2013-2014 ANNUAL REPORT

Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime
THE OFFICE OF THE
OMBUDSMAN FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

Created in 2007, the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime (OFOVC) is an arm’s-length federal government office that works to help victims of crime and their families.

The OFOVC responds directly to phone calls, e-mails and letters from victims of crime, and works to ensure the federal government meets its responsibilities to victims. We:

• inform victims about the federal programs and services that exist to help them;
• address complaints made by victims about federal government departments, agencies, employees, laws or policies;
• refer victims to programs and services in their city or province that may be able to assist them;
• identify issues that have a negative impact on victims, and make recommendations to the federal government on how it can enhance its policies and laws to meet their needs;
• educate federal law makers and policy makers about the needs and concerns of victims; and
• promote the principles set out in the Canadian Statement of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime with decision makers and policy makers.

The experiences that victims of crime and other Canadians share with the OFOVC help the Office to better understand the issues facing victims in Canada.

If you are a victim of crime, or are providing assistance to one, and have questions or a complaint about a federal law, policy, program or service, please contact us.

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It is with great pleasure that I present the 2013–2014 annual report of the Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime (OFOVC).

It has been a successful year for the Office as we continued to amplify the voices of victims of crime so that their needs and concerns can be properly understood and adequately addressed. Our work focused on three broad areas: responding to questions and complaints from victims and their families; reaching out to and engaging victims, stakeholders and the general public; and identifying and championing effective policy and legislative improvements.

During the period of this report, we received more than 500 inquiries and complaints. Our review of many of these complaints not only helped resolve the specific concerns of individual victims and their families, but also informed recommendations and progressive new policies and practices with the intent of preventing similar complaints in the future.

One of the year’s most important accomplishments was the multi-faceted outreach initiative, Moving the Conversation Forward. At the core of this initiative was a two-day forum held in April 2013 that enabled more than 150 stakeholders from across Canada to discuss the most pressing victims’ issues and to chart the path forward for addressing them.

What was so valuable and unique about this forum was that it was truly victim-led. The agenda was based on topics that victims, their families and victim advocates identified as common priorities during a consultation process conducted by the OFOVC and a team of more than 20 core planners. The core planning team was made up of victims and advocates who voluntarily came together to help build the framework for the forum. A survey of forum participants indicated that they considered the event a success in terms of overall experience and value.
To effectively bring positive change, we must first fully understand what victims and their families need and want from Canada’s justice system. Based on the feedback received from the consultations and the forum, we published a special report entitled *Moving the Conversation Forward*, which outlines eight core themes, each with detailed points for consideration that would enable equitable and meaningful support for victims of crime. The report helped inform our priorities and confirmed that we are on track in our efforts to understand and impart the concerns of victims and their families.

The *Moving the Conversation Forward* initiative also provided an opportunity to expand our National Framework for Dialogue and Engagement. This Framework is a practical process for victims to provide input on relevant policies and processes that help us to fulfill our mandate. Forum participants were invited to contribute their views through the Framework, thereby increasing our ability to effectively represent a variety of stakeholder communities and perspectives. We also continued to enhance our outreach through expansion of our communications capacity. Over the past year we produced a series of videos featuring testimony from crime victims and advocates, and we began using social media, such as Twitter and YouTube, to help increase the prominence of victim issues in the minds of stakeholders and Canadians, and facilitate the dialogue needed to effect lasting change.

Another important accomplishment that illustrates our role in improving policy was our response to the Government of Canada’s call for submissions on the development of a Victims Bill of Rights. Our submission was directly informed by the views of victims as well as by the opinions of our policy experts. We considered the feedback received during both a forum workshop on the Victims Bill of Rights and a follow-up engagement session with stakeholders. We developed a comprehensive submission addressing victims’ issues with nearly 30 recommendations to the federal government on how the justice system could be improved to better ensure that victims of crime are informed, considered, protected and supported.

I am proud to see the Office effect change in society’s perception of, and response to, victim issues. While I am encouraged by the progress made to date, more work is needed to address current and emerging challenges. Credit for the Office’s many accomplishments must go primarily to the many victims who have had the courage to share their experiences. I also would like to thank my team of talented, passionate and dedicated individuals, along with the departments and agencies that work every day on behalf of victims. By working together, I am convinced that we will continue to identify and implement new and better ways to engage Canadians, and ensure that victims of crime feel informed, considered, protected and supported.

Sue O’Sullivan
Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime
Mandate

The Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime (OFOVC) was created in 2007 to help victims of crime and their families by providing direct assistance, addressing complaints and ensuring that the federal government meets its responsibilities to victims of crime.

The mandate of the Ombudsman relates exclusively to matters of federal responsibility and requires the OFOVC to:

• Promote access by victims to existing federal programs and services for victims;
• Address complaints of victims about compliance with the provisions of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act that apply to victims of crimes committed by offenders under federal jurisdiction;
• Promote awareness of the needs and concerns of victims and the applicable laws that benefit victims of crime, including promotion of the principles set out in the Canadian Statement of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime with respect to matters of federal jurisdiction, among criminal justice personnel and policy makers;
• Identify and review emerging and systemic issues, including those issues related to programs and services provided or administered by the Department of Justice or the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, that impact negatively on victims of crime; and
• Facilitate access by victims to existing federal programs and services by providing them with information and referrals.

In fulfilling the Ombudsman’s mandate, the OFOVC helps victims in two ways:

• Individually, by helping victims directly every day, answering their questions and addressing their complaints. Victims can contact the Office directly through its toll-free victim-assistance line to speak with a bilingual Complaint Review Officer, or by TTY, e-mail, fax or regular mail.
• Collectively, by reviewing important issues and making recommendations to the federal government on how to change its laws or policies to better support and assist victims of crime. These types of national, widespread changes ultimately help all victims of crime in Canada.
WORKING DIRECTLY WITH VICTIMS

The case-management process

The Office of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime receives inquiries and complaints from victims. Staff works closely with victims on a case-by-case basis to try to find achievable and effective solutions. For each complaint it receives, the OFOVC follows an established process, as described in Chart 1.

CHART 1
OFOVC Case-Management Process

* As required, the OFOVC will monitor and follow up on cases where a specific action has been requested or a recommendation made.
Talking with Victims

The OFOVC opened 529 files in the 2013–2014 fiscal year. Although the number of files declined slightly from the previous year, the Office was actively engaged with stakeholders, including victims, victim-serving agencies and victim advocates. For instance, the Moving the Conversation Forward forum facilitated the exchange of information and dialogue about victim issues and opportunities for positive change. Meanwhile, the newly launched National Framework for Dialogue and Engagement was instrumental in creating a stronger voice for victims of crime. Details on these outreach and engagement strategies are available in the Building Partnerships and Raising Awareness section of this report.

The most common reasons for which people contacted the OFOVC were to ask about victims’ services and to file complaints. Nearly two-thirds of those who contacted the Office in 2013–2014 cited the OFOVC website as the source of referral. As shown in Chart 3, the vast majority of these files were from victims and their families.

“Thank you for responding to my email, and for being so thorough in explaining the various services.”
— An OFOVC client

**CHART 2**
Total files opened from April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014, by reason for contact

- 327 Inquiries (62%)
- 182 Complaints (34%)
- 15 Inquiries and complaints (3%)
- 5 Unable to determine (1%)

N = 529
Consistent with previous years, the majority of files are for victims and the family members of victims. Concerned citizens account for 19 of the files, while the remaining categories each account for 10 files or less.

The OFOVC assisted Canadians from across the country. The proportion of files from each province and territory has remained fairly constant since the Office opened in 2007. Chart 4 illustrates that 174 files were from Ontario, more than twice as many files than any other province. Alberta, British Columbia and Quebec each received between 60 and 80 files. The remaining provinces each account for 20 files or less. Compared to the previous fiscal year, the Office received more files from Alberta and New Brunswick (a combined increase of 22 files) while fewer files were from British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario (combined decrease of 60 files). Approximately 12 percent of all files were initiated in French.
CHART 4
Total files opened from April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014, by location

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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total number of files opened was 529.

LEARNING FROM VICTIMS

Our direct contact with Canadians not only provides us with the opportunity to offer assistance but it also provides invaluable insight into the issues and challenges facing victims of crime. This, in turn, informs our plans and priorities. Chart 5 shows the five most common topics raised by people contacting the OFOVC.

“I appreciate your help to no end as you are the only one that has been truly helpful.”
— An OFOVC client
Definitions of topics

Other levels of government: Individuals expressed concerns related to issues that fall under the jurisdiction of the provinces, territories and/or municipalities.

OFOVC’s role and mandate: Most of these files were from Canadians seeking more information about what the Office does and how it can help victims.

Victims’ rights: Individuals asked about, or expressed dissatisfaction with, the legal entitlements that Canada accords victims of crime.

Inquiry and/or complaint about victim-serving program: Individuals expressed concerns about a perceived lack of compassion, respect and dignity for victims; insufficient communication among service providers; inadequacy of restitution; the “not criminally responsible” provisions of the law; shortage of services; or barriers to participation in the justice system.

Victim safety: Individuals wanted information about measures they could take to protect themselves, or expressed concerns about the close proximity of an offender to their home or workplace.
CASE HIGHLIGHTS

We have selected the following four cases from the past fiscal year to illustrate some of the challenges that victims face and the positive changes made as a result of contacting the OFOVC. The names and personal details in these cases have been changed to protect victims' identities.

Use of victims’ names during Parole Board hearings

Mr. and Mrs. M contacted the OFOVC to raise concerns about a Parole Board of Canada (PBC) Board member who twice referred to Mr. M by name during a hearing. Mr. and Mrs. M were the only observers at the hearing and had not been advised in advance that they might be referred to by name. When the Board member referred to Mr. M in front of the offender during the hearing, Mr. M felt that his privacy had been invaded.

To address his complaint, Mr. M contacted several representatives of PBC, including a Regional Communications Officer and Regional Manager of Community Relations and Training. He was told that the PBC had erred by not informing him that he might be named during the hearing. When the Board member referred to Mr. M in front of the offender during the hearing, Mr. M felt that his privacy had been invaded.

The OFOVC reviewed the complaint and learned that PBC will not use the name of a victim when expressly requested. Mr. M expressed that this type of information should be available to victims who are preparing to attend a parole hearing. Following an OFOVC meeting with PBC in January 2014, PBC committed to explore how this type of information could be given to victims planning to attend parole hearings.

“Although all of our concerns have not been fully addressed, it’s nice to know that we have been able to affect positive change in some regards. Really appreciate your assistance and ongoing commitment to this issue.”
— An OFOVC client

Ensuring timely notifications about statutory releases

A registered victim contacted the OFOVC with concerns about the short notice they received from the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) about an offender who was being let out on statutory release. Normally, a Victim Services Officer (VSO) of the CSC contacts the victim five days in advance of release, or immediately when decisions are made (if fewer than five days to release). In this case, the VSO advised the victim only two days prior to release, which left little time for the victim to take any necessary safety precautions.
The OFOVC’s review determined that the late notification resulted from a communication error involving the correctional institution and the Victim Services Unit. The Correctional Service of Canada determined that it was not part of a larger communication problem. The OFOVC advised the victim of the outcome of the review.

Facilitating access to information about the deportation of offenders

A registered victim contacted the OFOVC about the lack of information available to victims of crime whose offender is subject to deportation. Specifically, the victim learned that the offender might be eligible to apply for re-entry into Canada. Given that a restitution order was still in effect, the victim raised questions about the re-entry application process. Unfortunately, the victim was unable to obtain this information from the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) or Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) websites.

The OFOVC facilitated a dialogue with CBSA and CIC to get answers to the victim’s questions as well as sought clarification of the practices pertaining to re-entry into Canada. The victim expressed gratitude for the assistance.

The OFOVC’s work with CBSA and CIC raised awareness of the needs and concerns of victims of crime at the federal level.

Accessing information for Canadians victimized abroad

Mr. K and his mother contacted the OFOVC about information available to victims of crime when a family member has been victimized abroad. The two had been unable to get consistent information about the investigation, and the roles and responsibilities of the warden(s) and case-management officers.

Initially, warden(s) in the region where the crime occurred, as well as case managers from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) had kept Mr. K informed about the progress of the investigation into the murder of his brother. Mr. K was then informed by DFATD officials that the warden(s) would no longer provide updates on the case and that the file had been assigned to a new case manager—the fifth since the murder.

The OFOVC met with DFATD officials to learn more about the policies, practices and processes in place to assist victims and their family members when crimes are committed abroad. The meeting raised awareness within DFATD about the needs of victims, such as having their voices heard, participating in relevant processes and accessing support services available to them in Canada.

Following the meeting with DFATD officials, Mr. K and his mother informed OFOVC that they received an email from DFATD informing them that at their request, they were being assigned a new case manager, and were provided with additional information pertaining to the role of the warden(s) and local support services available in the community. This case demonstrates how the OFOVC can address victims’ concerns through collaborative channels and further raise awareness within other government agencies about the needs of victims of crime.
WORKING FOR ALL VICTIMS

As part of the Ombudsman’s mandate, the Ombudsman makes recommendations to the Government of Canada about policies, programs, services and laws to improve the treatment of victims of crime in Canada. The Ombudsman also connects with and engages with as many organizations as possible that work with or impact victims so that the OFOVC can best fulfill its mandate.

The Ombudsman made recommendations on a number of measures proposed by the federal government that relate to victims of crime, including the development of a Victims Bill of Rights and amendments to the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and the Criminal Code.

VICTIMS BILL OF RIGHTS

In February 2013, the Government of Canada announced plans to develop and enact a Victims Bill of Rights and called for submissions from citizens and stakeholders. To prepare its submission, the OFOVC initiated a significant research and consultation effort. The Moving the Conversation Forward forum included a plenary session where victims, victim-serving agencies, academics, police associations, and government and private-sector representatives described what a Victims Bill of Rights should include.

In addition to the Moving the Conversation Forward forum, the OFOVC developed a comprehensive perspective on what victims and advocates wanted to see in the Bill by reaching out to members of its National Framework for Dialogue and Engagement as well as the general public through its website. A new “Have your say” section was added to the OFOVC website, enabling people to share their views and respond to questions about the Victims Bill of Rights, and the Office used its social media channels to promote the government’s national consultation. The OFOVC also developed a new video message from the Ombudsman encouraging Canadians to take advantage of this important opportunity to make their views known.

Taking into account all of the views and perspectives collected, the OFOVC submitted nearly 30 recommendations to the Government of Canada for consideration. In essence, the Ombudsman recommended that the Victims Bill of Rights should be enforceable, that it should ensure that victims are adequately informed at every stage in the justice process, that victims’ needs and interests be considered, that their safety be protected and, finally, that victims should have access to appropriate support services.

The OFOVC looks forward to the legislation and to working with the Government of Canada and all stakeholders to ensure that it is as effective as possible.
The following is an excerpt from the OFOVC’s submission:

“The development of a fulsome, encompassing, enforceable Victims Bill of Rights would mark a significant step forward for victims of crime in Canada. Beyond simply balancing the scales, providing victims with real enforceable rights would serve to strengthen the system overall. Whereas failing to recognize and act upon the needs of victims can result in victims’ withdrawal from cooperation in the justice system—thereby undermining the system’s effectiveness—improved responsiveness to the needs of victims of crime will enhance the effectiveness of, and public confidence in, the criminal justice system.”

**VICTIMS’ ROLE IN THE NOT CRIMINALLY RESPONSIBLE SYSTEM: BILL C-14 (FORMERLY C-54)**

**ISSUE**

On February 8, 2013 the Government of Canada introduced *An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the National Defence Act (Mental Disorder)*, also known as the *Not Criminally Responsible Reform Act*. The Bill sought to make three changes to the not criminally responsible system:

- Make public safety the paramount consideration;
- Create a high-risk designation; and
- Enhance victims’ involvement in the mental health regime.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Ombudsman appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights on June 12, 2013, and made several recommendations to strengthen the Bill. In particular, the Ombudsman called for authorities to inform victims and their families of relevant information, such as where the accused is detained, when and where they might be released from custody for treatment or other reasons, and whether any communications orders or other release restrictions are in place.

**STATUS**

Bill C-54 was reintroduced as Bill C-14 and remained before Parliament as of March 31, 2014. On March 27, the Committee issued its report with observations. An excerpt from the Committee report takes particular note of “the recommendations made by the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime concerning enhanced information sharing with victims.”

**GIVING VICTIMS A LARGER ROLE IN PAROLE HEARINGS: BILL C-479**

**ISSUE**

First introduced on February 27, 2013 and reinstated on October 16, 2013, *An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (Fairness for Victims)* would allow the Parole Board of Canada to increase the time between parole hearings, up to five years for violent offenders who have had parole denied, cancelled or terminated. It also would allow the Parole Board of Canada to increase the time between parole hearings to up to five years for violent offenders who have had parole denied, cancelled or terminated. The Bill also would allow the cancellation of hearings if offenders repeatedly refuse or waive their right to attend hearings. It would provide registered victims with more information about conditional
release. This would ensure that parole hearings give greater consideration to the needs of victims and their families, and provide them with transcripts of hearings free of charge, in cases where transcripts have been made.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

On February 13, 2014, the Ombudsman appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, and made several recommendations. In particular, the Ombudsman recommended that all information currently listed in the CCRA as discretionary be provided to victims automatically, unless there is a credible reason not to do so. The Ombudsman also recommended that victims be given choices and options about how to attend and participate in a parole hearing, and that victims and their families have access, free of charge, to audio and video records of parole hearings, since transcripts are not usually provided.

**STATUS**

The Standing Committee’s report was tabled in the House of Commons in March 2014.

**ESCORTED TEMPORARY ABSENCE: BILL C-483**

**ISSUE**

A Private Member’s Bill, introduced on March 8, 2013, sought to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA) to limit the authority of wardens in granting escorted temporary absences (ETA) to offenders convicted of first or second degree murder. The Parole Board of Canada would have exclusive authority over ETA decisions for these offenders.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

On March 25, 2014, the Ombudsman appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, and made a series of recommendations. The Ombudsman recommended that all victims of offenders currently in the federal system—regardless of the decision-making authority—should have access to, and be able to participate in, a conditional release system that better informs, considers, protects and supports them. Specifically, victims should:

- Be informed in advance of hearings and have the option to apply to attend;
- Be able to present a statement at hearings;
- Be informed of the offender’s progress and rehabilitation;
- Be provided the opportunity to update their impact statement and any other relevant information;
- Have access to some form of decision summary; and
- Be offered funding supports to help cover some of the expenses associated with attending hearings.

**STATUS**

By March 31, 2014, the Standing Committee had not yet completed its review of the legislation.

**PROTECTING VICTIMS AFTER OFFENDERS ARE RELEASED FROM CUSTODY: BILL C-489**

**ISSUE**

Introduced as a Private Member’s Bill on April 18, 2013, An Act to Amend the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (Restrictions on Offenders) proposed mandatory conditions that would restrict an offender from having direct or indirect contact with a victim, witness or others, or refrain from going to certain designated areas. These conditions would be mandatory for a person on probation, conditional sentence, parole, statutory release or unescorted temporary absence. The condition would be mandatory, unless the judge or releasing authority identified extenuating circumstances that would make the condition inappropriate, or if a victim provides consent to contact with the offender.
Recommendations

On November 7, 2013, the Ombudsman appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to express support for Bill C-489 and to suggest amendments that would strengthen it. The suggested amendments would expand the proposed provisions that prohibit offenders from contacting victims and witnesses, for instance, and better protect sensitive information of victims of crime, such as their work address.

Other recommendations included:

- That a judge or releasing authority have the option of imposing conditions on the offender to restrain from having contact with a victim, witness or other person and/or be able to impose a geographical restriction. The Bill should provide the option to impose either or both of these conditions rather than only one;
- That the restrictions of non-communication and refraining from going to specified places also apply to offenders on long-term supervision orders;
- That procedural safeguards are built into the Bill to protect the anonymity of the victim and their place of residence and work when a releasing authority or judge is imposing geographical restrictions as a condition of release; and
- That a clear administrative process is prescribed for victims who wish to maintain contact with offenders.

Status

On November 18, 2013, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights presented its report in the House of Commons. As of March 31, 2014, the Bill had yet to be referred to a Senate Standing Committee.

Prostitution-Related Offences

Issue

In December 2013, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that three Criminal Code prostitution offences were unconstitutional. The Court gave Parliament one year to respond before the judgment takes full effect. On February 17, 2014, the Government of Canada launched a one-month online consultation to seek input.

Recommendations

The OFOVC submitted a letter outlining the complex nature of prostitution as it relates to victimization. With reference to Canadian research and perspectives that individuals shared with the Ombudsman, the letter acknowledges that people become involved in the sex trade for various reasons and there are great discrepancies in how sex-trade workers identify themselves as victims. The OFOVC recognizes that, with the exceptions of human trafficking, exploitation and child prostitution, there is no simple formula to determine what should be criminalized in response to the Supreme Court’s ruling. The OFOVC submission called for:

- Equal and unbiased safety protection for all Canadians, including those involved in the sex trade;
- Measures to offer protection to those forced into the sex trade; and
- Supports for the individuals who choose to exit the sex trade.

Status

As of March 31 2014, no legislation had been introduced.
UPDATES ON PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the needs of victims attending parole hearings

The Ombudsman recommended that the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) and Parole Board of Canada (PBC) review the measures in place to address and respect the needs of victims attending parole hearings.

STATUS

The Commissioner of CSC notified the Ombudsman that CSC would establish principles to better accommodate the needs of victims at parole hearings. PBC worked closely with CSC to develop principles to collaboratively address the needs of victims who attend hearings at a CSC facility (i.e. federal institution).

In June 2013, CSC released its guiding principles and best practices that addressed the OFOVC’s concerns. OFOVC continues to monitor the issue.

Contact with victims following the release of an offender

The Ombudsman wrote a letter to the Minister of Public Safety on February 11, 2013, to recommend proactive consideration of victims’ needs by automatically requiring that offenders be prohibited from having “direct or indirect contact with the victim(s) or any member of the victim’s family.” PBC Board members currently impose this condition at their discretion. To better take into account the personal safety of victims, two other options are available: make the condition mandatory, and give victims the discretion to decide when to impose the condition.
The Minister of Public Safety responded in writing to the Ombudsman’s letter on December 12, 2013. An excerpt of the letter reads: “currently the CCRA provides PBC with the ability to impose special conditions that are reasonable and necessary to protect society and manage the offender’s sentence in the community.”

The Minister’s letter also referred to Bill C-489 (Restrictions on Offenders), a Private Member’s Bill that would prohibit certain offenders who are on conditional release in the community from being in close proximity to the victim’s residence and from communicating with victims, except in accordance with specific conditions.

Consideration of victims’ concerns in advance of decisions to transfer or release offenders

In August 2012, the Ombudsman wrote to the Commissioner of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to recommend improvements in relevant policies.

In particular, the Ombudsman asked that the CSC require institutional parole officers to contact Victim Services Units prior to making decisions about transfers, escorted temporary absences and work releases, by reviewing and amending paragraph 11 of the Commissioner’s Directive (CD) 784. This requirement would help to ensure that all relevant victim information is taken into account when release decisions are made.

According to a letter received from CSC Commissioner Don Head in September 2013, the review of CD 784 concluded that: “… paragraph 11(b) adequately addresses the process related to information provided by victims in the decision making process.” The letter also said that victims’ concerns about conditional release are adequately taken into consideration according to existing CDs, including Transfer of Inmates, Temporary Absences and Work Release. As well, CSC advised the OFOVC that they were in the process of developing a new process to further strengthen the communication between case management staff and the victim service units when preparing for the release of an offender.

The OFOVC continues to monitor the communication between CSC and victims with regards to release decisions and victims’ consideration at release.
Videotaped victim statements at parole hearings

In 2012, the OFOVC received a complaint regarding a video recording of a victim statement that was presented at a parole hearing. At previous hearings, the monitor used to show the video was visible to everyone in the room, except the offender – a common practice of the Parole Board in the region. In this case, the monitor was placed in front of the offender. The complaint led the OFOVC to review how videotaped victim statements are positioned in various regions.

STATUS

During the course of the review, the OFOVC learned that the issue of the positioning of video monitors during hearings was discussed by the Board in June 2013 during the Board’s Joint Committee meeting with PBC’s Regional Vice-Chairperson and senior managers. As well, the OFOVC was advised that the PBC had updated its fact sheet on Victims: Recording a Statement, which reminds victims to discuss any concerns regarding the positioning of the video monitor with their Regional Communications Officer.
The OFOVC recognizes that it can best fulfill its mandate by continuing to connect with and engage as many organizations as possible that work with or involve victims. During the year, the OFOVC was active in building partnerships and raising awareness. The Office hosted a major forum on victims’ issues, continued to build our National Framework for Dialogue and Engagement, and participated in several outreach activities.

**OFOVC FORUM: MOVING THE CONVERSATION FORWARD**

In April 2013, the OFOVC hosted a two-day forum called *Moving the Conversation Forward*. More than 150 stakeholders, including victims and delegates of victim-serving agencies, academics, police associations, and government and private-sector representatives, participated in the event to discuss how Canada’s justice and corrections systems could be improved for the benefit of victims.

The forum was an overwhelming success. More than 85 percent of those surveyed after the event found that the forum’s panel sessions and breakout discussion groups were effective, and more than 90 percent felt they were able to contribute in a meaningful way.

More than 90 percent of those surveyed agreed with the statements: “There was good variability in content,” “Many priority issues for victims of crime were discussed” and “I have a better understanding of victims’ issues in Canada and my role.” Similarly high percentages of those surveyed agreed with the statements: “The topics discussed will help mobilize victims’ issues in Canada” and “The forum provided me with the opportunity to participate, share and network.”

The OFOVC published a report on the forum that provided recommendations in eight broad areas:

- Criteria for who is a victim of crime
- Equitable access to tangible supports
- Meaningful information
- Awareness of and collaboration across the network of victims’ services
- Visibility of victims’ voices
- Prevention and safety
- Equity of treatment before the law
- Equity across all regions of the country

The forum also provided an opportunity to record a series of video testimonials from victims and stakeholders that served as a direct and compelling platform for victims’ views. The videos were posted to the OFOVC website and YouTube channel, and they continue to attract viewers and help raise awareness of the unique needs of victims of crime.
The OFOVC continued to make progress on implementing the National Framework for Dialogue and Engagement as a formal mechanism for continual engagement with victims and their families on current and emerging issues. Approximately 80 participants in the Moving the Conversation Forward forum signed up to participate in the Framework. The Framework helps us achieve the larger goal of ensuring that victims’ needs are accurately understood, widely respected and appropriately accommodated. Essentially, it is a practical, evolving process that helps us fulfill our mandate and gives victims a greater voice in relevant policies and processes.

The OFOVC’s outreach activities during the 2013–2014 year included consultations with victims of crime, victim advocates, victims’ service agencies, organizations, public agencies, academia and international bodies. The Ombudsman met with dozens of these organizations to learn about their programs and their interactions with victims of crime. This outreach work enabled the Office to expand and strengthen its network of partners across the country and around the world. The Office’s outreach efforts also serve a number of other goals, including raising public awareness of victim issues, and sharing best practices among victims, agencies and stakeholders.
### CHART 6
Highlights of 2013–2014 Outreach Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 9–10</td>
<td>National Forum on Community Safety and Ending Violence</td>
<td>Edmonton, AB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 18–19</td>
<td><em>Moving the Conversation Forward</em> (OFOVC hosted forum)</td>
<td>Ottawa, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 23</td>
<td>Consultation on the Victim Bill of Rights</td>
<td>Ottawa, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 24</td>
<td>Victims of Homicide Conference</td>
<td>Edmonton, AB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2</td>
<td>Alberta Police-Based Victim Services Association</td>
<td>Calgary, AB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 8</td>
<td>W.A.V.E. Empowering Youth Day</td>
<td>Mississauga, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 13</td>
<td>Mission Parlementaire Française (Parliamentary mission from France)</td>
<td>Ottawa, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 4–6</td>
<td>Meeting the Needs of Victims of Terrorism: The Way Forward</td>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 19</td>
<td>York Region Victim Services</td>
<td>Toronto, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 6</td>
<td>Meeting with commissioners of the inter-American Commission on Human Rights</td>
<td>Ottawa, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 9</td>
<td>Meeting with members of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women</td>
<td>Ottawa, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 14</td>
<td>National Organization for Victim Assistance</td>
<td>Columbus, OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 25</td>
<td>Saskatoon Aboriginal Women’s Group</td>
<td>Saskatoon, SK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 26</td>
<td>Alberta Region Victim Services Conference</td>
<td>Banff, AB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 31</td>
<td>Victims’ Forum</td>
<td>Sudbury, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 5</td>
<td>National Justice Committee</td>
<td>Ottawa, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 9</td>
<td>International Stop Cyberbullying Youth Summit</td>
<td>Charlottetown, PEI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 14–16</td>
<td>Together Let’s Stop Trafficking Conference</td>
<td>Ottawa, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 17–18</td>
<td>Re-inventing Criminal Justice 6th National Symposium</td>
<td>Ottawa, ON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 23</td>
<td>Mount Royal University, Speaker Series: Victim Bill of Rights</td>
<td>Calgary, AB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 17</td>
<td>National Victims Justice Network Symposium</td>
<td>Toronto, ON</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OPERATIONS

CASE MANAGEMENT

The OFOVC is always looking to improve operational processes and policies to ensure that it can most effectively serve victims and promote change. Since 2011, the OFOVC has been using a data tracking system to create files that accurately capture information regarding victims who have contacted our office. Plans are underway to incorporate the amount of activity on client files as a measure of how much time is spent on each file. Although the number of files remains an important measure, the time required to properly address the unique needs of victims of crime is crucial to evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of our operations.

The OFOVC is also reviewing how it uses other tracking mechanisms to capture activities with victims, victims’ groups and stakeholders (e.g. National Framework for Dialogue and Engagement, surveys, etc.) to better provide more accurate data about its operations.

DEVELOPING BEST PRACTICES

Community of Federal Ombudsman Organizations

Over the course of the year, the OFOVC continued its participation in the GCpedia-based Community of Federal Ombudsman Organizations (CFOO). This community of practice facilitates the exchange of information, resources and expertise, as well as the sharing of best practices in the area of corporate responsibilities, complaint resolution and investigations.

The OFOVC also participated in several activities organized by the community, including fairness training and an annual learning event where each Ombudsman Office had the opportunity to discuss their work. As well, the Ombudsman wrote a submission for the community blog.

The involvement of the OFOVC in this community of practice is an excellent example of what can be done to not only help build a strong foundation for Canadian federal Ombudsman Offices, but also help the Office strive for efficiencies within our organization.

COMMUNICATIONS

Social Media Framework

The OFOVC finalized and began to implement a social media framework during 2013–2014. Through the strategic use of social media platforms such as Twitter and YouTube, the OFOVC plans to increase communication with victims of crime and stakeholders. Another goal is to increase the numbers of media mentions and contacts. To achieve these goals, the OFOVC regularly posts new social-media content (text, videos, images) that is linked to current and upcoming OFOVC initiatives. The OFOVC’s content is also shared on social media networking sites, including Twitter. To ensure
the framework helps achieve the established goals, content is monitored regularly, and reviewed and adjusted every three to six months.

**TWITTER: @OFOVC_BOFVAC**

The OFOVC began to use its Twitter account on a daily basis in November 2013 and by the end of March 2014 the account had 99 followers. Some of the most favourited tweets, retweets and mentions that OFOVC received on Twitter revolve around three core themes: 1) accessing information on how we can help victims of crime; 2) event information and registration details for large-scale events such as the National Victims of Crime Awareness Week Symposium; and finally, 3) the Ombudsman’s responses to new legislation.

**YOUTUBE VIDEOS**

The year’s most significant social media accomplishment was the production and posting of a series of eight videos on the OFOVC YouTube channel. Recorded during the *Moving the Conversation Forward* forum, the videos feature testimonials from victims of crime and stakeholders about particular issues, such as timely access to relevant information, and prevention and safety. The videos were well received and attracted hundreds of views.

**WEBSITE: VICTIMSFIRST.GC.CA**

The OFOVC continued to improve the website during the year, such as by adding new content and links to its Twitter and YouTube accounts. As illustrated in Chart 7, the website continues to be the OFOVC’s primary source of referrals.

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**CHART 7**

Top five sources of referrals to the OFOVC from April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014

- **Website**: 134 (66%)
- **Member of Parliament**: 11 (5%)
- **Brochure**: 13 (6%)
- **Word of mouth**: 15 (7%)
- **Federal victim services**: 31 (15%)
The OFOVC website received more than 32,000 visits over the course of the 2013–2014 fiscal year. The most popular web pages were those that provide information on victims’ services and rights, and those relating to the Ombudsman’s submission to the government on the development of a Victims Bill of Rights.

To improve the visibility of the website, the OFOVC ran a Google keyword-search campaign. During the campaign, Internet users who conducted Google searches of terms such as “victims of crime” and “information about offender” were presented a Google ad for the OFOVC website. The campaign resulted in an additional 6,000 visits to the website over the course of the year.

Additionally, the OFOVC conducted a usability and accessibility study of its website. The results were comprehensive, and we have already begun to implement some suggested changes, while other identified content gaps as well as general functionality issues will be addressed in the next fiscal year.

An updated version of the website analytics software was introduced in 2013, which provides more accurate information about visits to the website by filtering out the false-positive results generated by automated digital technologies such as bots and spiders. As a result of the update, the figures regarding web visits are not comparable to those of previous years.

MEDIA RELATIONS

To increase awareness of its role and services, the OFOVC continued to engage the news media, making the Ombudsman available for interviews and issuing news releases in connection with current issues. The OFOVC monitors major news media and tracks every mention of the Ombudsman and the Office. Over the course of the 2013–2014, the Ombudsman or her office were mentioned in roughly 78 news reports. The majority of mentions related to specific issues such as government legislation regarding victims of crime, the Victims Bill of Rights, the mandatory victim surcharge that was recently introduced, and OFOVC recommendations regarding victims’ rights.
The Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime operates at arm’s length from the Department of Justice. However, to ensure that the OFOVC is efficient and cost-effective, some administrative services such as procurement and human resources management are shared with the Department of Justice, where appropriate. The OFOVC continues to work within its budget. Overall, the Office recorded a slight increase in expenditure over the previous year (4 percent) that was mostly due to additional information and communications activities related to consultations on the development of a Victims Bill of Rights.

**CHART 8**
Summary of 2013–2014 fiscal year actual expenditures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries and wages</td>
<td>928,447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information/communications</td>
<td>90,383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and professional dues</td>
<td>14,468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and special services</td>
<td>101,142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rentals</td>
<td>25,234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repair and maintenance</td>
<td>394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities, materials and supplies</td>
<td>5,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition of machinery and equipment</td>
<td>720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel and relocation</td>
<td>60,773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total expended by Ombudsman’s Office</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,227,727</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate costs (controlled centrally)</td>
<td>90,217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,317,944</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Public Works and Government Services Canada contributed to the cost of occupying and maintaining OFOVC offices.