

Three phases to victim empowerment



Answers from Janie
by Janie Simpson, L.C.S.W.

Powerless is a word often used by someone who has been a victim of a crime. Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines powerless as "devoid of strength or resources or lacking the authority or capacity to act." When someone is victimized, the immediate reaction is often one of shock and disbelief. Victims initially feel "devoid of strength" or "lack the capacity to act." These feelings are caused by another person taking control, by force, of the victim or his property.

Morton Bard in *The Crime Victim's Book* describes the victim's experience in three phases. The impact, recoil, and reorganization phases are part of his model.

The **impact phase** is during and immediately after the crime. During a victimization most people describe feeling as if life is moving in slow motion, that they are watching what is happening. Right after the crime the victim feels euphoria at

surviving, shock and/or numbness. A victim needs at this point a supportive presence, no expectations or demands, safety, security, understanding, assurances, promises kept, and a need to test reality.

The **recoil phase** comes a few hours or days after the event is past. The victim may feel fear, anger, denial, alienation from others and blame himself for what has happened. He/she may feel helpless, sad, guilty, tired and emotionally detached.

Often victims ask "what if" questions, trying to figure out what they could have done differently. The reality of what has happened begins to sink in and there is often outrage. Victims need to be listened to and given a chance to ventilate; demands on them need to lessen for awhile. They need a supportive and safe environment.

The **reorganization phase** occurs after a period of time has passed since the incident. Victims begin to feel they can accept the changes in their lives. Life appears to go back to being the same as before, but the victims know they are never the same. They know they are vulnerable in a way they never thought possible before they became a victim.

The more severe the victimization, the more pronounced the reactions and the longer it will take to recover.

There are ways to help a person move from feeling like a victim to being a survivor. An early tactic is to provide an immediate debriefing time. This involves letting him/her say what happened, explore troubling reactions, identify coping strategies, and explore feelings about surviving.

Another helping strategy is to provide a safe therapeutic environment. Give the individual choices, respect his wishes, and help him take control. Crime victims can benefit from a support group where others have been through similar experiences and have similar reactions. Advocacy with police, criminal justice system, family, media, and social services can help the victim feel a sense of regaining control.

Being a crime victim can be a devastating experience, but regaining realistic control can be empowering. The lesson many crime victims learn is that while they cannot always control what happens to them, they can choose how they will respond to the event. That lesson is truly powerful.

Mary Hill...

Continued from page 1

would do this to their mother. "She was not a violent person; we barely got chastised when we were little. She was so generous; she would feed anyone who was hungry." Tears rolled down Velma's cheeks as she recalled how Mary sacrificed to send them to school "across the bridge. She made sure our clothes and shoes were nice, even when her shoes were torn up.

"I was popular in school and when she would meet me at the bus, kids would laugh and say 'who is that lady?' and I was ashamed of my mom and would walk the other way. I didn't realize until I was older how much that hurt her, and I wanted to make sure she had a nice place to live and a nice car. It's not fair that someone took her life before she will be able to see it."

Currently serving as FCCJ's student government president, Velma has also worked as a senior financial rep at Merrill Lynch and in human resources at Convergys. "Everyone knows what type of person I am, that I'm a hard worker who gets things done, and they keep telling me I need to get this case solved. They don't understand that this is something I can't do. I don't know what direction to go.

"My sisters (who are old enough) and I are in college, have part-time jobs and we don't have money or insurance; we're trying to survive and I'm caring for my two kids. Through all the problems, Mom taught us to be ethical and good and fine people, to appreciate art and poetry. She loved to say, 'The giver is worth the moment of appreciation that the gift brings.'"

Velma has been reading through her mother's journal and feels that just before her death she was "transitioning into another person. She loved the song by CeCe Winans, *Mercy Said 'No,'* and I listen to it and gain strength for myself."

*Mercy said 'no,'
I'm not going to let you go...
I'm not going let you slip away
You don't have to be afraid...
Mercy said 'no'...
The devil can't take control....
Life and death stood face to face
Darkness tried to steal my heart away
But Mercy said 'no.'*

If you have any information about who killed Mary Hill, please contact JSO Homicide at 630-2172.

It's Our City! Let's Make It Better!

**AMERICAN
ELECTRICAL
Contracting, Inc.**



"Wired Right At A Fair Price!"

(904) 737-7770

5065-3 St. Augustine Road
Jacksonville, Florida 32207

Mobile: (904) 591-9947

Fax: (904) 737-1099

ghopkins@american-electrical.com

www.american-electrical.com

License # ER0015316

Pettyco Express

Jacksonville's Courier, Trucking
and Expediting Specialists

Local 1.5 and 3 Hour Courier pickup and delivery

Straight Truck • Lift Gate Service • Flatbed Delivery

Truckload Warehousing & Distribution

Full Logistics Services

Internet Order Entry & Tracking

Immediate Proof of Delivery

Licensed, Insured & Bonded

695-2200

Same Day Statewide & Nationwide Service Available

Same Day Flatbed Service Available

24 Hours - 7 Days a week

Visit Our Website at: www.pettycoexpress.com



Childers Roofing & Sheetmetal Inc.

Quality Commercial Roofing

Butch Childers
Paul A. Gibbs

10416-196 New Berlin Rd.
Jacksonville, FL 32226-2216
#CCC044923