



TVFV Speaker's Bureau
By Verna Wyatt

What Is A Speakers Bureau?

Tennessee Voices For Victims will collect and manage an active list of survivors of crime from across the State that agencies, the media, prisons and jails, and the legislature can inquire about. The list is not comprised of "victims" -- but "survivors", who are at a place in their healing where they are ready to take control of and share the dark event that invaded their life. They are ready to take something horrible that happened to them, that they were not able to control at the time, and make something positive come from that darkness. People on the Speakers Bureau are willing to share their personal story of victimization and survival to help people understand the crime. The Speakers Bureau is made up of all different kinds of crime survivors - domestic violence, stalking, rape, robbery, homicide, child abuse, child sexual abuse, etc.

Why Do We Have A Speakers Bureau?

It's been 21 years February 8th, that my sister-in-law Martha was raped and murdered, and I can still vividly remember the helpless feeling that covered me up for so long. It was just smothering. It was intense. It was constant pressure on my soul, constant anger, and constant bitterness. There was nothing I could do to change what happened, and that just fueled the helplessness even more. All crime victims experience this. How could you not? One day you are living life, and the next day, that life you were living, that you knew and loved, is completely devastated - and, it will never be the same. I can tell you from my own personal experience, and from working with survivors the last 21 years that taking your power back *is* possible. It is also rewarding. One of the best ways to get your power back is to use your voice. The first time I shared my personal story about Martha's murder was in front of a classroom of 11th graders who were studying the justice system. I remember crying all the way home after speaking; I could hardly see to drive because of the tears. Yes, sharing your story brings up all the sad emotions that you want so desperately to put away. But, the power that comes from sharing your story, for making it real, for giving it voice, is very therapeutic. Add to that the concept that if your truth touches just one person to prevent a crime, or to help another victim, it makes your crime a little less senseless. That's taking your darkness and bringing light from it. That's power. And, that is why Tennessee Voices For Victims is working to create a Speakers Bureau of survivors all across the State. We want victims of crime to become "victors." We also want to prevent crime, and to help identify victims so they can get the appropriate help they need in working through their victimization. What better expert is there about crime, than someone who has lived through a victimization to tell his or her story?

Where Would Speakers Be Used?

There are always opportunities for the voice of the crime survivor to be heard.

1. **In the communities.** Agencies all across Tennessee who raise awareness about crime for prevention efforts, or to identify victims to serve, often plan and conduct community programs where a survivor would be a tremendous help on the program.
2. **In the media.** Often times, when a crime happens in a community, the media wants to interview someone who has had that same experience to better get their story's point across. Again, the media is looking for the "expert". A survivor who is able to talk about his or her own experience and articulate their survival process can raise a tremendous amount of awareness from just one television or radio interview.
3. **At the Legislature.** Many times when lawmakers are considering legislation that is crime/justice related, they would like to hear from survivors of the crime they are looking at. They want to hear from the true expert to help them shape the legislation.
4. **In the prisons and jails.** Please don't stop reading! Yes, in prisons and jails! There is a movement across the nation, (and Tennessee is becoming a leader in the nation); to have victims share their personal story of victimization to incarcerated inmates in victim impact classes. These classes are designed to get the offender to understand the impact their actions had on their victims. We have been facilitating weekly classes for 7 years, and we've had scores of victims come into the prison and share their stories with incarcerated men and women. Survivors of all kinds of crime, even the most personal like rape and child sexual abuse, and not one time in 7 years have we had a survivor say it was not a good thing. In fact, they have always agreed to come back and share again. The survivor gets power from "telling" and the offender receives new insight from the telling. For more information on this project, go to the tab on our website designated for victim impact.
5. **Person to person.** There are so many victims who are struggling to become survivors. They suffer through the court system, they suffer through the prison term, they suffer through the appeals, they suffer through the parole hearings. Sometimes, these victims need to talk personally to someone who has gone through what they are going through.

Are you interested in being added to the speakers bureau list?

You can sign up for our speaker's bureau at <http://tnvoicesforvictims.org/education/speakers-bureau/> or contact us by email at info@tnvoicesforvictims.org. We will contact you to talk about what level of participation you would like to do.