

Computer system gives comfort to crime victims

By Maya Hollinshead

Edited by Matt Williams

Mary, whose name has been changed to protect her identity, had a difficult relationship with her estranged boyfriend.

"My estranged boyfriend was very abusive, physically and mentally. It had a powerful impact on me," Mary said. "Some things he would say to me to stay with him was, 'If you leave me, I will kill you,' 'I'm the only one who loves you,' and 'I will kill you in a rage of passion.' In other words, he didn't want me to leave him."

Mary finally had enough courage to have her boyfriend arrested. He was charged with assault and battery of a high and aggravated nature and if found guilty, could be sentenced up to 10 years in prison. The trial will take place sometime next year.

Keeping S.C. crime victims informed

The Internet Victim Information System, or IVIS, is a computer database system that keeps South Carolina crime victims informed all of the time. The system is being developed by Advanced Solutions Group, which is associated with USC's Department of Physics and Astronomy.

How does it work?

- A victim advocate registers a victim or a witness of a crime by recording notification information (such as phone numbers and e-mail addresses) in the system.
- When developments happen in a victim's case, IVIS can automatically generate phone calls, letters and e-mail notification to the person using the notification information.
- Victims can also check out IVIS's website to check on their cases.

Source: Advanced Solutions Group at USC

Maya Hollinshead/Carolina Reporter

Everyday, crime victims like Mary depend on updates on criminals who have victimized them. A new system being developed at the University of South Carolina is expected to make the lives of victims better by giving them peace of mind.

The Internet Victim Information System helps South Carolina crime victims stay informed on their offender's cases. The computer system is being developed by Advanced Solutions Group, which is associated with USC's Department of Physics and Astronomy. It is funded by the Victims of Crime Act funding, awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice.

The system is operated by a large, powerful database that can be accessed through a secure website and through telephones with human voice recordings and a computer-generated voice. For a victim to be registered in the system, a victim advocate (a South Carolina justice employee who helps victims in various stages of the justice system) must register a victim or a witness of a crime by recording notification information in the system. Notification information can include telephone numbers and e-mail addresses.

With this information, the system can automatically generate phone calls, letters and e-mail notification to the victim that indicates the criminal's activity. This could include arrests, court hearings and releases. The system can also give the victim the time of occurrence and the name and phone number of the enforcement agency to contact for further information. Victims can check out the system's website or call to check on their cases.

Laura Hudson, the public policy coordinator for the S.C. Victim Assistance Network, said many state police and sheriff's departments are using the system. Richland County Sheriff's Department is in the process of getting the system, while Lexington County has a similar system.

"Many of them are using it for misdemeanor crimes," Hudson said. "It is also good for stalking victims, assault victims and criminal domestic violence victims."

Hudson said some state enforcement agencies are waiting for funding so they can be linked to the system.

"As they get money for it, it would take two to three years for all of them to get linked," Hudson said.

Julie Frick, public information coordinator for Advance Solutions Group, said the technology is so well constructed that other states are planning to use it for their statewide notification systems.

"So far, Colorado has the technology, and ASG is working with justice agencies there to customize the software for the state," Frick said. "In the past months, ASG has received many requests from several other states, as well as U.S. territories, that are reviewing and considering the IVIS technology for their crime victim notification systems."

Hudson said the victim assistance network is happy about the system.

"We're really excited to give immediate information to crime victims, and it gives safety to them," Hudson said.

Mary, who depends on her victim advocate to call her on updates on her case, said the system would be very helpful to her.

"I think it's very helpful because there was a time victims didn't have rights," Mary said. "I feel very safe that there is something like this out there."