Nominating Commission. She currently serves on The Children’s Justice Task Force, The Tennessee Council for Interstate Adult Offender Supervision and serves on a subcommittee of Governor Lee’s Criminal Justice Reform Task Force.

Past awards and recognition include the 2005 Presidents Award from the Tennessee Association of Chiefs of Police, the 2012 Correction Corporation of America Volunteer of the Year, 2014 Edwina Hefner Community Leadership Award from the Nashville Symphony, 2014 Board of Probation Victim Service Award, and 2015 Union University’s Champion of Victims’ Rights Award.

Website: www.tvoicesforvictims.org
Courts are inherently negative environments. For the most part, people who are coming to court are not coming for good reasons. Defendants, witnesses, victims, attorneys, law enforcement officers are generally not coming to court because they want to. As a result, court environments are inherently stressful — which provides fertile ground for people who struggle with trauma, profound grief or loss, and numerous other mental health challenges to experience intense emotional responses. All workplaces should be trauma-informed, and courts are no exception.

Trauma-informed care is an approach used to engage with people with histories of trauma. It recognizes the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledges the role that trauma can play in peoples’ lives. Trauma-informed responses in the criminal justice system can help to avoid re-traumatizing individuals. This increases safety for all, decreases the chance of an individual returning to criminal behavior, and supports the recovery of justice-involved individuals with serious mental illness.

Key points to creating a trauma-informed court include:

Believing that being trauma-informed is now the expectation, not the exception.

Asking, “What happened to you?”, instead of, “What’s wrong with you?”

Viewing the process of “holding people accountable” with compassion.

Using a compassionate lens when engaging with anyone.

Learning how to de-escalate stressful situations.

Treating people with dignity and respect — people who interact with the court system remember most how they were treated.

In short, if you are not sure how to get started with creating a trauma-informed work environment, just be kind — you simply do not know what life experiences people carry with them.
Tennessee Domestic Violence Hotline - 800-356-6767
National Domestic Violence Hotline - 800.799.SAFE
Battered Women’s Justice Project - 800.903.0111
Mothers Against Drunk Driving - 877.MADD.HELP
National Center for Missing and Exploited Children - 800.843.5678
Tennessee Human Trafficking Hotline—1-855-558-6484
National Human Trafficking Hotline - 888.373.7888
Criminal Injuries Compensation: Corvel Corporation 866.960.6039

Stay Connected
With #TeamTDOC!
Follow Us:
/TNDepartmentofCorrection
/TNTDOC1
/Tennessee-department-of-correction
/TNDepartmentofCorrection

Tennessee Department of Correction
Victim Services Division
5th Floor Rachel Jackson Building
320 6th Avenue North
Nashville, TN 37243
Phone: 615-253-8145
Fax: 615-741-1055
Email: Victim.Notification@tn.gov

Tamika Dobbins
Victim Services Director
Tamika.Dobbins@tn.gov

Betsy Fletcher
Executive Secretary
Betsy.Fletcher@tn.gov