

NATIONAL JUVENILE JUSTICE NETWORK

Fact Sheet

USING VICTIMS OF CRIME ACT DOLLARS FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

June 2019

In 1984, Congress passed the [Victims of Crime Act \(VOCA\)](#), which established the [Crime Victims Fund](#) to allocate funding for crime victims' compensation and victims' services. The fund is financed solely through fines and penalties paid by people convicted of federal offenses; no taxes are used to support the Crime Victims Fund. When the fund was first established, Congress placed a cap on it to ensure the funds would not be depleted; over time, because of the rise of corporate criminal penalties, the funds grew exponentially. In 2018, the VOCA fund was over \$12 billion. Congress partially lifted the cap three years ago giving states an influx of money to put towards victims' services and programs. Soon after this lift, in August of 2016, the Administration released new, more flexible, regulations governing the use of these dollars.

Since 2016, many states have begun expanding the use of their VOCA funds to meet the needs of underserved victims. Tennessee, in particular, has been very successful in using VOCA funding for innovative programs, such as restorative justice, that help victims as well as at-risk and justice involved youth. This publication will give you some ideas on where to get started in influencing how VOCA funds are spent and describe three ways that Tennessee has modeled the use of VOCA funding to help youth and young adults.

Influencing VOCA Funding

Here are some first steps to take to begin to navigate this issue:

- **Become familiar with the VOCA statute which you can find [here](#).**
- **Get to know your VOCA Administrator**
VOCA Administrators have a great deal of leeway in how the dollars are used. [This link](#) provides a list of all the state VOCA Administrative agencies. Contact them to find out information on their funding process, such as how they determine priorities. Then choose a good messenger to build a relationship with that agency.

- **Learn about your state VOCA funding**

See [this chart](#) to learn how much VOCA funding your state has received in the past and ask your state VOCA Administrator to see their strategic plan and find out how they have distributed funding previously. See [this publication](#) for information on how some states have used VOCA funding in the past.

- **Review [Vision 21](#) website**

The Vision 21 Initiative was a comprehensive assessment of the victim assistance field coordinated by the federal government's Office for Victims of Crime beginning in 2010. It led to the development of a strategic plan which has served as the framework for funding priorities.

VOCA Supported Programs in Tennessee

The Office of Criminal Justice Programs (OJCP) in Tennessee distributes their VOCA dollars. Below we have listed programs that OJCP is currently providing VOCA funding for, including funds for project personnel (mediators, coordinators, advocates and administrative oversight), trainings, and project supplies. Previous programs that received VOCA funds included one that worked with children referred by schools, the police, and courts, to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline through activities such as emotional trauma care, violence interruption, and community conferencing and circles.

Nashville Conflict Resolution Center

The Nashville Conflict Resolution Center (NCRC) works with 8-18 -year- olds referred by juvenile courts, police, and schools for violent offenses such as neighborhood fights or bullying. The Center focuses its efforts on youth from structurally disadvantaged neighborhoods characterized by high rates of poverty, violence, and incarceration. The Center's mission is to resolve conflict and empower individuals through mediation by decreasing school expulsion and juvenile justice involvement. The NCRC helps youth develop skills, de-escalate violence, develop positive senses of community, and successfully complete school. NCRC fosters resilience and accountability in their youth participants.

Raphah Institute

The Raphah Institute works to empower people and communities to recover from trauma by creating education, advocacy, and treatment systems that heal through a restorative justice lens. They work with youth who have committed home burglaries and car theft. In this program, all parties of the crime are referred to the institute for voluntary participation and restorative community conferencing.

You Have the Power - Know How to Use it.

You Have the Power - Know How to Use it is a young adult curriculum project that focuses on victims who have committed crimes. These individuals have recently offended but have a history of victimization and usually come from neighborhoods with low to mid-level income and high crime and violence rates. The curriculum is a highly interactive, eight-week program that helps youth who have committed crimes and are also victims. They are taught to empower themselves to evaluate cultural norms, accepted labels, communicate effectively, and understand the impact of their experiences, actions, and ACES (adverse childhood experiences). You Have the Power - Know How to Use it works to get youth back on track.

Conclusion

With the updated guidelines in 2016 that expanded its allowable uses, VOCA money can now reach more people. In addition to numerous other uses, these dollars can be put towards services for youth who are at-risk or justice system involved, incarcerated youth, children exposed to violence, and for restorative justice programming. VOCA is a large source of funding that justice advocates should consider accessing in order to better serve vulnerable youth.

For Further Information

General Information

- NJJN's [Crime Victims Fund: A Primer for Youth Justice Advocates](#) fact sheet
- [Vision 21 website](#)
- Office of Victims of Crime Factsheet, "[Crime Victims Fund](#)"
- [National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators](#)
- [Making Restorative Justice Transformative: Ten Key Questions](#)
- [Restorative Justice and VOCA Webinar](#)

Tennessee Information and Programs

- [Tennessee Grant Solicitation Packet](#)
- [Nashville Conflict Resolution Center](#)
- [Raphah Institute](#)
- [You Have the Power- Know How to Use It](#)