

Belknap County Collaboration Creates Victim Restitution Fund

LACONIA: Victims of juvenile crime in Belknap County may have a shorter wait to be reimbursed for offenses committed against them, now that Belknap County has a Victim Restitution Fund. Initiated by Laconia Police Department Juvenile Officer, Tom Swett, and Laconia City Prosecutor, Jim Sawyer, this new fund is dedicated to assisting crime victims and is the result of collaborative planning with Youth Services Bureau and Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families.

As Officer Swett explains, “In the past, victims have often been left out of the restorative process because the attention and focus has been on the juvenile offender and the long court procedures involved. Many months can go by before the victim’s loss is acknowledged.” He explains that victims will be eligible for up to \$250. in compensation through an application process that is facilitated by a designated agency shortly after the offense has occurred.

Alan Robichaud, Executive Director of the Citizens Council, the county department tasked with promoting community and restorative justice principles throughout the county, says, “Balanced restorative justice means supporting victims of crime and meeting their needs with as much energy as has always been devoted to the offender.”

The Fund has already received donations from the Laconia Police Officer’s Union and the Laconia Police Relief Association and will be replenished on an on-going basis by the juvenile offenders as part of their restorative contracts with the community. Youth Services Bureau in Laconia is the fiscal agent and will process requests for reimbursements that have been vetted by the Balanced and Restorative Justice Workgroup of the Citizens Council. Swett and

those working with the Belknap County Citizens Council are encouraging police relief associations throughout the county and others to contribute to this revolving fund.

Those requesting reimbursement funds on behalf of victims of juvenile crime will attend a mandatory informational training session in mid-November that will be offered by the originators of this new Restitution Fund.

This new Fund is just “one of a number of new programs and procedures now being developed by the Council’s Juvenile Justice Advisory Council to support victims,” notes Robichaud. The Council is also planning a countywide observance of National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, April 23-29, 2006.

Robichaud explains that Restorative Justice means attention and resources are placed equally in three areas - rehabilitating the offender, supporting the victim, and preserving the safety of the community. “It’s a three-legged stool, and if one leg is not there...the stool tips over.”

For more information about the Victim Restitution Fund, one may call the Citizens Council at 528-3185 or visit the Council’s website, www.bccj.org