FRANKFORT, Ky. (April 22, 2020) – April 19-25 is National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, a time set aside to raise awareness for victims’ rights and services, and celebrate the progress victim advocates are making. This year’s theme is “Seek Justice, Ensure Victims’ Rights, Inspire Hope”.

In the fall, Kentucky State Police employed sixteen victim advocates to provide support services and resources to crime victims across the Commonwealth. KSP is among the first state police agencies to implement this program on a statewide basis.

The program Victim Advocate Support Services (VASS) is funded through the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant awarded by the Kentucky Justice & Public Safety Cabinet in the amount of $2.5 million. VASS launched in the fall of 2019 with a dual purpose. Advocates administer care to crime victims – or those involved in traumatic events – connecting them with immediate resources, such as mental health services, crisis intervention or legal support. These skilled professionals also serve as liaisons between law enforcement and the victim, simultaneously helping victims navigate the system while allowing detectives to focus more on the details of the case.

“We make contacts with the victims right then and there whether we’re called out on scene or following up the next day with a phone call.” said Victims’ Advocate Bruna Souza. “We’re here to provide support and to let them know we are thinking of them.”

One advocate is assigned to each of KSP’s 16 posts throughout the state. They work with community partners to provide fair, compassionate and sensitive treatment of victims, families and witnesses – from the investigative stage of a crime through a follow-up period after the case has been adjudicated. Providing these services in the first hours following a crime is not only vital to healing, it also helps victims secure available compensation funds for out-of-pocket expenses.

Post 6 (Dry Ridge) Victims’ Advocate, Bruna Souza says the work they do helps Kentuckians get through hard times. Since the fall, she’s worked with kids as young as six months old to adults into their 70s who are victims of
assault, abuse, kidnapping, hate crimes, car accidents, and more. Souza says there’s one case that reminds her why she does this. In 2019, a mother lost her daughter in a fatal accident. Souza helped the mother grieve, navigated her through the court system, and helped her write a victim impact statement.

“We just formed a really great relationship just allowing her to share her story and honor her daughter in ways that were healthy and we were able to follow that through to sentencing,” said Bruna Souza.

Since the inception of the program, KSP Victim Advocates have assisted 463 people.

If you or someone you know needs assistance through the VASS program, please contact your local post and request to speak to the victim advocate. To find the nearest post, visit http://kentuckystatepolice.org/post-locations/.

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*Photo Caption: You are not alone, Kentucky State Police Victim Advocates are here to support and recognize victims of crime*