



Supplying scheduling information will keep the staff busy.



The staff of the center hopes to work closely with the officers who make the first contact with crime victims and witnesses.



Property used as evidence has to be claimed from the property clerk. Below, the storage area where the property is kept.

A New Service Begins

Many programs exist for persons arrested and charged with crime. There are public defenders, bail funds, medical and psychiatric care, and in prison food and clothing are supplied.

The victims of crime are treated much differently. An ambulance will take the victim to a hospital if necessary, and later he will be hailed into court. How should he know how to cope with the criminal justice system, or with problems resulting from the crime?

The Victim Assistance Center which began operation there March 1 is tailored to the needs of victims and witnesses. Operating in the city police department, the program is one of less than a dozen nationwide. It is funded for one year with a \$156,000 federal grant. The office is located in room 704 of the Public Safety Building, down the corridor to the right of the Headquarters desk. The telephone number is 428-6630. Staff members can be identified by their green blazers.

Police Lieutenant James W. O'Brien is project director, and Susan L. Costa is coordinator. There are five "victim service workers" and a secretary.

The center has received good cooperation from the various government agencies that victims and witnesses deal with. Ms. Costa points out that people are receptive

to a program benefiting crime victims, and willing to help.

The idea for this program grew from the rape crisis centers established during the past few years in many cities. It became obvious that the services they provided would be useful to victims of other crimes. The Rochester project is a pilot program, examining the need and the best way for such programs to operate.

Because the first contact a crime victim has with the criminal justice system is a policeman, the program includes a short training session for policemen in handling victims and witnesses. If the officers can avoid seeming threatening, witnesses more likely will show up in court to testify.

Police officers will have business style cards they can fill out, notifying the center of victims who may need assistance. Hospitals are aware of the program, and also will make referrals.

The center receives copies of subpoenas delivered and makes contact with the victim or witness. The staff worker makes sure that the witness knows how to get to the court. If a witness is unable to make the stated time, the service worker will contact the appropriate trial personnel and try to solve the problem.

If a conference with the district attorney prosecuting the case is necessary, the victim service worker may go with the witness. The district attorney's office is enthusiastic about the program, seeing it as a means of procuring witnesses and cutting down the number of adjournments. The center has two vehicles to provide transportation, if necessary.

A victim sustaining personal injury may be eligible for compensation from the New York State Compensation Board. The center will help with the paperwork.

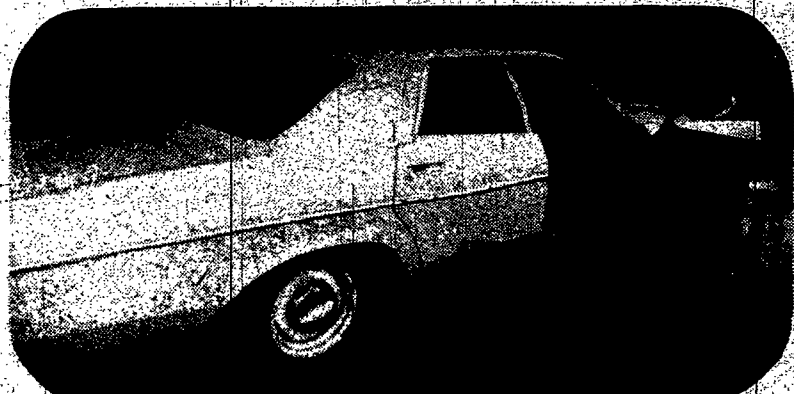
When the case has been completed, the center will notify the victim and witnesses of the outcome. Lt. O'Brien noted that many times a witness would testify, and then never hear the outcome of the trial. This communications gap could cause bad feelings, needlessly.

Property used as evidence must be picked up at the conclusion of the trial. Lt. O'Brien notes that nationally 25 per cent of such property is never returned. The center hopes to work with the property clerk to ensure that all property is picked up.

The center estimates that 40,000 people could be either victims or witnesses to crimes during its trial year.



Victim Assistance also extends to hospitals, which are equipped to refer crime victims to the center.



The center has two vehicles available to provide transportation for those who would not otherwise be able to get to court.



Police Lieutenant James O'Brien, project director, was charged with making the program operational.