

A Guide to Rebuilding Shattered Lives

“Death is not the greatest loss of life. The greatest loss is what dies inside us while we live”

—Norman Cousins

This Guide is designed to provide expertise, facilitators' and participants' manual contents, suggestions for potential speakers, a variety of resource materials, delivery and project evaluation approaches, to numerous victim serving organizations across Canada. This Guide will be of particular interest to organizations that have direct contact with survivors of homicide victims; however, other major crime victims may also benefit. Guide deliverables will give victim serving organizations the tools and techniques to offer customized Rebuilding Shattered Lives programs to their clients. These resources and expertise have been developed as a result of two very successful and insightful Rebuilding Shattered Lives pilot projects held in Ottawa in 2014 and 2016. In addition, resource material will be drawn from an earlier program developed by CPOMC entitled The Impact of Murder on the Family Unit.

Rebuilding Shattered Lives takes a victim-centered, strength-based approach with a focus on building victims' resiliency against various risk factors. This program was developed and co-facilitated by a Board member of CPOMC (a survivor of a homicide victim) and the Manager of the Victim Crisis Unit, Ottawa Police Services. Professionals in disciplines such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, victim crisis intervention, traumatology, spirituality, mindfulness meditation, media relations, dealing with the justice system, health and nutrition etc. offered their expertise during a number of the sessions. This Guide is designed to help survivors of homicide victims, from all walks of life, races and religions, move in a positive manner from their current state of mind and provide tools to support them re-integrate into society in a meaningful way. It will provide an opportunity for participants to re-frame their experiences and to put preoccupations in a positive light so that they can continue on with their lives in a purposeful manner.

In many communities there are services available to deal with crisis situations in the short term, however, there is very little support to help families get through the longer term. Few people can appreciate the true impact of murder on the family. Living in the aftermath of murder is a constant emotional, physical and spiritual struggle. One of the most important things a survivor can do for himself/herself is to connect with a person or group with whom they can talk freely, and who are traveling on the same path of healing. This Guide is geared towards helping individuals who have been dealing with the murder of a loved one for 2–3 years or more. It is designed to provide a safe environment for survivors to overcome the impediments to readjustment and to focus on survivors' strengths and resilience. This program is not designed to provide crisis response intervention for those survivors who are newly bereaved and, therefore, still dealing with the early, acute crisis stage of trauma.

Following a murder, the family unit undergoes permanent changes that are extremely difficult for the surviving members to accept. As each member of the family struggles with his or her own pain and grief, offering support to the other members of the family network can be challenging and sometimes impossible. Re-integrating into society in a significant way can prove overwhelming. Not only must each family member navigate through his or her own feelings about the murder, but they must also deal with the way their loved one died. Part of the family has died along with the victim. This missing piece can never be restored. The challenges that lie ahead for the families and loved ones of a murder victim are complex and unique to each individual. These challenges do not stop at the end of the trial, if indeed there is one. The murder of your child or loved one has created an irreversible life-changing effect.

Rebuilding Shattered Lives is designed to be conducted over a six week period, three hours/week. It is suggested that five–six participants be invited to attend. It is felt that if there are more participants than this you run the risk of not allowing enough time for participants to share without feeling rushed.

The following will assist in guiding weekly discussions:

WEEK 1: Orientation and Commemoration. The first session is an orientation session, providing an overview and outlining what participants can expect to discuss. Ground rules will be established within the group. An opportunity will be provided for each participant to tell his/her story to help participants connect with one another and to commemorate their loved one.

WEEK 2: Self-Care Part I. This session asks participants to share how they have coped with their loss including developing some personal goals. The topic of resiliency and vulnerability and risk factors will be discussed. There will be a focus on building upon existing strategies and focusing on the strengths of group members. Participants will start completing a self-care plan by completing journal entries leading to a personal plan of "Self-Care".

WEEK 3 and 4: Grief and Trauma Response. The next two sessions will help participants better understand and deal with grief and trauma response. During these sessions, a trauma specialist in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) will define what trauma is, how it manifests itself physically, emotionally, spiritually, similarly how grief shows and manifests itself and how to deal with trauma and grief when people are dealing with the aftermath of sudden, violent death. The facilitators will provide psycho-education around the reaction and feelings related to the impact of loss of a loved one to violence. PTSD is only one of the reactions. Insight will be provided concerning how one might be impacted or respond to different situations.

WEEK 5: Exploring Personal Experiences Regarding Faith and Spirituality. During this session complications in the grieving process with respect to spirituality will be explored. The participants will be invited to speak about their spiritual beliefs and how they have utilized these beliefs to work through their grief. A spiritual leader will attend should participants find this helpful.

WEEK 6: Self-Care Part II and Commemoration and the Celebration of Your Loved One's Life. Participants will continue to explore and implement self-care components introduced during Self-Care Part I, i.e. what have participants learned from each other, what strengths have they identified in themselves that they didn't realize they had and build on those. They will, also, write a letter as a personal commitment to themselves reminding them what they plan to do.

As well, during this session each participant will present the memory of his/her loved one through pictures, poems, recordings or any memorabilia that enlivens that person's presence within the group. This is an occasion for celebrating the vitality and value of the participants' loved ones.