

Words From Survivors

A part of speaking in prisons is “therapy,” an enormous sense of healing for me. My voice is heard when, for so many years, I spoke only within my soul and nobody heard me. If I have impacted one person in 7 years, I have accomplished a huge part of what I have set out to do. There is no better feeling than walking away from a group of inmates after telling my story and one man or woman walking up to me and simply saying “thank you.” It makes every minute worth it.

—Child Sexual Assault Survivor

There are many, many inmates in the system who have no idea just what they have done and how the effects linger long after the crime has been committed. Going to the prisons and speaking helps me, as well. I get to vent. I have been told I need to talk about what happened in order to heal, but people around me have, frankly, heard enough. After all, I am supposed to be “past it” by now. I have chosen to try to help make a difference.

—Homicide and robbery survivor

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It went really well. They took my words and really held them in. They were really engaged and heard everything I had to say. I really think they understood, so I felt healing from it and I really think it’s a good thing for them.

—DUI Crash Survivor

When I speak it helps me to heal from the horrendous pain of losing my son. I also realize that when I can effectively change another person’s life while incarcerated, then maybe when they are released, they won’t continue on the same path they have been on. It works; maybe not with all inmates, but if it changes one, that will make our world a better and safer place for all of us.

—Homicide survivor

For videos about guest speaker experiences in VADOC’s Victim Impact program, please visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSwACLpupSE>

or

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jo8bqy3HgmY>

This project was supported by Grant Number 21-B4115VP19 awarded by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services with funds from the Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime, Victims of Crime Act.

Virginia Department of Corrections Victim and Survivor Guest Speaker Program



Victim Services Unit 1-800-560-4292

6900 Atmore Drive
Richmond, VA 23225

Office Hours:
8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Monday through Friday

Telephone: 804-674-3243
Toll Free: 800-560-4292
Fax: 804-674-3054

E-mail: victimservices@vadoc.virginia.gov
www.vadoc.virginia.gov

Why become a guest speaker?

- ◆ Speaking can empower you and give a voice to your experience. Many who choose to speak find it healing.
- ◆ Inmates and supervisees gain more from a guest speaker than they are able to through reading, discussing, or even watching videos. Hearing from a crime victim/survivor who took the time to come into the class to speak to them reaches them in a way other methods simply cannot.
- ◆ Speakers offer a personal and real education. Many participants have not considered the full impact of their actions on the victim/survivor, or the ripple effect of their crime.

****Please Note****

- ◆ **We will take care not to bring you into a facility or district in which the perpetrator in your case is located.**
- ◆ **We will not reveal your personal information, nor the identity of the perpetrator in your case.**
- ◆ **You will have staff support and will be accompanied at all times.**
- ◆ **Entering a prison facility will involve security screenings in advance and at the facility. This process varies from one facility to another. Our staff can provide further details.**

What opportunities are there for speaking?

- ◆ The *Victim Impact: Listen and Learn* program is a place where victim and survivor voices are needed to help inmates / probationers / parolees understand the true impact and “ripple effect” of their crimes on victims, survivors, and the community. The program seeks to make participants more aware of the impact of their crimes and encourages greater accountability for their actions. For more information on this program, please visit <https://www.ovcttac.gov/victimimpact/index.cfm>
- ◆ There are also opportunities to share your story at staff trainings and events. Whether staff are preparing to facilitate Victim Impact or are attending other training, guest speakers can assist staff in understanding an important perspective of crime and criminal justice.

How Can I Participate?

To apply to become a guest speaker, contact VADOC’s Victim Services Unit by calling **804-674-3243** or **1-800-560-4292**, or by emailing **VictimServices@vadoc.virginia.gov**

Is Guest Speaking Right For Me?

What are your reasons for wanting to speak? Can you focus on the harm and impact of the crime, without blaming or accusing the participants in the group? Will talking about it help or hinder your healing process? Our staff can discuss these questions with you.

What Should I Talk About?

Victim Impact: Listen and Learn focuses on four major impact areas of crime: ***Physical, Emotional, Financial, and Religious/Spiritual.*** Some speakers find it helpful to use this framework to discuss the many ways the crime has impacted their lives. Some will add additional sections that they feel are important. If you want to speak but aren’t sure where to start, our staff can help you develop a presentation.