

Victim notification system tracks offenders, in its tenth year

by Ashton Goodell
Friday, May 29, 2009

ANCHORAGE, Alaska -- For years victims relied solely on prosecutors and victims advocates to keep updated, but for the past decade they've been able to keep track of offenders online or by phone.

The Victim Information and Notification Everyday, or VINE marked its 10 years of service this week.

VINE has helped Joerene Hout, who is a victim and a witness to murder.

She was there when her best friend died.

"My best friend Evangeline Landers was murdered by her husband," said Hout.

Keith Landers had a long history of domestic violence.

"I had been afraid for a year that he was going to kill her," Hout said. "But I always felt that if I was there he won't do anything."



Joerene Hout is a shooting victim and a witness to murder. (Dan Carpenter/KTUU-TV)

Landers put a handgun to Hout's forehead, she flinched and the bullet grazed the side of her head.

Hout heard her friend scream and then a shot.

"It's amazing how alone you can feel," Hout said. "My friends didn't know whether they should talk to me about it they kind of tip toed around me, which is the wrong thing to do. It's best to get it out and talk about it."

Hout says it's difficult to keep up with justice system, and at times she has nightmares that the man who tried to kill her might try again.

She found some comfort keeping tabs on her friend's killer through VINE.

"You wake up in the middle of the night and feel panicky you go to the computer log in and you can see okay everything is fine," said Hout. "He's safely tucked away in jail and it starts giving you a feeling of control, it's the beginning of some control."

The VINE system calls or emails victims when an offender is released, transfers, or escapes from prison.

"So that they can keep track of where the offenders are. If they are incarcerated or if they are out into the community," said Gail Brimner with VINE. "That way it makes the victims feel safe and gives them time to come up with a plan if the offender is going to be released."

Anyone can register for a VINE notification either by phone at 1-800-247-9763 or at www.vinelink.com.