VICTIM ADVOCACY CORPS



ELEVATING THE NEXT GENERATION

September 2025





AUTHORS OF THIS REPORT

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR VICTIM ADVOCACY

Abrianna Morales, Victim Advocacy Corps Program Manager

Jasmine Uribe, Associate Director of Youth Engagement

Shannon Collins, Senior Director of Training & Technical Assistance

CONTRIBUTORS

HOPE M&E EVALUATION AND RESEARCH

Martha Hernandez-Martinez, Founder & CEO

RAINBOW RESEARCH

Dr. Samuel H. Leguizamon Grant, Executive Director

© 2025 National Organization for Victim Advocacy (NOVA) This publication is available in a PDF format at www.trynova.org.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR VICTIM ADVOCACY

Founded in 1975, NOVA is the oldest national victim assistance organization of its type in the United States and is a recognized leader in victim advocacy, education, crisis response, and credentialing.

We support aspiring advocates, victim assistance professionals, crisis responders, civilian and government advocacy groups, and allied professionals working with victims of crime and crisis. Our work extends to supporting public policy promoting victims' rights.

Our longstanding commitment to compassionate, evidence-based victim advocacy guides our work. As we have grown, so have our efforts to advance the field of victim assistance and crisis response.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This program was made possible by initial funding and support from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC). Thank you for your investment in the future of victim services.

The Victim Advocacy Corps (VAC) was designed and implemented through strong partnerships across communities, college campuses, and sectors. We would like to extend our most heartfelt thanks to our campus partners, field-placement sites, consultants, Advocate Mentors, and Advisory Committee for their dedication, energy, and perspectives.

Finally, we would like to thank the 'stars' of this work: Our VAC Student Fellows. As the next generation of leaders in victim advocacy, we appreciate your dedication to community and your willingness to learn alongside us throughout this pilot, and wish you all the best as you continue to re-imagine the future of advocacy in your communities.

A VISION FOR A BETTER FUTURE

The victims' rights movement started out small. It was born in community, at the grassroots, invested in and built up by those who believed in it most: advocates and survivors. Our field's longstanding commitment to doing what's right is at the heart of what makes victim advocacy so special and is central to NOVA's mission to champion dignity and compassion for those harmed by crime and crisis.

More than 50 years removed from the genesis of the victims' rights movement, the question of 'what's right' stands stronger than ever before. The very nature of violence and victimization is changing. Trust in the criminal legal system is wavering. A new generation is emerging.

In times of uncertainty, it serves us to remember what we do know. We know that survivors continue to lack access to essential services. We know that those services, and that systems, more generally, do not often reflect the perspectives or needs of survivors who use them.

We know that it's essential to build up the next generation of leaders in the victims' rights movement—that we need to meet this moment, however uncertain it may feel, with optimism for and belief in the future.

NOVA established the Victim Advocacy Corps (VAC) to do just that. Created in partnership with college campuses in communities, designed with survivors' needs in mind, and built to uplift the next generation of leaders in our field, the VAC is a pipeline that connects students from underserved communities with career pathways in victim services.

The VAC is more than a program. It's a vision of a future in which survivors have reliable access to the services they need, provided by advocates who represent and understand them. The VAC aims to make that vision—that future—a reality. It dares to invest in young people, in underserved communities with the belief that they will advance the victims' rights movement, make services accessible to all who need them, and build a better world along the way.



Claire Vonder Selib

Claire Ponder Selib

Executive Director

National Organization for Victim Advocacy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	6
Background	7
What is the Victim Advocacy Corps?	9
Year One: Designing a Framework	11
Year Two: Uplifting the Next Generation	15
Year Three: Building a Pipeline	24
Reflections and Lessons Learned	29
Improving the Present, Imagining the Future	39
Notes & Acknowledgements	42

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NOVA's Victim Advocacy Corps (VAC) aims to connect students with careers in victim advocacy and communities with the services they need by, uplifting the next generation of youth leaders in victim services. We achieve this by providing college students from underserved communities with victim advocacy training, credentialing, mentorship, and a paid, nine-month field-placement at a local victim service agency.

The VAC pilot program was funded in Fall 2023 and launched in Summer 2024 with 17 Student Fellows from six campuses across the United States starting the program and 14 Student Fellows successfully completing the program. These Student Fellows received 40 hours of victim advocacy training, became credentialed advocates, received mentorship from subject-matter experts in the field, completed 250 service hours at agencies in their local communities, and were paid \$8,000 stipends for their participation in the 9-month program.

The VAC, as an endeavor to connect students with careers in victim advocacy and communities with the services they need, was successful. In Spring 2025, 14 Student Fellows graduated from the program and received a Provisional Credential from the National Advocate Credentialing Program (NACP).

Future iterations of the VAC will aim to improve the program by prioritizing partnerships with community agencies, streamlining Student Fellow training, and tailoring programming to meet the needs of both early and mid-career Student Fellows.

BACKGROUND

Visionaries of the Victims' Rights Movement

In 1974, there was a gathering in Fort Lauderdale. Hailing from cities and towns throughout the country, a group of victim advocates—survivors, activists, and visionaries—came together for the first-ever national workshop on victim advocate programs, hoping to learn how they could better serve victims in their communities.

They came for new skills, but they left with something even greater: a vision that would shape the future of victim services—and an organization that would come to be known as the National Organization for Victim Advocacy (NOVA).

A lot has changed since then, but 50 years later, NOVA remains the oldest national victim assistance organization of its type in the United States and continues to be a leading force in victim advocacy, education, and credentialing.

Visit our website to learn more trynova.org/about/history/

As a leader in the field, NOVA is not only committed to uplifting the voices of victims and advocates, but is also determined to advance victim services by creating innovative programs that respond to the demands of the field.

In 2024, there was another gathering. But this time, it was in Washington, D.C. Hailing from cities and towns throughout the country, a group of students—survivors, activists, emerging advocates—came together for a week of training, connection, and community-building. But it wouldn't stop there.

As inaugural members of NOVA's new Victim Advocacy Corps, these Student Fellows would spend the next nine months charting a course for the upcoming generation of leaders.

This report tells their story.

Victims' Rights: A Growing Movement with Growing Needs

The Victims' Rights Movement has successfully championed significant changes in crime victims' rights, victim compensation, and victims' services. Among other advances, the professionalization of the field has been key to elevating victim advocacy as a career and developing critical standards for facilitating trauma-informed, survivor-centered advocacy services.



50% of violent of unreported of violent crimes go unreported due to victims' lack of trust in law enforcement.

Since its inception in the 20th century, the victim services field has significantly grown in size and scope, with the field being composed of more than 12,000 victim service providers representing a wide range of agencies, including nonprofits/faith-based agencies, government agencies, tribal agencies, college campus programs, among other victim service programs.¹



Yet, with more than 50% of violent crimes not being reported due to crime victims' lack of trust in law enforcement and the criminal justice system, and only one in 10 crime victims reporting receiving assistance from a district attorney or prosecutor's office, it was evident that something needed to be done to ensure that crime victims have access to services that are representative, trustworthy, and grounded in community.

It was clear that the next generation of advocates and service providers needed training, support, and career pathways that enabled them to serve survivors in their communities.

And, most of all, it was clear that we needed to do something about it.





VAC Student Fellows and NOVA Staff with former US Attorney General Merrick Garland

WHAT IS THE VICTIM ADVOCACY CORPS?

Our Vision for the Next Generation

NOVA's Victim Advocacy Corps (VAC) aims to address these pressing issues by elevating the next generation of leaders in victim services. Developed in partnership with victim-survivors, advocates, and institutions of higher education, the VAC connects college students with victim advocacy training, credentialing, mentorship, and a

nine-month, paid field-placement in a local victim service agency. This initiative—inspired by service corps programs like AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, and Teach for America—is founded on a commitment to service. The Victim Advocacy Corps creates a career pipeline for college students to become victim advocates.

YEAR ONE: DESIGNING A FRAMEWORK YEAR TWO: UPLIFTING THE NEXT GENERATION YEAR THREE: **BUILDING A PIPELINE**

Project Timeline

The Victim Advocacy Corps (VAC) pilot ran for three years, starting in 2022.

Year One: Designing a Framework
NOVA designed the framework of the
VAC pilot by hiring program staff,
assessing gaps and opportunities,
formalizing agreements with project
partners, convening an Advisory
Committee, establishing a process for
evaluation, and conducting listening
sessions with key populations.

Year Two: Uplifting the Next Generation
After designing the VAC pilot, NOVA
recruited and selected Student Fellows
from partner campuses, formalized
partnerships with field-placements,
created and disseminated tools for
process evaluation, and trained the
inaugural VAC Cohort at NOVA's 50th
Annual Training Event in Washington, D.C.

Year Three: Building a Pipeline

Following the launch of the pilot, NOVA facilitated monthly cohort calls, individual check-ins, and virtual site visits with Student Fellows, assigned Student Fellow mentors, gathered and processed evaluations and feedback, supported their attainment of NACP credentials, conducted surveys and interviews with stakeholders, and prepared a final report on the impact of the pilot program.



Designing Together: Strategic Planning & Partnerships

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." We knew that elevating the next generation of leaders in victim services was something that we could not do alone. From the start, we prioritized partnerships with stakeholders—youth survivor-advocates, college campuses, researchers, and others—who had unique, important perspectives to bring to the table. This 'table,' our VAC Advisory Committee, met quarterly over the course of the pilot to offer guidance, input, and feedback as we designed and implemented the VAC Pilot Program.

Campus Partners

The VAC Pilot was developed in partnership with six institutions of higher education across the United States, each bringing their own, unique campus context:

- Aaniiih Nakoda College Fort Belknap, MT
- Coahoma Community
 College Clarksdale, MS
- Gallaudet University -Washington, D.C.
- Regis University Denver, CO
- University of New Mexico -Albuquerque, NM
- The University of Texas El Paso - El Paso, TX

Program Evaluators

The VAC Pilot was developed in partnership with evaluators from Rainbow Research.

Rainbow Research conducted listening sessions in year one to assess needs, and developed assessment strategies in year two to facilitate ongoing process evaluation for the remainder of the program.

In Year 3, Martha Hernandez-Martinez, Founder & CEO of HOPE M&E EVALUATION AND RESEARCH served as an independent evaluator.

Where it Began: Victim Advocacy Corps Town Hall

Albuquerque, New Mexico (2023)

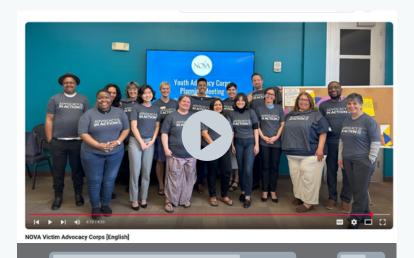
On April 24, 2023, NOVA and the VAC Advisory Committee, came together to launch the Victim Advocacy Corps with a Town Hall at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

The panel included youth survivoradvocates, campus representatives, an introduction from Former Director of the Office on Victims of Crime, Kristina Rose and a musical performance from UNM student group Something Major A Capella.

Following the Town Hall, NOVA and VAC Advisory Committee members met with program evaluators to discuss the vision and strategy of the pilot program, shared perspectives on victim services in their respective communities, and asked questions about what it would mean to design a VAC that is truly inclusive and accessible.



Three advocates discuss youth engagement in victim services at the VAC Town Hall & Planning Meeting



Screenshot taken from the Town Hall video showing Advisory Committee members, program evaluators, OVC and NOVA Staff posing for a group picture at the first Committee Meeting at the University of New Mexico

Finding the Gaps: Listening Sessions

In addition to working with our VAC Advisory Committee, NOVA sought additional input and expertise from three key communities:

Service Corps Professionals

People with lived experience serving in or administering a service corps program (e.g., Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, Teach for America)

Victim Service Professionals

People with lived experience working as a victim advocate, crisis responder, or allied professional who provides direct services to crime victims

College Students/Survivors

People enrolled in college who may or may not have lived experience as a victim-survivor of crime

Facilitated by Rainbow Research and NOVA Staff, these structured conversations focused on participants' perceptions of victim services, service corps programs, and access to services and service opportunities for young people from historically marginalized communities.

THREE COMMUNITIES. SIX SESSIONS. THREE KEY INSIGHTS.

UNDERSTAND THE CRITICAL ROLE OF ADVOCATES

Victim advocates help survivors navigate systems, connect them with resources, and offer emotional support.

PRIORITIZE COMMUNITY, ACCESS, AND SUPPORT

Victim service programs should emphasize community partnerships, eliminate barriers to participation, and offer adequate support resources (e.g., mental health support) to new advocates.

UPLIFT NEW VOICES, SHIFT OLD NORMS

Victim service programs should aim to elevate the voices, needs, and perspectives of young people and folks from historically marginalized communities, focusing on accessibility, cultural responsiveness, and alternative approaches to justice and healing.



RECRUITMENT & SELECTION: CHOOSING THE NEXT GENERATION

What does the next generation of advocates look like? What do they have in common? Such questions were at the forefront of conversation when deciding how to recruit and select members of the new Victim Advocacy Corps.

Listening sessions and close guidance from the VAC Advisory Committee made one thing clear: Our selection criteria, like our Student Fellows, would need to be unique, dynamic, and responsive to community members' needs.

With this in mind, we considered how common requirements like age limits, grade-point average (GPA), and letters of recommendation can often pose barriers for nontraditional students.

After all, is 'youth' strictly defined by age, or is it determined by where one is on their life path? How does GPA capture a working parent's ability to juggle child-rearing, work, and schooling?

Our chief focus and priority for the recruitment and selection process

was to maximize accessibility for applicants, working closely with each campus to build procedures that would best support the students in their community.

Recruitment

Utilizing a combination of traditional flyers, social media posts, promotional videos, and word-of-mouth outreach, we collaborated with campus sites to recruit students to apply to the program from August 2023 to January 2024. The program was widely advertised to both undergraduate and graduate students.

At the end of the recruitment period, we received 35 applications from the six campuses.

Selection Process

Applications were reviewed and evaluated by NOVA Program Staff and campus representatives using a standardized rubric. Finalists from each campus were invited to participate in a 20-minute, virtual interview with program staff.

In May 2024, 17 Student Fellows from the six campuses were selected to participate in the pilot.

ANATOMY OF A VAC APPLICATION

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name, age, contact information, school, major, year, and language access needs

VICTIM SERVICE INTERESTS

Experience working as a victim advocate, populations served and/or populations interested in serving

REFERENCES

A friend, family member, supervisor, or other person who can speak to experience working with others

SHORT ESSAYS

Three questions about what it means to be an advocate, how identity influences advocacy, and career goals

An Accessible Application Process

The Victim Advocacy Corps application was designed to be accessible for and inclusive of all potential applicants. Available in digital and physical (paper) formats, the application itself was brief and consisted of four sections: demographics, victim service interests, references, and short essays, and could be submitted in multiple formats (e.g., video, audio recording, etc.) depending on the applicant's needs and preferences.

Discussions with the Advisory Committee led us to conclude that instituting a strict age eligibility requirement would be limiting for non-traditional students, which helped us reconceptualize 'youth' to include those who are 'young' or early in their educational and/or career path. For similar reasons, we also eliminated a GPA requirement and did not ask for traditional letters of recommendation.

Throughout the application submission window, NOVA Program Staff hosted virtual, drop-in 'office hours' where applicants could ask questions and learn more about the program.

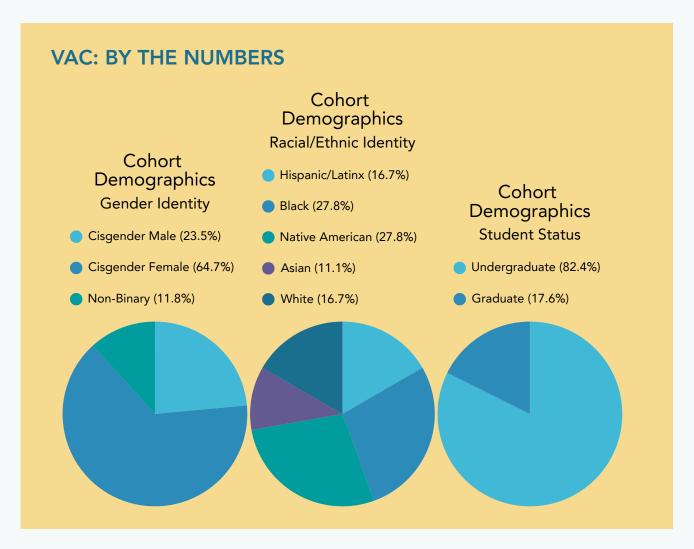
All finalists were interviewed using the same set of questions, with language interpretation provided by NOVA as needed.

THE INAUGURAL VAC COHORT

The 17 selected Student Fellows were a diverse group that represented their campus and local communities, and brought a variety of experiences and perspectives to their new role as student advocates.

The average age within the cohort was 24 years old, with the youngest Student Fellow being 18 and the oldest being 38 at the start of the program. 83.4% of the Student Fellows identified as non-white (e.g., as Hispanic/Latinx, Black, Native American, or Asian). Seven Student Fellows (41.2%) identified as bilingual (e.g. American Sign Language, Spanish)

The majority (76.5%) of the cohort had little to no experience working in victim services, though some Student Fellows (23.5%) came into the program with 1 - 5 years of experience working in the victim services field.



TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION

What do new advocates need to know about serving survivors? We sought to create a training curriculum that would not only teach our Student Fellows the basics of victim advocacy, but would lay a strong foundation for continued learning and growth as they navigated their field-placements and the unique dynamics of their communities.

Over 40 hours of training that covered topics ranging from crisis intervention to language justice, the VAC Student Fellows had the chance to learn and explore exactly what being a victim advocate entails.

Curriculum Development

The VAC Training Curriculum was developed in adherence to guidelines established by the National Advocate Credentialing Program (NACP). The NACP, as the sole national credentialing body for victim advocates, outlines basic requirements for training and credentialing, including content and training duration.

In the development of the VAC Training Curriculum, NOVA Staff consulted the NACP's list of foundational training topics as well as those included in the Office for Victims of Crime's Victim Assistance Training (VAT).



Four Victim Advocacy Corps Student Fellows listen to a workshop presentation at NOVA50

All training content, including learning objectives and materials, were created and delivered in consultation with subject matter experts, including NOVA Staff and external consultants, and approved by OVC and the NACP.

Training Delivery: In-Person

VAC Student Fellows received their training in two sections. The first 29 hours of the VAC Training Curriculum were delivered in-person in Washington, D.C. at the VAC Leadership Summit.

The Summit, which ran parallel to NOVA's 50th Annual Training Event (NOVA50), featured live training sessions delivered by NOVA Staff and consultants, as well as access to NOVA50 keynote, plenary, and workshop sessions.

In addition to live training sessions, VAC Student Fellows had the chance to connect with one another and the larger advocacy community. Beyond connecting with NOVA50 attendees, VAC Student Fellows also visited both the U.S. Attorney General's Office and Office on Gun Violence Prevention at the White House.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE VAC LEADERSHIP SUMMIT



VAC Student Fellows smiling for a group photo on the NOVA50 stage



VAC Student Fellow, Priscilla Berrios, attending a live training session at NOVA50



VAC Student Fellow, Janeese Brisbo, laughing and having fun as she descends an escalator at the VAC Leadership Summit

VAC STUDENT FELLOW SPOTLIGHT

ADVANCING ADVOCACY, CELEBRATING COMMUNITY

For Thanh Nguyen, a Student Fellow at the University of New Mexico, no day at her fieldplacement is the same. The New Mexico Asian Family Center (NMAFC), where she completed her placement, provides services for sexual assault and domestic violence survivors hailing from the Pan-Asian community. From tea talks to healing circles to multidisciplinary team meetings, NMAFC (and Thanh) cater to the varied, multi-faceted needs of the community—which are always changing.



Thanh Nguyen stands with NMAFC Executive Director and NOVA VAC Program Manager

"[Each day] looks a little different,"
Thanh shared over a recent Zoom
call. "I think that's really reflective of
advocacy work...It's about adapting
to community needs and pivoting
where you need to."

When she's not changing gears or moving to the next thing, Thanh's bringing a unique perspective to her work with youth populations. "Thanh was instrumental in helping to shape activities that would resonate with youth," Sarah Azibo, NMAFC's Youth Program Coordinator, shared. "Our programs, and the agency as a whole, have benefited greatly from the investment she has given to NMAFC."

But being a part of the VAC is only the beginning of her commitment to serving her community. As a graduate student and aspiring mental health counselor, Thanh aims to use her experience serving survivors to better serve clients in the future. "Advocacy is more comprehensive than just a job title...I've really been impacted by the need to be a presence in my community."



VAC Student Fellows, NOVA Staff, former OVC Director Kristina Rose, and former Deputy Director of the White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention posing for a photo on the White House steps

Training Delivery: Online

The remaining 11 hours of training were delivered virtually over the course of the VAC Program via LearnUpon, NOVA's online training platform.

VAC Student Fellows had the ability to complete all online training modules at their own pace over the course of the VAC Program. All modules included curated reference materials (e.g., readings, podcast episodes, videos), and the VAC Student Fellows were given the opportunity to respond in writing.

These asynchronous training modules covered a variety of topics that aimed to supplement the VAC Student Fellows' knowledge of working with different populations, including the LGBTQ+ and Deaf/Hard of Hearing Community. Upon successful completion of the online training modules, Student Fellows were able to submit an application to the NACP to receive a 'Provisional' Credential, certifying them as a Credentialed Advocate (CA).

IDENTIFYING FIELD-PLACEMENTS

The largest component of the VAC Program is the Student Fellows' field-placement experience. At their field-placement—a victim service agency in their local community—VAC Student Fellows have the opportunity to put their training into action and serve survivors for a total of 250 hours (125 per semester or ~8 hours per week over the academic year).

Upon acceptance, VAC Student Fellows worked with NOVA Program Staff to identify potential field-placements in their community that aligned with their interests and expertise. Once these options were identified, NOVA Program Staff and representatives from the campus sites conducted outreach to or leveraged established partnerships with local agencies where the Student Fellows would complete their service hours.

Some partner campuses, by virtue of their being in rural areas, had limited or no victim service agencies in the community for the Student Fellows to serve. In these cases, NOVA Program Staff collaborated with campus representatives to establish 'on-campus' field-placements for Student Fellows, housed in their college's violence prevention office and focused on conducting outreach and raising awareness.



Thanh Nguyen, VAC Student Fellow, at NM State Legislature with field-placement team



VAC Student Fellow, Sicilee Silvermsith, at a field-placement event



KeiJuan Neese, VAC Student Fellow, raising awareness on campus.



DOING THE WORK: FIELD-PLACEMENT EXPERIENCES

After returning home from the VAC Leadership Summit, VAC Student Fellows were tasked with preparing for the next, big step in the program: Putting their training into action and serving survivors.

For eight hours each week, Student Fellows would report to their field-placements to work on a variety of tasks and projects in support of the organization's mission. For some Student Fellows, this looked like managing client intake. For others, it was building a new resource directory for survivors in the community.

Whatever work they did, they brought their unique knowledge, expertise, and perspectives to their agency.

"Priscilla has had a big impact on how the organization can expand their services to be more accessible for everyone—particularly to the Deaf/HoH community." Natalie Clayton, her host-site supervisor, reported that Priscilla has advocated for bringing curriculum and resources to folks in the Deaf community.



VAC Student Fellow, Sophie Anderson-Haynie, at her field-placement

"This resource guide will be helpful for tribal and community members across NM." Tiffany Jiron, Sicilee's host-site supervisor, shared that Sicilee has been instrumental in developing and completing a comprehensive resource guide for tribal and community members across the state of New Mexico.

Building Capacity

For many of the field-placement agencies, having a VAC Student Fellow in the office proved to be a positive addition when it came to providing services to different and new populations. As young people possessing a variety of experiences and identities, VAC Student Fellows helped their field-placement agencies expand and improve their work.

VAC STUDENT FELLOW SPOTLIGHT

MAKING A LASTING IMPACT



lan Bolden stands with team at his field-placement agency, Family Crisis Services

When Ian joined the VAC in 2024, he thought that being an advocate was simply being a voice for others. After participating in the program and serving at his field-placement, he now believes that it's so much more.

At Family Crisis Services in Oxford, Mississippi, Ian spent a lot of time observing. He sat in on meetings, watched forensic interviews, and even had the chance to go to court with his supervisor as they supported a client. In his words: "I got to see a different side of people...My placement really opened my eyes."

As an aspiring prosecutor, lan hopes to use his experience working as a VAC

Student Fellow to help him better serve victims in his community. But even more, lan's participation in the VAC taught him essential skills for working in an office setting and navigating time management as a college student—skills that he hopes to take with him into his career.

When asked what advice he would give to the next cohort of VAC Student Fellows, Ian had this to say: "Even if you're not going along with the advocate [career] route...The skills that you gain from this program will be vital for any career that you choose and make you gain a deep appreciation for anyone who does this kind of work."

SEEING THE WORK: VIRTUAL SITE VISITS & COMMUNITY IMPACT

Virtual Site Visits

Each semester, VAC Student Fellows and their host-site supervisor met with the VAC Program Manager for a virtual site visit, which gave both the Student Fellow and the host-site supervisor an opportunity to discuss the fieldplacement experience, including goals, objectives, projects, capacity, and any existing concerns.

"Felicia has had a tremendous impact."
Vincent Spean, her host-site supervisor, shared that Felicia, as a PhD student, has been able to expand services by offering clinical neuropsychological assessments to clients with traumatic brain injuries (TBIs). "A lot of clients want directions for treatment...Felicia being here allows us to offer that to them."



lan Bolden standing by an awareness project for Child Abuse Prevention Month

Sicilee Silversmith in a group photo with staff from her field-placement agency

"Aldo has a true advocate heart." Susan Oliva, Aldo's host-site supervisor, shared that Aldo is using his research and policy experience to help the organization improve their policies, procedures, and approaches to serving children in the El Paso area. "He has a very broad outlook on helping victims of all kinds."

"KeiJuan has had a huge impact working with the office." Kenneth Gooden, KeiJuan's host-site supervisor, related that KeiJuan has helped improve messaging and communication to other students on campus, particularly with regard to violence prevention and victim advocacy.



Thanh Nguyen tabling with her field-placement agency at a community event

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS: MENTORSHIP AND PEER CONNECTION

A victim advocate is only as strong as their community. Being able to work with and learn from others—mentors, peers, and colleagues—is a key skill in victim services and in life. It's what gets us through the toughest of moments and to the best parts of the job.

The VAC Program was designed with this in mind. In addition to training, credentialing, and placing Student Fellows at victim service agencies, we built a community in the form of monthly cohort calls, check-ins, and advocate mentors, to help Student Fellows to strengthen old connections and create new ones.

Individual Check-Ins

Each Student Fellow met with the VAC Program Manager for 30-minutes each month to discuss program requirements, field-placements, and personal well-being.

These calls, though brief, were an opportunity to address any questions or concerns Student Fellows had about their placement or the program, more generally.

Monthly Cohort Calls

All Student Fellows convened for a monthly Cohort Call. These group meetings gave Student Fellows the opportunity to connect and discuss their experiences navigating the program and field-placement. In addition to peer connection, Cohort Calls also offered professional development opportunities via exclusive panel discussions and guest speakers.

Advocate Mentorship

Student Fellows were assigned Advocate Mentors at the beginning of their field-placements based on their interests and expertise.

These Advocate Mentors, as experienced victim service providers, met with their respective Student Fellows for six hours over the course of the fellowship to offer their perspectives, advice, and support for career planning as well as professional networking.

VAC STUDENT FELLOW SPOTLIGHT

BRINGING A NEW PERSPECTIVE



Janeese Brisbo, VAC Student Fellow

"Janeese is a new, fresh-faced person that the kids are willing to listen to." James Hodgson, Janeese's host-site supervisor, reported that she has made a positive impact through the anti-violence and anti-bullying programming she has been developing for the youth she works with.

Janeese, who was placed in Fort Belknap, Montana's Harlem High School, came into the program with a goal of building connections and confidence working with kids and young people. At the end of her time as a VAC Student Fellow, she feels that she's met that goal. "When I first talked to students...I needed to have notes and paper. Now, I can speak off-the-cuff, from the heart."

In the face of community tragedies, Janeese has helped bring new perspectives to addressing issues like bullying and healthy relationships. From facilitating group activities to giving presentations, she's become a new face that makes a strong impression and has a strong influence on the community. These are skills she's been glad to hone—skills she'll take with her into her career.

The new perspectives that Janeese brought to her placement have also helped her to see her own future in a new light: "[I've realized] that this is where I want to be in my career.

Once I get my degree, I know that I want to work in a school setting—and this placement has shown me what I want to do."





A GREAT SUCCESS: POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR THE VAC

The Victim Advocacy Corps (VAC) pilot connected college students with career pathways in victim services. Fourteen of the seventeen student fellows successfully graduated the program. Those that were unable to complete the program disclosed a need to step away as fellows due to higher demand of their coursework, or need to partake in another internship program on campus as a requirement of their coursework during the semester.

In the process Victim Advocacy Corps Fellows:

- Attended the VAC Leadership Summit at NOVA50 in Washington, D.C.
- Completed the 40 Hour Victim Advocacy Corps Training
- Received a Provisional Credential from the National Advocate Credentialing Program (NACP)
- Built a community of advocates via Cohort Calls, Individual Check-Ins, and the Advocate Mentorship Program
- Completed 250 hours of service to survivors in their communities and received \$8,000 as compensation for their time and efforts

A Lasting Impact: Employment Outcomes & Perspective Shifts

They also made lasting connections with one another, the NOVA Team, and their field-placement agencies. In fact, as of August 2025, two Student Fellows have received offers or invitations to apply for positions at their field-placement agency, and one has secured a full-time position at another victim service agency in their state.

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

- HAVE RECEIVED OFFERS OR INVITATIONS TO APPLY FOR POSITIONS
- HAS SECURED A FULL-TIME ROLE AT ANOTHER VICTIM SERVICE AGENCY IN THEIR STATE

Other members of the VAC cohort, many of whom are pursuing further schooling, have indicated that—regardless of their future career choice—their experience as a VAC Student Fellow has transformed their understanding of victim services and their approaches to working with others in their community.

"[Working at my placement] has been very impactful...I have learned patience, I have learned how resilient these women can be. I have also learned that victimization and the grieving process...it looks different for everybody."

Brianda Vasquez
VAC Student Fellow

"Before, victim services, to me, was just being a voice for somebody...Through the VAC, I've learned that it's more than that. You're teaching somebody, basically, the avenues to [be a voice for] themselves."



Shaina Barrows
VAC Student Fellow

"The vision [of victim services] that NOVA has brought to me is...way bigger than I thought it would be...It opened my eyes to see that there are so many types of services that you can give someone, so many ways to help them."

Saniyah Turner VAC Student Fellow

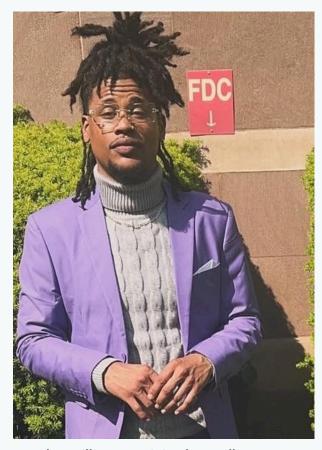
VAC STUDENT FELLOW SPOTLIGHT

BUILDING BRIDGES FOR COMMUNICATION

The Crime Victims Compensation Program (CVCP) in Washington, D.C. had been working to make their services more accessible to young people, the elderly, and—with Kayden's help—the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. Sequoria Brown, his host-site supervisor, shared that he had a big impact on the agency. "He was able to give so much insight into the challenges that the Deaf community faces in terms of crime, access to resources, and technology."

Kayden, a Social Work student at Gallaudet University, was passionate about being able to share his work in victim services with more folks in the Deaf community. As an intern at the CVCP, he was able to help make outreach and training presentations more accessible, and was working to bring information about the CVCP to his fellow students and faculty at Gallaudet.

In the future, Kayden hopes to pursue a graduate degree in law or criminology, with the hopes of



Kayden Williams, VAC Student Fellow

using that knowledge—and his experience with the VAC Program—to better support the Deaf community.

While CVCP has learned a lot from Kayden, the learning and investment has certainly been mutual. In Kayden's words: "I've learned a lot and enjoyed this experience, as well as the investment the team has made in me."

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH: CHARTING A PATH FORWARD

The VAC pilot established a national model for victim service corps programs and, in the process, demonstrated its potential to support both workforce development and leadership & capacity building. As we envisioned the future of the VAC—and considered the lessons learned from the pilot—we identified the following opportunities for growth:

Strengthening Community Partnerships

Challenge: Moving Beyond the Campus Context The VAC pilot was developed in partnership with college campuses. We believed that college campuses were well-positioned to support Student Fellows recruitment, serve as liaisons to their respective communities, and facilitate potential field-placements. As members of our Advisory Committee, campus representatives played a key role in the program design, recruitment and selection of the Student Fellows, and initial connections with local field-placements.

In this capacity, our campus partnerships were absolutely essential for the success of the program and provided strong foundations for partnerships with community agencies that served as field-placements.

However, as field-placements were identified simultaneously with Student Fellow selection, NOVA's partnerships with those agencies were not formalized until *after* the Student Fellows were selected and preparing to begin their placements. This meant that field-placement agencies did not have a chance to actively participate in the Student Fellow recruitment, selection, training, and onboarding process.

As a result, field-placement agencies found themselves tasked with supervising, training, and supporting Student Fellows that were selected by NOVA Staff and campus representatives. While this was not problematic in most cases, it did result in some misalignment between Student Fellows' and field-placement agencies' needs and expectations.

Innovation: Prioritizing Partnerships with Field-Placement Agencies

While campuses play an important role in facilitating community connections and recruiting
Student Fellows, field-placement agencies—as the primary source of on-the-job training and work experience for Student Fellows—are essential to the successful execution of the program. The initial VAC pilot prioritized relationships with campus partners and thus field-placement agencies were not positioned to participate in the design, recruitment, and selection of Student Fellows.

To address this, future iterations of the VAC could prioritize establishing partnerships with field-placement agencies earlier in the process, working with both agencies and campuses to recruit and select Student Fellows. This would better equip the VAC to address the needs of community agencies by selecting Student Fellows with interests or skill sets that align with those needed by the field-placement. It would also allow field-placement agencies to interview and select Student Fellows that best align with their organizational needs.

BUILDING CONNECTIONS: THE VAC IN THE COMMUNITY



Janeese Brisbo, Sicilee Silversmith, Abrianna Morales, and Shaina Barrows smile for a photo at the 18th National Indian Nations Conference in Palm Springs, CA



Sophie Anderson-Haynie, Thanh Nguyen, Felicia Tuchman, Sicilee Silversmith, and Abrianna Morales smile for a group photo at a gathering for UNM VAC Student Fellows

Streamlining Training

Challenge: Standardizing Training Across Multiple Contexts
As part of their fellowship requirements, the VAC Student Fellows completed a 40-hour Victim Advocacy Training, with 29 hours of in-person training at the VAC Leadership Summit at NOVA50 in Washington, D.C. and 11 hours delivered asynchronously via LearnUpon, NOVA's e-learning platform.
Completing this training made them eligible to receive a Provisional Credential from the National Advocate Credentialing Program (NACP).

While this training was pre-approved by NACP and educated Student Fellows on topics ranging from ethics & confidentiality to crisis intervention, many field-placement sites and states had separate training and credentialing requirements that Student Fellows were expected to complete before handling client-facing work. This resulted in some Student Fellows having to complete two, separate (but often duplicative) 40-hour trainings, which served as a source of frustration and delayed their working with clients.

Innovation: Developing Training with Community Needs in Mind
The VAC Leadership Summit and core training for the VAC Student Fellows,
as well as the receipt of a Provisional Credential from NACP are essential
parts of the program. The field-placement and getting to see client-facing
work are also key to a rewarding experience for a VAC Student Fellow, and
delays caused by completing duplicative training is understandably frustrating
for both Student Fellows and field-placement agencies.

To address this, future iterations of the VAC could work more closely with field-placement agencies and state-level credentialing bodies to develop a VAC training that fulfills agency, state, and NACP requirements. This would allow Student Fellows to benefit from a shared training experience with their cohort and receive an NACP credential without forcing them to do excessive trainings, freeing up more time for them to get essential on-the-job training at their field-placement.

Expanding Opportunities Across Generations

Challenge: An Intergenerational Cohort

Initially, the VAC was designed to connect youth—undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25—with career opportunities in victim services. However, working with our campus communities and Advisory Committee led us to conclude that such a narrow definition of youth would be limiting for the non-traditional students who make up a substantial portion of the campus population.

This led us to remove any age eligibility requirements and, thus, a VAC cohort that represented a range of ages and student identities, with our youngest Student Fellow being an 18-year-old college freshman and our oldest being a 38-year-old graduate student.

This range of ages and experience was not problematic in and of itself. In fact, having such diversity of perspectives and life experiences made for insightful discussion and intergenerational friendship in our VAC cohort.

An intergenerational cohort, with different levels of work experience, did pose challenges for creating training curriculum and programming that was fully responsive to the differing needs of our younger and older Student Fellows. Finding the balance between what content would be suitable for younger students, and still challenging for older students with more work experience had its difficulties.

Ultimately, the diversity of age and life experience in the initial VAC cohort proved to be positive. Student Fellows across generations had the chance to learn from one another, network, and engage in insightful discussions. However, the differing needs of the younger and older Student Fellows made it difficult to build effective training and programming.



VAC Student Fellows attend a training at the VAC Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C.

Innovation: Early- and Mid-Career VAC Cohorts

It was clear that the older VAC Student Fellows—many of whom were parents, graduate students, or had previous work experience—saw the VAC as an opportunity for professional development as well as life and career transition, whereas younger Student Fellows saw the program as an educational and exploratory opportunity that introduced them to the field of victim services. The younger and older Student Fellows, as distinct groups, came into the program with entirely different needs and desired outcomes, and while they overlap, they also need specialized attention to be better supported.

To address this, future iterations of the VAC could include two distinct tracks for early- (undergraduates) and midcareer (graduate students, professionals) Fellows.



VAC Advisory Committee Members Brandon Wolf and Kaylyn Ahn, and VAC Program Manager, Abrianna Morales, announce the VAC at NOVA50

These two tracks and cohorts would receive specialized training and programming based on their needs while participating in the same program and receiving the same, core training, which would allow for the positive aspects of an intergenerational VAC community while supporting each tracks' distinct needs. For instance, earlycareer VAC Student Fellows would receive training to navigate day-today life in an office setting, whereas mid-career VAC Fellows would receive training to tailor one's resume/CV to apply for jobs in victim services.

By creating these two tracks within the program, we are able to build more and better pathways to careers in victim services by maintaining the accessibility of the program for nontraditional students and mid-career individuals while also ensuring that training and programming meet all participants' needs.

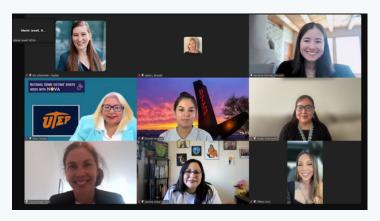


ELEVATING OUR IMPACT

The Victim Advocacy Corps pilot was abruptly terminated in April of 2025, due to federal funding cuts. While the program ended earlier than anticipated, NOVA committed to sustaining the program and ensured VAC student fellows received their full stipends. NOVA's work to uplift youth leaders and underserved communities is far from over; in the months following the end of the pilot, we have been more motivated than ever to elevate the impact of the VAC to both grow and sustain the program.

Spreading the Word

The best people to 'spread the word' about the impact of the program are those who took part in it: our Student Fellows, campus partners, and field-placement sites can speak firsthand about the ways that this program touched and improved lives across the country. Recognizing this, we organized opportunities for our VAC Student Fellows' voices to be heard:



VAC Fellows Brianda Vasquez and Sicilee Silversmith, host-site supervisors, and NOVA Staff during a virtual panel for National Crime Victims' Rights Week 2025



Screen capture of video featuring VAC Fellows for a group picture on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

- National Crime Victims' Rights
 Week 2025 Webinar: The VAC in
 Action Reflecting on the Impact of NOVA's Victim Advocacy Corps
- Promotional Video: Celebrating
 NOVA's Victim Advocacy Corps
- Readers can view the videos on our YouTube "Victim Advocacy Corps" playlist

https://www.youtube.com/@NOVA dvocacy/playlists

These resources are testaments to NOVA, our Student Fellows, and our communities' ongoing investment in programs like the VAC—programs that uplift a new generation of leaders, celebrate different perspectives, and make victim services more accessible to the survivors who need them most.

Expanding the Work

Our Victim Advocacy Corps Student Fellows taught us just how valuable youth voices and leadership can be in directing the future of the victims' rights movement. They've also motivated us to 'dream bigger' about youth engagement in victim services.

In July 2025—exactly one year after the first VAC Leadership Summit—NOVA hosted a Youth Engagement Summit in Washington, D.C. This Summit focused on the future of youth engagement in the victims' rights movement and also marked the launch of our Youth Advocacy Leadership Center (YALC), which will house all of NOVA's Youth Engagement Work, with the VAC as a foundation and model for youth leadership and workforce development.

Readers can learn more about NOVA's Youth Advocacy Leadership Center and read our Youth Engagement Summit Summary by visiting our website: trynova.org/initiatives/youth-advocacy-leadership-center/



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT SUMMIT



Thanh Nguyen, VAC Student Fellow, shares her perspectives as a panelist during the Youth Summit



Youth Advocate Leaders and panelists (from left to right): Thanh Nguyen, Kaylyn Ahn, Abrianna Morales, Sabrina Javellana, and Ray Epstein



Shannon Collins, NOVA Sr. Director of TTA, talks with a Youth Engagement Summit participant



ENDNOTES

- 1. Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017 National Census of Victim Service Providers. (2019). Downloaded from: https://www.bjs.gov/content/ncvsp
- 2. Alliance for Safety and Justice.

 Crime Survivors Speak. The FirstEver National Survey of Victims'
 Views on Safety and Justice. (2016).

 Downloaded from:
 https://allianceforsafetyandjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/Crime%20Survivors%20Speak%20Report.pdf

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Check out NOVA's website to learn more about the <u>Victim Advocacy</u>
<u>Corps</u>, <u>NOVA's Youth Advocacy</u>
<u>Leadership Center</u>, and our ongoing efforts to get youth engaged in victim services.

Visit our YouTube page to view our Victim Advocacy Corps playlist highlighting the VAC program.

If you have questions about the Victim Advocacy Corps, NOVA's Youth Advocacy Leadership Center, and this report can be sent to our team via email at youthleadership@trynova.org.



Brianda Vasquez, Sicilee Silversmith, Sophie Anderson-Haynie, Thanh Nguyen, and Aldo Jafet Perez-Flores smile with Áine McCarthy at NOVA50



Sicilee Silversmith, Thanh Nguyen, and Sophie Anderson-Haynie enjoy the NOVA Wellness activities at NOVA50



VAC Student Fellows pose for a selfie on the White House steps in Washington, D.C.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to extend a special thanks to the following individuals and organizations for their commitment to and support of the Victim Advocacy Corps:

Advisory Committee Members Field-Placement Sites

<u>Campus Representatives</u> <u>ANC</u>

Bobbi Klingaman Harlem High School

Rebecca Bishop Aaniiih Nakoda Family Healing

Kenneth Gooden Center

Amy Rousseau

Shanese McGregor <u>CCC</u>

Áine McCarthy Coahoma Community College
Elisa Chaides-Reyes Mississippi Valley State University

Family Crisis Services

Survivor-Advocates

Kaylyn Ahn <u>RU</u>

Rosalie Fish Project Safeguard
Cheyenne Tyler Jacobs The Blue Bench
D'Angelo McDade Undestructable

Brandon Wolf

University of New Mexico (UNM)

Campus Partners UNM
Asur

Aaniiih Nakoda College (ANC) HopeWorks

Coahoma Community College Coalition to Stop
(CCC) Native Women

Gallaudet University (GU) New Mexico Asian Family Center

Regis University (RU)

UNM Women's Resource Center

University of Texas at El Paso UTEP

UTEP UTEP CARE

(UTEP) UTEP CARE

Advocacy Center for the Children of

El Paso

Coalition to Stop Violence Against

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS (CONTINUED)

Advocate Mentors

Gayle Thom

Tanya Grassel-Krietlow

Dave Thomas

Frances White, PhD

Ayana Wallace

Aysia Evans

DeAnna Swope

Mary Van Bavel

Olivia Garcia, PhD

Jose Juan Lara Jr.

Kelly Muklevicz

Jee Suthamantwee

Monycka Snowbird

Michelle Dugan

Alejandro Palacios

Diandra Poe, PhD

Consultants

Activating Change

Red Wind Consulting

Ujima: National Center on

Violence Against Women in the

Black Community

Evaluators

Martha Hernandez-Martinez

Rainbow Research

OJP/OVC Program Managers

Silvia Torres

Lourdes McKenna

VAC Student Fellows

ANC

Shaina Barrows

Janeese Brisbo

CCC

Ian Bolden

KeiJuan Neese

Saniyah Turner

GU

Priscilla Berrios

Kayden Williams

<u>RU</u>

Grace Chungu

Krishna Lund-Brown

<u>UNM</u>

Sophie Anderson-Haynie

Thanh Nguyen

Sicilee Silversmith

Felicia Tuchman

UTEP

Aldo Jafet Perez-Flores

Brianda Vasquez

SPECIAL THANK YOU AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

NOVA would like to thank and honor former U.S. Office of Justice Programs, OVC Director, Kristina Rose who's support was instrumental to the launch of the Victim Advocacy Corps pilot program.

NOVA staff and VAC student fellows connected to her passion, thoughtfulness, and dedication to advancing the field of victim services, which continues to be a source of inspiration. Thank you Director Rose for leaving a lasting impact!



Former OVC Director Kristina Rose with NOVA Staff and VAC Advisory Committee Members

