

## **Defense-Initiated Victim Outreach**

Defense-Initiated Victim Outreach (DIVO) is a federal and state program that seeks to address distinctive needs of victim survivors throughout the justice process by providing a link between the survivors and the defense attorney or defense team, especially in capital cases. DIVO utilizes specially trained Victim Outreach Specialists (VOS) who operate independently of the defense but who, at the request of the defense work with survivor families to identify questions, concerns and needs that can be uniquely addressed by the defense and communicates those issues to them. Through the VOS the defense has an opportunity to respond without compromising the due process rights of their client.

The purpose of this program is to reduce the harm that criminal justice proceedings may inadvertently and unnecessarily inflict on survivor families or in non-homicide crimes, on the survivors themselves. Access to the defense may help address survivor needs for information, empowerment and control—needs often not met by the criminal justice process. In addition it can serve as a means for the defense to relate to survivors with respect and compassion, a statutory or constitutional mandate in most states. It may also reduce tension levels between the survivor family and defense counsel, a benefit to all parties. The program is completely voluntary for both defense to initiate and for victim survivors to participate. Rigorous principles of practice and a VOS code of ethics assure the program's integrity and victim-centered focus.

In Texas DIVO is coordinated through the Institute for Restorative Justice & Restorative Dialogue (IRJRD) at The University of Texas at Austin – a non-aligned academic institution. Initial funding for DIVO was provided by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), a component of the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), U.S. Department of Justice through grant number 2009-CP-BX-0001.

For more information about DIVO and for training and information material, visit [www.irjrd.org](http://www.irjrd.org) or e-mail [divo@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:divo@austin.utexas.edu).