



Gage County Victim Assistance Program

About the Program

Established in 1995, the Gage County Victim Assistance Program has been dedicated to supporting crime victims throughout Gage County. The program operates through the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant funding, as well as in-kind and cash contributions from the City of Beatrice and Gage County.

Our Mission

The Gage County Victim Assistance Program is a free public service that provides information, practical assistance, and crisis intervention to victims of crime. Victims not only experience physical harm but also endure emotional and financial hardships, including lost wages, medical expenses, and property damage. Many victims struggle with anger, guilt, confusion, and frustration with the complexities of the criminal justice system.

Our mission is to ensure that victims' rights are upheld while offering guidance, support, and advocacy throughout the legal process. We provide case updates, assistance with compensation applications, and emotional support, always treating victims with dignity, compassion, and empowerment. The criminal justice system is designed to bring justice and relief, but its process is often lengthy and complex. Our office is committed to helping victims navigate each step, ensuring they receive the information, resources, and support they need.

Services Provided

The Victim Assistance Coordinator is responsible for direct victim services, advocacy, and administrative oversight. Daily responsibilities include:

- Making initial contact with victims and providing case updates
- Assisting with State Crime Victims' Compensation applications
- Helping victims complete their Victim Impact Statements (VIS)
- Acting as a liaison between victims and prosecutors
- Attending pre-trial meetings and providing court/law enforcement accompaniment
- Connecting victims with community resources and services
- Assisting with protection orders and follow-up contacts
- Addressing questions and concerns about the criminal justice process

Additionally, the Victim Assistance Coordinator manages collaborations with partner agencies, grant writing, and all required financial and statistical reporting for VOCA funding.

With the loss of the Assistant Victim Advocate position due to funding reductions, the program continues to adapt to ensure that victims in Gage County receive the highest level of support possible.



The Victim Assistance Coordinator, Chevis Epp, has been serving Gage County crime victims since April 2021, following the retirement of the previous coordinator after 20 years of service. With over 15 years of experience in victim advocacy, she specializes in supporting survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, child welfare, and juvenile justice. She also has extensive experience in diversity and equity work, child abuse prevention, and is a certified Mental Health First Aid trainer. Chevis holds a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice with a minor in Psychology and an emphasis in Counseling.

The Gage County Victim Assistance Program faced a significant loss on November 30, 2023, when the Assistant Victim Advocate position, held by Marty Seymour since December 1, 2016, was eliminated due to a statewide reduction in Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant funding. Since its inception in 1995, the program has relied on VOCA funding to provide critical services to crime victims in Gage County. Losing an advocate has placed an increased strain on the remaining staff, reducing the program's capacity to offer essential support to victims navigating the aftermath of trauma and crime.

The funding crisis has only deepened in the current grant cycle. In the first year, Nebraska experienced a 40% reduction in VOCA funds, and in year two, that shortage increased to 60%. Despite these drastic cuts, the Gage County Victim Assistance Program was fortunate to receive its fully awarded amount in year two, allowing it to continue serving victims without further reductions. However, the ongoing decline in VOCA funding across the state remains a significant concern, as the demand for services far exceeds the available resources.

To help ease the burden on the Victim Assistance Coordinator, who is now solely responsible for running the program, the City of Beatrice brought on Sue Sullivan in a part-time capacity to assist with non-direct tasks such as record-keeping. Her position, not funded by the VOCA grant, was implemented to provide administrative support and help close out the grant year efficiently. While this assistance alleviates some workload pressures, the absence of a second advocate continues to impact the program's ability to provide direct services to victims in need.

Gage County Victim Assistance Program: Services & Community Partnerships

24/7 Availability & Law Enforcement Collaboration

The Gage County Victim Assistance Program is available 24/7 to support crime victims and assist law enforcement when called upon by the shift supervisor. The program works closely with the Beatrice Police Department, Gage County Sheriff's Department, Wymore Police Department, Nebraska State Patrol, and the Gage County Attorney's Office to ensure victims receive timely and effective assistance.

Comprehensive Victim Services

The program provides a wide range of services to all crime victims in Gage County, including but not limited to:

- **Crisis Intervention** – Immediate emotional support for victims in crisis

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- **Personal Advocacy** – Assistance with navigating victim rights and available resources
 - **Criminal Justice Advocacy** – Guidance and support throughout the legal process
 - **Protection Order Assistance** – Help with filing and understanding protection orders
 - **Property Release** – Coordination with law enforcement for property retrieval
 - **Restitution Assistance** – Helping victims seek financial reimbursement
 - **911 Cellular Phones** – Providing emergency phones for victims in need
 - **Safety Planning** – Developing personalized plans to enhance victim safety
 - **Transportation Assistance** – Helping victims access services and court proceedings
 - **Parole Information** – Updates on offender release and parole hearings
 - **Victim Impact Statement Assistance** – Helping victims express how the crime has affected them
 - **Court Proceedings Support** – Accompaniment and guidance for victims in court
 - **General Information & Assistance** – Providing answers and referrals for victim-related concerns
 - **Nebraska Crime Victim’s Reparations Program** – Assisting with financial compensation applications
 - **Nebraska Victims of Crime Alert Portal Registration** – Enrolling victims for case status notifications

Community Involvement & Partnerships

The Victim Assistance Coordinator actively collaborates with multiple organizations to enhance victim services and promote community safety. These partnerships ensure a comprehensive, multidisciplinary response to crime and victimization in Gage County.

- **Gage County Child Abuse and Neglect Treatment Team**
The Gage County Child Abuse and Neglect Treatment Team is dedicated to a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach to assisting children who have experienced abuse or neglect, are at risk, or are displaying delinquent behavior. This team works to fill service gaps for children whose needs are not met within the current system, even in cases where the Juvenile Court is not involved.
- **Gage County Crime Stoppers**
Gage County Crime Stoppers is a nonprofit organization led by a volunteer citizen board. This initiative brings together law enforcement, media, and the community to combat crime. Crime Stoppers provides a secure, **anonymous** way for individuals to report crime-related information to law enforcement. Tipsters may receive a reward of up to \$1,000 for valuable information leading to an arrest.
- **Southeastern Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force**
Established in 2015, the Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force (NHTTF) coordinates the state’s efforts to combat human trafficking. This initiative brings together law enforcement, prosecutors, service providers, advocates, and community partners to implement a unified, strategic response to trafficking in Nebraska.

- Nebraska Partnership Against the Trafficking of Humans (NE PATH)**
 NE PATH connects organizations and individuals engaged in the fight against human trafficking. This network strengthens Nebraska’s anti-trafficking efforts by fostering collaboration, promoting trauma-informed practices, and ensuring a survivor-centered approach.
- Community Justice Committee – Gage County MAPS**
 The Community Justice Committee operates within the **Multiple Agencies Partnering for Success (MAPS) Coalition**, a network of over 50 individuals, agencies, and organizations committed to improving the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities in Gage County. Through collaboration, the coalition addresses critical social issues and enhances community resources.

Chevis Epp
Victim Assistance Coordinator



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