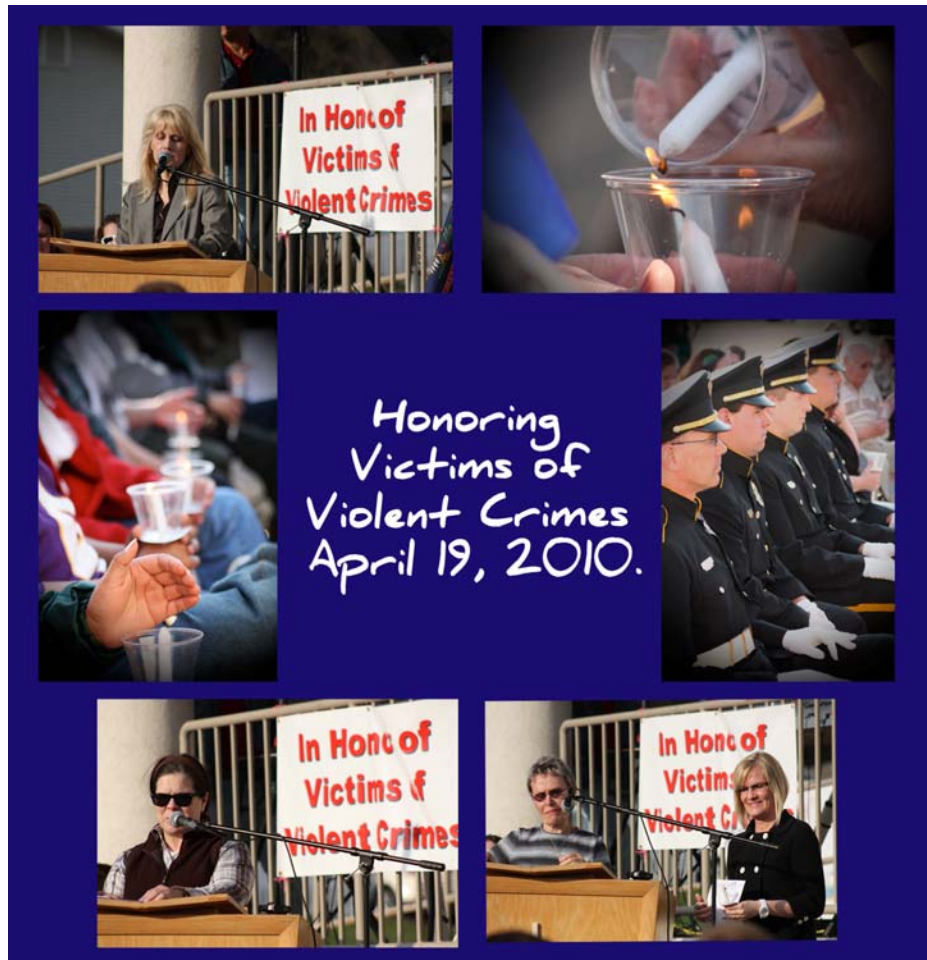


Honoring Victims of Violent Crimes

By: Heidi Francis, Crime Victim Coordinator

On April 19, 2010, the North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCR) collaborated with the Bismarck branch of the Minot State University Student Social Work Organization to coordinate an event to honor victims of violent crimes. The event was planned in conjunction with National Crime Victims' Rights Week which ran from April 18 through April 24, 2010. Our goal of the event was to inform victims and the community of victim's rights, as well as honoring those who have been impacted by crime, who continues to be impacted, and who have lost their life due to violence. The Candle Light Vigil Honoring Victims of Violent Crimes was a success and was held in the parking lot of the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church with a rare day of great weather. Approximately 85 people attending the event, ranging from victims and victims' family members, students, professionals who work with victims, as well as many community members.

The event opened with the DOCR Honor Guard presenting the Colors, followed by Leann Bertsch, the Director of the DOCR, providing a speech regarding victim's rights. During the event we also heard from two guest speakers; Sharon spoke of her daughter's murder and how it has impacted her, even today, 30 years after losing her daughter she continues to be impacted. She discussed what she has gone through and the things that she has done to continue living, which include speaking to the legislature regarding ND Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification System (SAVIN). Shelly provided information about the physical and mental abuse she had to live through and how the events of her life have impacted her and her children. She also discussed the services that were beneficial to her during her time of need, and discussed some of the key people and the roles they played in helping her and her family live safe, happy lives. Following the speakers, Pastor Jeff Tengesdal provided some inspirational words, as well as led us in a prayer, honoring and remembering victims of violence. Then the Candle Light Vigil was held with the song, "You Raise Me Up", and a moment of silence. The event closed with the DOCR Honor Guard retiring the Colors. Our hope is to continue providing this event each year, and to keep the victims and the community informed of victim's rights, as well as continuing to honor those who are impacted by crime every day.



DOCR Director Leann Bertsch's Speech

"It is an honor to be with you to commemorate National Crime Victims' Rights Week. This week is recognized nationwide to honor crime victims, especially those who have lost their lives, and families who have lost loved ones due to crime. It is a time to celebrate the progress that has been made to secure rights and services for crime victims.

Over a thousand North Dakotans are victims of crime each year and may experience emotional, physical, psychological and financial crises and harm as a result of crime. As we acknowledge the impact of crime on individuals, families, and communities, we also must ensure that victims are treated with fairness, dignity and respect in the criminal justice system and in their community.

Fairness, dignity and respect are provided to crime victims when we help them access the resources they need, from financial resources such as crime victim compensation or restitution, to emotional support and counseling; when we help them plan for their own safety; when we give them the information they need to

make their own choices; when we make sure they have the opportunity to participate in the criminal justice process; When we do all of these things, we give victims a voice.

North Dakota, through the rights guaranteed victims within the Fair Treatment Standards for Victims and Witnesses of Crime, has improved the treatment of victims in the justice system. Treating victims with dignity serves the public interest by inspiring respect for public authorities and promoting confidence in public safety, which in turn, encourages victims to report crime.

Ensuring fair treatment of crime victims requires information. We must ensure they are informed of the rights to attend trial, present an impact statement at sentencing, or receive notice of the release or movement of an offender. North Dakota's investment in SAVIN enhances services to victims by immediate notification through the latest technology. Ensuring victims' rights restores hope to crime victims that the justice system and society will work to restore their dignity and respect their needs.

Let us make this week a time to recommit ourselves to make sure that all crime victims have the help they need, that none falls through the cracks in systems established to protect them. Let us make sure that victims' rights are not just observed annually but practiced daily.”

DOCR Director Leann Bertsch