



INFORMATION IS THE KEY TO TAKING BACK YOUR POWER

Park City's Victim Advocate Coordinator Malena Stevens says gathering information is a crucial first step to removing yourself from a bad situation

Park City Municipal: What is a victim advocate?

Malena Stevens: Victim advocates assist the victim of any violent crime, as well as people who are subject to the threat of violence such as stalking. Our cases include sexual assault and domestic violence as well as simple assaults such as bar fights. We also assist with unattended deaths and suicides. We provide information and emotional support, and we connect the victims with legal, housing, medical, and other resources.

PCMC: Who provides these additional resources?

MS: We work with a dedicated network of providers including [Utah Legal Services](#) in Salt Lake City, the [Christian Center](#), [Peace House](#), [Valley Behavioral Health](#), [Holy Cross Ministries](#), and [Mountainlands Community Housing Trust](#). Oftentimes, victims are dealing with more than just the crime itself, so we need to offer a complete continuum of care.

PCMC: How many clients do you work with, and what is the demographic composition?

MS: I have an average of 150 clients a year, about 75 percent of which are women. The majority of my cases are related to domestic violence. People

should understand that domestic violence does not discriminate: it affects every socio-economic level and segment of the community. I have clients from some of the wealthiest neighborhoods in town; in fact, money can be a key way to abuse and control someone. Attorneys can help victims put together a financial game plan, which is one reason we encourage people to contact us if they are thinking of leaving.

The makeup of my client base also generally reflects the ethnic makeup of our town. About 20 percent of my clients are from our Latino community, even though they make up 24 percent of Park City residents. We suspect some underreporting because of fears of deportation.

PCMC: There is a lot of fear in our community related to immigration status. What happens if the victim of a crime is undocumented?

MS: Our number-one concern is the safety of our citizenry, regardless of immigration status. Nothing has changed in terms of how we handle crimes: we help the victim and hold the suspect accountable. There is a misconception in the community that we are going to just go out and arrest people. We're only interested

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in arresting people who have broken the law—documented or undocumented. If someone is being victimized, we don't ask them for their documentation status; we don't want immigration status to be a tool used against victims to keep them in their bad situation. We encourage victims to come forward regardless of their status. And we should remember that we're talking about people. Most of these people serve our community well. We owe it to them—to everyone—to treat them with dignity and to honor their rights.

PCMC: If someone reading this article feels they are being victimized or knows someone who may be in a dangerous situation, what should they do?

MS: If they are not ready to report their accuser, I would urge them to contact me or Peace House to get information, just so they know their options. Having information can be very empowering, but ultimately it is the victim's choice whether or not to take action.

PCMC: How can community members help?

MS: We always need volunteers to assist with crisis intervention, including Spanish speakers. We have a great team of current volunteers, including former law enforcement officers, people with criminal justice degrees, and those who've volunteered in shelters, but we can always use more!

PCMC: What are the requirements to be a volunteer?

MS: The only requirements are a willingness to learn, a desire to help your community and help change the paradigm, and the ability to pass a background check. We have regular orientations, and I would love to chat with anyone who is interested in learning more.

You can also support any of our network providers, such as the Christian Center and Peace House. Religious institutions also provide support to their parishioners, so if you are involved in a local faith organization, you could inquire with them. And just getting the word out about our services is a huge help: shifting perspectives at the community level is crucial to reduce the stigma of being a crime victim.

PCMC: This can be a very heavy job. How do you handle the stress?

MS: Decompressing with colleagues always helps. And I often reach out to my counterparts at our network providers, just to bounce ideas off of them or see how they might handle a situation. It can be a tough job, but it can also be very rewarding. I really enjoy being able to help people get to a little bit better place in their lives. I'm also just so amazed by the resilience of the human spirit. Even a horrible event doesn't have to define a person. Watching people emerge from trauma and crisis to go on to lead fulfilling lives gives me faith in humanity and makes me more secure, personally.

PCMC: When you are not advocating on behalf of victims in Park City, how do you spend your time?

MS: I like to spend time with my husband, dog, and six-month-old son. I also love to read and write and am currently writing a novel. I'm more of a summer (than winter) sports person: our family enjoys hiking, biking, and running. I was also recently appointed to the Snyderville Basin Planning Commission.

To learn more about the city's [victim advocate program](#) or to contact Ms. Stevens, visit the program page on the city's website. You can also learn more about [National Victim's Rights Week](#), which is going on now.