

SYSTEMSTATS

North Carolina Criminal Justice Analysis Center

Governor's Crime Commission

Assessing the Needs of Crime Victims' Basic Service Providers

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Introduction/Study Rationale

The primary mission of the Crime Victims' Services Committee of the North Carolina Governor's Crime Commission is to advocate for victims by promoting the development of effective programs that improve the response of human service professionals and the criminal justice system to crime victims. This report presents the findings of a statewide survey administered to those agencies in North Carolina who provide basic services for crime victims. The results of this study/needs assessment will enhance the work of the committee by providing them with current data, critical and timely input from local practitioners who work in both rural and urban areas, identifying needs or gaps in services as well as emerging ideas for the future.

Specifically, the use of data driven decision making will allow the committee to develop grant funding priorities which are directly tied to the voices from the field, facilitate more informed policy and program development, formulate legislative agenda items which truly emanate from local constituents and

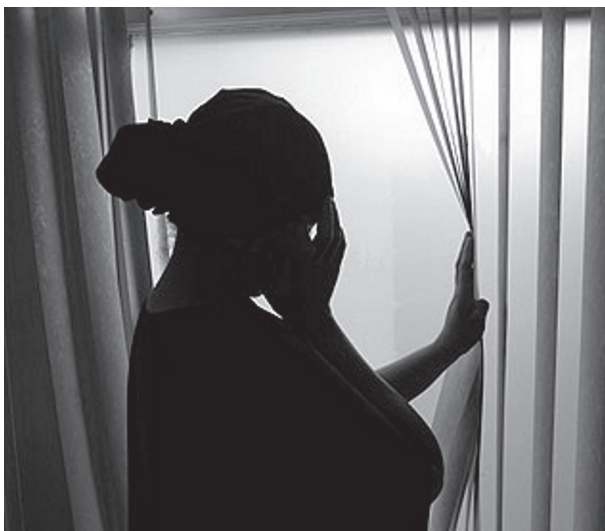
result in significant improvements for both statewide and local or regional planning initiatives.

Ultimately, data driven planning will significantly improve the work of not only the committee but also the work of the state's service providers and consequently better assist those individuals who become victims of crime.

Methodology

A 45-item questionnaire was developed with respondents being asked a variety of yes-no questions as well as open ended questions where they were encouraged to elaborate or comment further on their original responses. Procedural questions addressed mental health and drug screening at the time of shelter admission, the existence and extent of collaborative mental health partnerships, direct service provision for children, counseling services and the ability to provide services for non-English speaking victims. Questions on other organizational features included those addressing the use of employee background checks, victim follow-up interviews and operational bed space. The respondents were also asked to elucidate the extent to which a variety of services or programmatic issues were needed at their facility. Examples of these 15 questions, which were posed on a continuum or Likert type scale ranging from 'No Need' to 'Great Need', included program sustainability and staffing, bilingual services, shelter security, accessible transportation and transitional housing.

Every agency providing basic victims services in North Carolina received a letter outlining the purpose of the needs assessment and a link to the automated survey questionnaire on the GCC Web site. Of the 81 programs surveyed, 24 completed and returned the survey for a study response rate of 29.6 percent.



Results

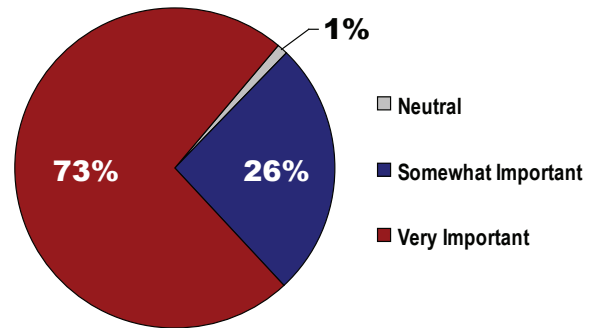
Respondents were queried about the use of screening tests or procedures which their shelters or agencies utilized when admitting new clientele. Twenty-three survey participants completed this question with 16 (69.5%) answering in the affirmative that screenings are conducted by their respective organizations. Of the 16 shelters that conduct screenings, nine (56.3%) offer mental health screenings, eight (50%) offer drug or alcohol screenings while seven (43.8%) offer both types of screening during the admissions process. Several respondents noted that their shelters screen for other issues such as danger or risk assessments, post traumatic stress disorder and mental health diagnoses for minor children who accompany the victim.

In order to gather more information about collaborative efforts across the state between shelter staff and mental health professionals the survey respondents were asked to elucidate the extent of their involvement in this type of relationship. Of those completing this section of the questionnaire eight (34.8%) participants noted that their agency does employ a licensed mental health professional while 15 (65.2%) do not employ licensed professionals.

Of those agencies that do not retain a licensed provider on staff, referrals to local management entities, or LMEs, and mental health hospitals or facilities were the most common form of reported collaboration with 16 (72.7%) respondents suggesting that their agency does have a collaborative partnership with either a regional LME and/or a local provider. However, only five (31.3%) of these agencies have a formal memorandum of agreement



Figure 1: How important is your mental health partnership?



or understanding with the LME or service provider. Contracting for mental health service provision and mobile crisis units were also described as being a vital component of the shelters' collaborative efforts in this area. In total, over 90 percent of the surveyed shelter staff did note that their respective agencies have access to some form of mental health services within their jurisdiction and as Figure 1 reveals 26 percent felt that these collaborative endeavors were somewhat important while 73 percent noted that this collaboration is very important for their agency and its clientele.

The Crime Victims' Services Committee has prioritized the importance of addressing the needs of minor children who witness and/or experience violence for several years now. Consequently, the survey included questions in this area to further guide this group in its planning and policy development work. More than half (54.2%) of the respondents reported that their agency does provide direct services to children on site. These services include the provision of food, shelter and clothing, offering group support and individualized counseling, basic child care in the victims' absence and play therapy.

The shelters were evenly split with 50 percent of the participants noting that their respective agency does inquire about health insurance for the children while the other half do not.

Of the 11 survey participants whose agencies do not currently offer direct and on-site services to children, all of these agencies reported that they nonetheless do make referrals for service provision by another organization which is typically a local LME or child abuse counseling center.

Assessing the Needs of Crime Victims' Basic Service Providers

Seventy-five percent of the surveyed shelter staff noted that counseling services are provided at their facilities; however only 10 (55.6%) shelters offer counseling by a certified or licensed practitioner. These practitioners are typically licensed clinical social workers or certified through the state as rape crisis counselors and/or have completed training sessions offered by the coalitions.

An overwhelming majority of those surveyed (95.8%) reported that their programs do have the capability to provide services to victims who possess limited English proficiency. Respondents were also asked to report the number of these victims that they have served during the last 12 months. A total of 566 victims with limited English proficiencies were served during the past year by the 23 responding shelters who offer this type of service provision. The number served at each shelter ranged from zero to a sample high of 150 victims with the typical program serving an annual average of 24 victims.

Respondents were asked to comment on bed space restrictions; i.e. they were specifically asked if their shelter had a maximum number of beds which were directly reserved for out-of-county victims. Ninety-five percent of the programs do not have a maximum number of beds for out-of-county victims while only one program does indeed have this restriction or a set limit or specified maximum number of beds for non-county residents.

The importance of maintaining contact with victims who leave the shelter and/or received prior services was reiterated as 22 (91.7%) of these shelters do conduct some form of follow-up after the victim has left the program.

Twenty-one of the 24 survey participants (87.5%) reported that their agencies are now conducting background checks on employees and/or volunteers. Seven (one-third) of those agencies that do these checks obtain criminal history records from the local clerk of court or courthouse personnel. Four agencies (19%) use Internet based companies to run these criminal histories while other shelters obtain this data from the local law enforcement agency. Sixty-six percent of these agencies reported that costs were associated or incurred for obtaining background checks on staff and/or volunteers.

The second part of the survey involved the identification of barriers or obstacles to more effective and efficient service delivery with the survey participants being asked to comment on 15 commonly recognized issues that have the potential to negatively affect or prevent and impede basic service provision to crime victims. Response sets were phrased to allow the participants to select the extent of need for each item ranging from 'no need' to 'great need'. The following section and figures outline this portion of the needs assessment.

As Figure 2 depicts, program sustainability is a concern for the majority of the respondents with 22

Figure 2: Needs Assessment Ratings

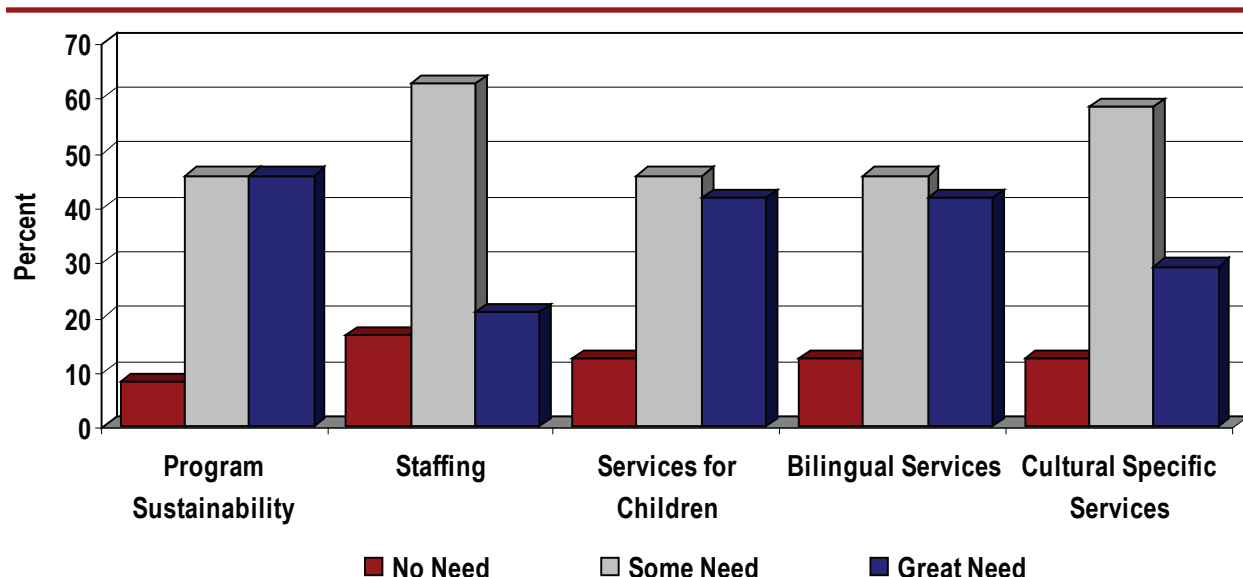
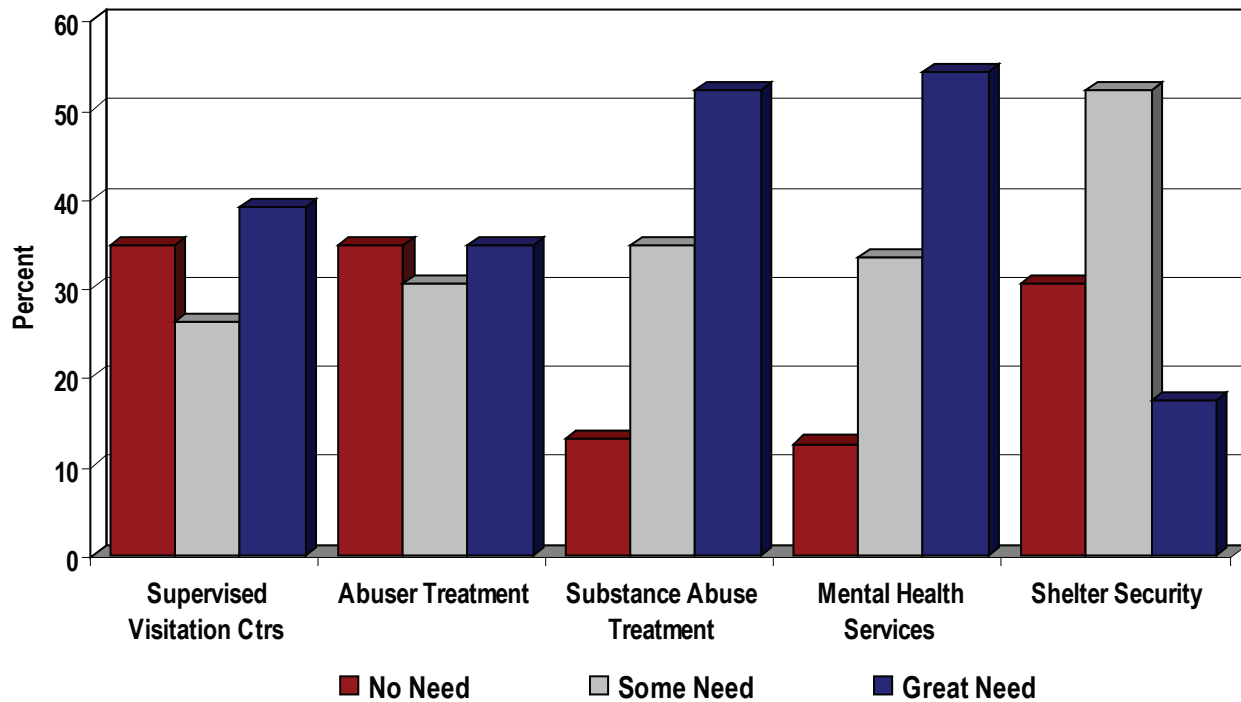


Figure 3: Needs Assessment Ratings



(91.6%) of the 24 program staff noting that there was either some need or a great need for work to be completed which would help their respective programs become permanent or institutionalized in the local community. Twenty of the respondents (83.3%) expressed needs for program staffing improvements with 62 percent stating there was some need while 21 percent noted a great need in this area. A comparable percentage of the survey participants noted the need for increased services for children with an equal number of respondents expressing the need for more bilingual services. The need for

culturally specific or culturally sensitive services was also apparent as 21 (87.5%) respondents selected either the some need (58.3%) item or the great need (29.2%) item.

Of the five issues listed in Figure 3 the greatest needs of the shelters included more access to mental health services for their clients (54.2%) and more access to substance abuse treatment (52.2%). Slightly more than 30 percent of these respondents noted at least some need for access to these two service types. Needs were also expressed for the remaining three issues but at a lower rate than for mental health and substance abuse treatment. The need for supervised visitation centers was apparent with 26 percent noting at least some needs in this area while 39 percent expressed a great level of need for these visitation centers. Sixty-five percent of the participants expressed the need for abuser treatment programs with 30 percent noting some need for this service and an additional 35 percent noting a great level of need for abuser treatment. Shelter security was not a need or issue for approximately one out of three respondents while the remaining participants suggested either some need for increased security (52.2%) or a greater need (17.4%).



Figure 4: Needs Assessment Ratings

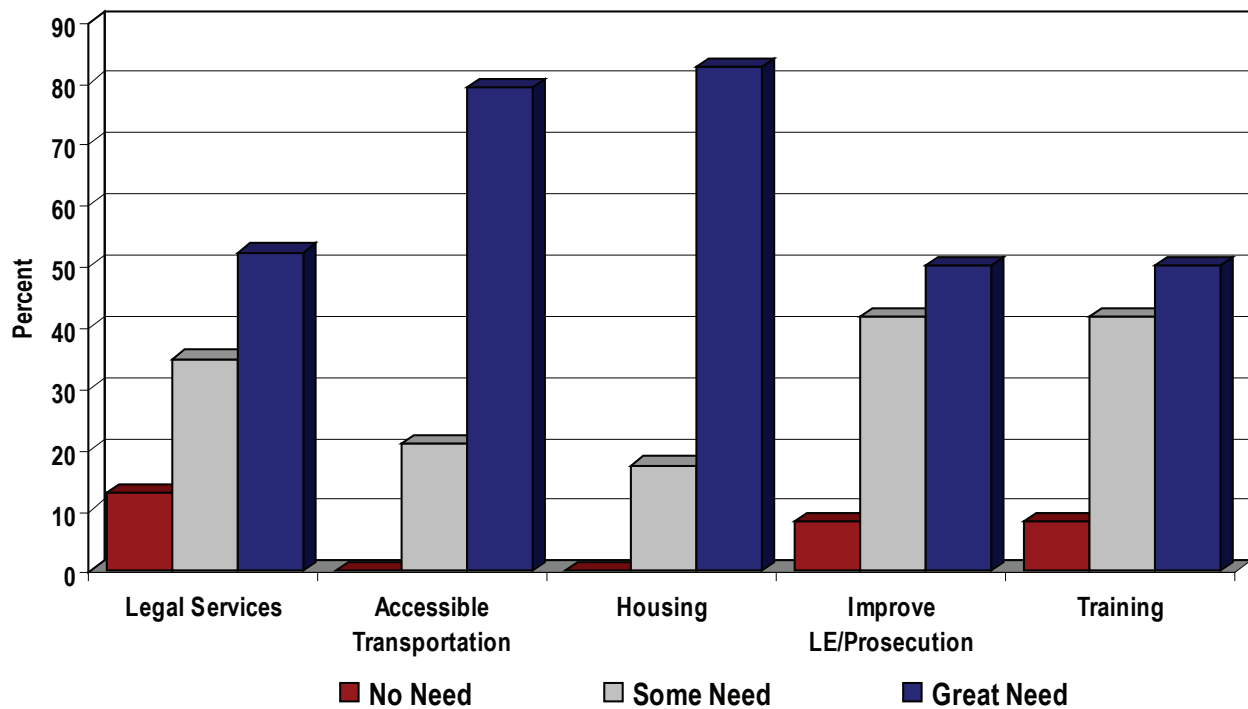


Figure 4 depicts the level of need for legal services, accessible transportation, affordable or transitional housing, improving local law enforcement and/or prosecution and training.

As the figure clearly shows there is a substantially great need for improving access to transportation and for affordable and/or transitional housing as documented by the fact that over 75 percent of the respondents reported great needs in these areas with the remaining respondents reporting at least some need. None of the survey participants stated that there were no needs for affordable/transitional housing and accessible transportation. In a similar vein, over 90 percent reported a need for improved law enforcement and/or prosecution and for criminal justice system training. A slightly lower 87 percent noted some level of need in the area of legal services.

The following table presents a rank ordering, for the 15 system attributes and critical issues outlined in the survey, based upon the percentage of respondents expressing either a great level of need or at least some need.

Table 1: Percentage of Respondents Expressing Either Some Need or Great Need by System Attribute or Critical Issue

Attribute/Issue	Percent
Accessible Transportation	100.0
Affordable and/or Transitional Housing	100.0
Improve Law Enforcement/Prosecution	91.7
Training	91.7
Program Sustainability	91.6
Services for Children	87.5
Bilingual Services	87.5
Culturally Sensitive Services	87.5
Access to Mental Health Services	87.5
Access to Substance Abuse Treatment	87.0
Legal Services	87.0
Program Staffing	83.3
Shelter Security	69.6
Abuser Treatment	65.2
Supervised Visitation Centers	65.2

Discussion, Policy Recommendations and Implications

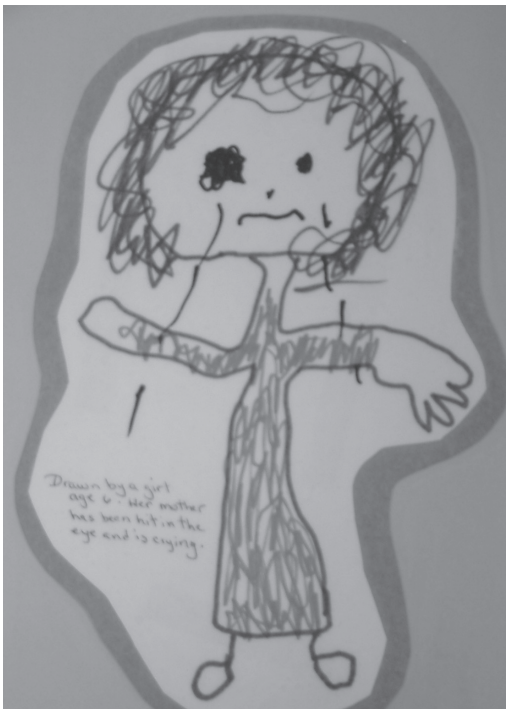
Survey results indicate that while the shelters provide a vital service for the community several areas should be scrutinized in more detail as significant needs were identified by the respondents. Only slightly more than half of these programs currently offer mental health and substance abuse screenings for incoming victims and an even lower percentage offer both types of screening. A large percentage of the survey respondents noted that their programs are involved in beneficial collaborative partnerships with mental health providers; however a much smaller percentage employ licensed mental health professionals and have active 'Memoranda of Understanding' in place to ensure a more formal and professionally operated partnership.

The percentage of programs offering on-site direct services for children was also slightly more than half and suggests that more programming be developed and implemented within the shelter itself. Also, the need for more licensed counselors should be addressed and considered as only 55 percent of the responding programs have certified or licensed specialists available to offer counseling services.

The most significant gaps in service that emerged from the study were a lack of access to transportation and affordable/transitional housing; every respondent noted some level of improvement needed in these areas. A high percentage also noted a need for improved law enforcement/prosecution responses, training for members of the criminal justice system as well as more guidance or assistance with planning for program sustainability.

Other areas of need that should be investigated further and require more planning and policy development include access to mental health and substance abuse treatment, services for children and more bilingual and culturally sensitive programming.

Despite a lower survey return rate it is anticipated that these findings will stimulate much debate and spark more directed discussions and open communication about the identified areas of need and system weaknesses. As federal funding declines, or remains level, data driven decision making becomes tantamount and critical for allocating limited resources in the best manner possible in order to ensure a more effective and efficient targeting of funding and improved service delivery.



Note: In order to protect the identities of victims, images used in this publication do not illustrate facilities within North Carolina.

The Governor's Crime Commission was established in 1977 by the North Carolina General Assembly under G.S. 143B-479. Its primary duty is "to be the chief advisory body to the Governor and the Secretary of the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety for the development and implementation of criminal justice policy." The Crime Commission is always open to comments and suggestions from the public as well as criminal justice officials. Please contact us and let us know your thoughts and feelings on the information contained in this publication or on any other criminal justice issue of concern to you.

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