Volunteer training gives skills and confidence

Claire Buckley was intrigued. When her mother witnessed a homicide her anxiety levels reached breaking point – family and friends had tried to reassure her, but nothing helped. Then Victim Support was called in and had an immediate, positive, effect. It happened again when, some years later, Claire herself was a victim following a vehicle accident, and a Support Worker suggested a simple (and successful) strategy to combat negative visions. “We were very thankful, but I was also curious: how is it that this support is so effective?”

She was curious enough that when she saw an ad for Victim Support volunteers, Claire decided it was time to find out more while also having the opportunity to give back to the community. “Like many others, I was nervous about my ability to do the work, and also about time commitment.”

But the Initial Training Programme, held over four days, provided this enthusiastic volunteer with new knowledge and skills. “It was amazing and so interesting. It was empowering and gave me a real mind-set shift about how to support people and enable them to help themselves.”

Because Claire is available, she put her name on the roster as much as possible to ensure she could get early experience. “I was buddied up with an experienced Support Worker until I felt completely confident to go solo.” Claire, who has been a volunteer Support Worker since mid-2015, said she always feels a bit apprehensive at a new call-out, but “the initial training and ongoing training have equipped me well. We also get brilliant back-up, no matter the time of day or night, you never feel alone.”

Claire says if you are considering volunteering with Victim Support “absolutely do it!” You can work as many or as few shifts as suit you, and the reward of knowing you have made a positive difference in someone’s life is priceless.

Support Workers who meet specific criteria can also be invited to attend additional training to extend their knowledge and experience in two other areas. These are:

- two-day training exploring the needs of victims of any form of sexual violence, and
- two-day training exploring the needs of victims of family violence.

Each programme discusses appropriate support models and includes guest speakers specialising in each area.

All volunteer support workers receive skills to attend those bereaved by suicide during their initial training. Victim Support also employs Bereavement Support Specialists, who oversee volunteers working with those affected by suicide. We also have paid staff overseeing homicide cases: Homicide Support Specialists and Family Support Workers.

New Zealand’s multicultural society is certainly reflected in our staff and volunteers. Our first point of contact, the staff in the Contact Service, speak numerous languages including Samoan, Japanese, Portuguese, Pidgin, I-Kiribati, French, Greek and Spanish... And that’s just the tip of the language iceberg when you add languages that some of our volunteer Support Workers can offer!

Some volunteers speak Asian languages including Mandarin and Cantonese. Add Māori, Tongan, German, Samoan, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu, Polish, Malay, Thai and Farsi – to name a few and more are always welcome!

When necessary we also use the Language Line and get an interpreter on the telephone to help. It can be a real relief for people, especially as they may be distressed or traumatised, to talk to someone freely in their own language.

Additional training

There are some incidents that volunteer Support Workers attend that require more in-depth training. For instance, Claire has been asked to take homicide training to become a homicide Support Worker.

Experienced volunteers who display skills and resilience to support people following a homicide are invited to an interview process. If successful, they attend three days of focussed training exploring the needs of those bereaved by homicide.

SUPPORT - in many languages

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Message from our Chief Executive

Welcome to our first newsletter for 2016. I do hope you had an enjoyable and safe summer.

As is normal, the holiday period was an especially busy time for our on-call staff and volunteer Support Workers. It is testament to their commitment that they, and their families, are willing to change their plans to respond to a call for help.

We have articles about our volunteers in this issue, about their training, the international reach of their support, their linguistic skills, and how we are always keen to hear from people who would like to join us.

We are very grateful to the people and organisations that make donations to enable our services to remain free of charge. Training and ongoing mentoring of our staff and volunteer base, our administrative support infrastructure, transport costs and contact service all need to be paid for to ensure victims get the best possible support.

There is news of two sizable donations in this issue, from the (now disestablished) Westland Branch of the National Council of Women (page 4) and from The Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem (page 2). Such generous donations, especially those that are assured over a period of years, helps us plan for the future with some confidence.

While, of course, large donations are very gratefully received, it is the larger number of small donations that make up the majority of our community funding. Large or small, every dollar counts, and we are grateful for every contribution to our funds.

If you want to help, please send us the donation slip on the back page and know that your generosity is going towards supporting someone who is suffering through no fault of their own.

Kevin Tso, Chief Executive

Christchurch five years on

Born in Venezuela, Carlos Manrique spent three years working with asylum seekers in Australia before moving to New Zealand last year to be with his partner’s family. Committed to working in a humanitarian context, Carlos joined Victim Support’s Christchurch team as a Service Coordinator almost a year ago. He says his new role has been challenging — but in a good way. “The most rewarding part of the job is definitely the contact with our Support Workers, and hearing them talking about what they’re doing in the community. That’s the really human side of the role. It’s amazing,” he said.

Since the initial recovery work following the February 2011 earthquake, each of the subsequent five years has brought its own demands for Victim Support.

While the effect of the earthquakes is impossible to quantify, in Carlos’s view it has affected people more than they know. As well as post-traumatic stress, there are possible knock-on effects in areas like family violence, burglary, and assault. Another thing to consider is the way some people have been made more vulnerable to crime and other trauma by their changed living circumstances. Many people who have had to move out of their homes are still living in makeshift situations and even in their vehicles. “A number of cases don’t report their circumstances,” Carlos explained, “so the statistics are not necessarily accurate.”

Now, five years on, almost to the day, the sizable earthquake on Valentine’s Day has sent the people of Canterbury reeling again. Such events show how raw emotions still are.

Victim Support relies on community donations to keep its support of victims free of any charge. We are so grateful to The Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem, a chivalric, ecumenical Christian and charitable Order, that has pledged $30,000 over three years to Victim Support. The funds are to help the people of Canterbury as they continue to contend with the emotional and physical after-effects of the region’s natural disasters.

The 2016 Victim Support Lottery, one of our key fundraisers will be on sale in mid April.

There is an exciting line up of prizes, and we are once again delighted to have Honda New Zealand join us as principal partner to offer the incredibly stylish Honda HR-V SPORT as the first prize. This new vehicle from Honda is a 5-door crossover SUV – while the exterior echoes that of a coupe, it has the solid stance and visibility of an SUV. Loaded with luxury, the Honda HR-V SPORT is super stylish and would look terrific in your driveway!

As a major fundraiser for Victim Support, we want to sell as many tickets as possible. You can support us by buying tickets or even volunteer your time at a selling spot. If you are in touch with your local Victim Support office you can talk to the staff, or you can download a ticket order form from our website victimsupport.org.nz/victim-support-lottery/ or phone 0800 VS DONATE for more information. We are unable, by law, to sell tickets directly electronically.

Proceeds from the lottery will assist us to support victims of crime and trauma, free of charge, in communities around New Zealand.
Having moved to New Zealand from Germany 26 years ago, Miriam Uslar-Furkert is now at home in the outskirts of Palmerston North where she has been a volunteer Support Worker for the past two years, working on cases from Te Horo to Dannevirke and further afield when necessary. With a background in teaching and counselling, Miriam wanted to keep supporting people in her community – “especially victims and their families, whose stories can be left in the shadows because of high interest in offenders”.

Recently, Miriam has been using her native tongue in a case involving a German tourist who was a victim of aggravated robbery. She was asked to help the man, who had returned to Germany, to prepare a Victim Impact Statement at short notice. “I have also been helping the victim to access information and support which would be a lot more straightforward if he were living in New Zealand,” she explained.

Liaising with police, obtaining timely information, and negotiating post-sentencing issues like reparation all involve a raft of difficulties when the victim is overseas and translation issues are involved.

Miriam said she and the victim managed to overcome the frustrations of communicating long-distance, because they were both committed to getting the Victim Impact Statement right. Now, many long phone conversations later, Miriam is still the man’s chief support in New Zealand as the case continues post sentencing.

This support is, of course, practical – but it is also much more than that. “We make contact as the victim needs us. And “victims know they can contact us with questions at any time.”

After two years as a volunteer Support Worker, Miriam sees the importance of committed and well-trained staff Service Coordinators. “When there is an inevitable turnover of volunteers like myself, our Coordinators ensure the consistency of corporate knowledge that our service depends on.”

### Twenty-five years of service

Twenty-five years ago, a group of like-minded people sat around Colleen McLeod’s kitchen table in the small town of Hawera working out the founding policies and procedures of the fledgling Victim Support service. Talking to Colleen you can feel the energy of those early days – the “go ahead people” who were so determined to lobby, fundraise, sponsor and give their time to get something started for victims in the community. Help came from far and wide. Colleen recalls the importance of high-level backing within the police, but also the buzz of securing donations from local businesses and community groups.

Today, Colleen is well into her retirement after a varied career within and without Victim Support – and is one of our longest-serving volunteers. Asked about the secret of her longevity, she explained that she is always mindful of the importance of self-care and accepting personal limitation. “I’m there to empower our victims to take control of restoring their own lives,” she said. “It is never my story – it is always their story.”

One of those stories in particular stands out: the Waitotara floods of 2004. “This was a devastating time, but it also sparked this incredible cooperation between the local people and the organisations helping them. We were all working together, and our volunteers put in a total of 358 hours over a period of five days.” For Colleen, this is Victim Support at its best – working within a wider network to enact change. “The support and cooperation of other agencies is just vital.”

Another attribute Colleen particularly values is openness to change. And much has changed over the decades, from the days of carrying around new fangled mobile phones the size of bricks to the establishment of our telephone Contact Service – “which was just great” – and the nationalisation of the service in 2004.

More broadly, Colleen says there has been a sea change in the way that victims are thought of and treated. “In most areas there has been a trend toward more victim-focussed thinking. Now their rights are at the centre of police work rather than on the periphery.”

Finally, it is people who make Victim Support what it is and keep Colleen going as a volunteer after so many years. “It’s the passion and commitment of fellow volunteers and staff, our Board, and the guys and girls working at the Contact Service so you’re never alone, 24/7. But it’s also the victims – the amazing people you get to meet and who are willing to share their stories with you.”

If you are interested in volunteering with Victim Support, please call us on 0800 VOLUNTEER (0800 865 868)
Thanks to wonderful Westland women

A generous donation of just over $9,000 was made to Victim Support last year by the now disestablished Westland Branch of the National Council of Women. Much of the funding came from sales of the book *Women of Westland*, compiled by Westland Branch members.

Former member Yvonne Davison said there were three books in all, and in 1998 these were amalgamated into one omnibus edition.

At their final meeting Westland Branch members decided where the proceeds from the book and their other funds would be donated. “We wanted organisations that help women, and we chose Victim Support, Women’s Refuge and Plunket – and our funds were split equally between them,” Yvonne explained.

“I think Victim Support does great work and is so necessary. I personally make regular donations.”

Thank you Yvonne, and to all the past members of the Westland Branch!

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Yes!

Here is my donation to help victims of crime and trauma

| Value of donation | $100 | $75 | $50 | $25 | Other |

Gifts over $5 are tax deductible.

- **Cheque.** Made payable to Victim Support.
- **Credit card.** Please debit this amount to my credit card.
  - Mastercard
  - Visa
  - Amex

Name
Postal address
Phone
Postcode
Email

The Privacy Act of 1993 requires us to advise you that we keep contact information of supporters on file to help us with fundraising. If you do not wish us to keep your information, please let us know.

Donate via internet banking to: **BNZ 020500 0493163 00**
Please ensure that you use your details as reference along with the code NL0316, so that we may acknowledge your gift.

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Training is Key

Training is, of course, a vital element in Victim Support’s operation.

Our volunteer Support Workers must feel confident that they have the skills to be on the front line for victims in need. Our Learning and Development Manager, Nige Cox, is kept busy with volunteer and staff training with the assistance of two Learning and Development Advisors. All our personnel attend four days of initial training, and many volunteers go on to learn additional skills. Our Contact Service team also complete our training programme as they are the first point of contact for victims.

Over the past two years our success rates have been very good with four out of five new volunteers progressing on to become active Support Workers.

People volunteer for many reasons - not least to gain new skills, knowledge and experience. That’s guaranteed for our volunteer Support Workers - last year Victim Support ran 537 training sessions at numerous locations around the country, dedicated to 15 topics for 3500 course attendees!

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Facebook post gets us a twitter!

Within seconds of posting a request for volunteers on our Facebook page, a tweeted response flew in. Our message was:

Victim Support volunteers are very special. They’re everyday Kiwis who have chosen to be there for people faced with a difficult situation. We provide volunteers with the right training to be able to help people. Our training gives them the skills and knowledge to be able to deal with a variety of challenging situations.

Talk to someone about what volunteering for Victim Support is all about, call 0800 842 846 or visit www.victimsupport.org.nz/volunteer/

And the tweeted response was: “VS was amazing when I helped at a fatal crash, near Patumahoe. Would not have slept that night without their help!”

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