

# OUR PROUD HISTORY

With roots dating as far back as 1926 and a formal history beginning in 1972 Victim Assistance Program's success has been the product of its staff, board, and community goodwill.



1926

In 1926, Reverend Bill Denton began what might be called an unorthodox ministry to reach people in need. It was shaped neither in the form of the institutional church nor the traditional structure of a rescue mission.

The Furnace Street Mission operated a boy's halfway house, summer camps for kids on the streets and provided food and clothing during the depression. It also created what is now the oldest religious radio broadcast in the nation.

1960s

Throughout the 1960's, Furnace Street Mission focused on building a halfway house for up to 70 residents. From that experience, it recognized that something was missing from the correctional programs – a sense of remorse for the damage done to another person.

Our community provided 35 free services for offenders and nothing for victims.

Robert Denton, a PH.D student, presented an idea to Dr. Arthur Blum at the School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University.

The soon to be Dr. Denton used his doctoral coursework to build the infrastructure including policies, services, research/evaluation and crisis intervention.

Dr. Blum's subsequent help enabled Victim Assistance Program to lay the early foundation of the program with a sound social science base of operation rather than just a well-intentioned "grass-roots" attempt.

1970s

In 1972, Capt. John Cunningham, Chairman of the Board; Stella Long, Supervisor, Adult Probation Department, Common Pleas Court; the late Richard Kinsinger, Chief Probation Officer, Common Pleas Court; and the Director, Robert Denton, Victim Assistance Program reviewed several brutal crimes in the Akron area committed by early-release offenders from prison. These cases crystallized the early workings of informal crisis intervention and led to the establishment of a program known as Victim Assistance.

One hundred and three victims were referred to the program by the Akron Police Department during the first year of operation. Advocates responded to the scene of the crime to provide crisis intervention and provided support on the crisis hotline. Eager to advance victims' rights, Victim Assistance Program spent the next few years identifying the needs of the community while also paving the way and advocating for victim compensation legislation on the state level.

Victim Assistance Program's first response to the community's need occurred in 1976 with the opening of a domestic violence shelter. Women and children were sheltered at 150 Furnace Street in Akron which is the current home of the agency's administration building.

80s-90s

The domestic violence shelter remained a place of refuge for victims until 1985 when Battered Women's Shelter opened a new shelter. At this time, Victim Assistance Program shifted its efforts to assist the judicial system.

First, Victim Assistance Program created the Time Out Program, a batterers intervention program that accepted participants who were court ordered by the Akron Municipal Court to attend an educational program about the cause and effects of domestic violence. Secondly, Victim assistance created a supervised visitation program at the bequest of the Domestic Relations Court. Finally, services expanded to the Summit County Juvenile Court which became home to a victim advocate dedicated to assisting victims of youth violence.

In 1992, funding permitted the hiring of additional community advocates to meet the increasing needs of victims whose cases had not reached the judicial system. The following year, the Akron Police Department gifted the agency an office in their detective bureau which is still used by advocates today.

Community awareness became an important aspect of advocating for victims. In 1990, the agency hosted its first Victim Rights Week annual luncheon and vigil to commemorate the nation's celebration of victims' rights. Next, Victim Assistance created the Angel Tree Ceremony in 1994 to memorialize Summit County victims who have lost their lives to homicide.

It was evident that Victim Assistance Program was becoming a staple in the community. In 1994, Victim Assistance applied for and was granted their own 501(c)(3) nonprofit status which initiated the formal separation of The Furnace Street Mission.

The first program expansion after becoming a nonprofit included four support groups to adult and youth victims of crime.

2000s

The turn of the century brought with it a focus on the silent victims, children impacted by violence. In 2003, Victim Assistance Program, Battered Women's Shelter and Children's Hospital embarked on a collaborative initiative by implementing the Children Who Witness Violence Program. The following year, Children's Hospital opened a new unit known as the Child Advocacy Center which provided forensic exams and interviews to child victims. Victim Assistance Program stationed an advocate in the unit to provide crisis intervention to the non-offending guardian while the exams were taking place.

In 2004, Victim Assistance Program began offering counseling services to victims of crime and trauma.

By 2006, Victim Assistance Program staff grew to 21 employees however addition support was required to meet the needs of victims. The Juvenile Court requested advocacy support for victims completing victim impact statements and the Summit County Sheriff's Department requested an advocate to work in their administration office. Due to the work load, Victim Assistance Program began accepting interns from the University of Akron to help with the statements. This began the formalization of the agency's intern program.

Today

In 2013, the agency's founder, Dr. Robert Denton stepped down as Executive Director after 40 years of service to victims. New leadership has maintained the vision and mission of the agency and continued to pave the path that was created so many years ago. The agency's tradition of responding to the needs of victims in the community can be seen under new leadership.

The first initiative of expansion was the implementation of the AmeriCorps volunteers who were charged with identifying the scope of human trafficking in Ohio. This project cemented the creation of the Summit County Collaborative Against Human Trafficking.

In 2014, Victim Assistance hosted its first Victim Assistance Academy 40-hour training which soon became a certified training by the National Organization for Victim Assistance. Attendance of the 40-hour academy is required of all staff and interns however it is opened to the community for a fee. The academy has evolved into monthly workshops, as well as online and onsite training for professionals.

In 2015, six additional staff were hired to meet the growing needs of victims in the community. Battered Women's Shelter and Victim Assistance Program restructured services to ensure all aspects of the courts were provided with unduplicated support. A year later, Victim Assistance Program partnered with Cleveland Clinic Akron General. Victim Assistance Program responds to patients presenting as victims of domestic violence, human trafficking and elder abuse. Secondly, Stow Municipal Court gifted the agency an office to allow a dedicated advocate to work with victims receiving services at the Stow Municipal Courthouse.

2017 focused on what the agency does best, crisis intervention. A decision to eliminate the counseling program was made to devote all resources to non-clinical crisis intervention and education services.