

VINE Keeps Victims at the Core of Company's Mission



Mike Davis

BY MIKE DAVIS

As president of Appriss, I often meet people who ask, "What exactly does your company do?" When I explain that we're the providers of VINE®, the National Victim Notification Network, I often see a look of recognition. While we're not yet a household name, people are increasingly aware that VINE allows crime victims and other concerned citizens to track the custody status of their offenders and to register for notification by phone or e-mail when the offender is released, transferred, or escapes.

Appriss has spent more than 12 years building this life-saving service, which is now offered in more than 1,500 communities across 40 states. We anticipate even more growth on the horizon. The U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance has provided grants for additional states to implement victim notification systems.

For us, this growth translates into more opportunities to help victims and those who serve them. One way we're working to achieve this goal is by partnering with the National Center for Victims of Crime in a variety of ways: sponsoring the National Center's national conference and Training Institute events, providing scholarships that allow practitioners to attend these valuable learning opportunities, collaborating to provide resources to crime victims, and participating in the advocacy process at the federal, state, and local levels.

This history of serving victims—both through our innovative products and the

relationships we've developed with advocates—is the foundation of our company. Appriss and VINE exist today in response to a tragedy. The community of Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky, was outraged after the 1993 murder of Mary Byron, a local woman who had been stalked, assaulted, and raped by a former boyfriend. He was jailed for those crimes, but someone posted his bail without Byron's knowledge. This man shot and killed Byron on her twenty-first birthday.

Local officials sought a way to prevent others from suffering Mary Byron's fate. My former business partner, software developer Yung Nguyen, and I proposed to build the community its first automated notification system. We spent a year collaborating with police, prosecutors, victim advocates, and survivors to make it happen. VINE was launched in Louisville exactly one year after Byron's death. Appriss continues to operate and manage the national system from its Louisville headquarters.

Mary Byron's story and her legacy motivated the Appriss team to help establish a public charity in her honor. The Mary Byron Foundation was launched six years ago with seed money from Appriss and with the involvement of her parents, Pat and John Byron. We're proud to continue housing and assisting the Foundation as it supports programs that address the crushing epidemic of domestic violence.

Today, we're building on the success of VINE by helping petitioners track the status of their protective orders. VINE Protective Order™ notifies petitioners by phone when a protective order is served,

when a hearing date is scheduled or changed, and when the order is about to expire.

We believe this service is crucial because the time immediately after a protective order is served can be particularly dangerous for crime victims. Far too often, the respondent reacts violently when served. A call from VINE Protective Order allows the petitioner to activate a safety plan or call police to arrest the respondent if he violates the terms of the order.

In addition, VINE Protective Order

helps courts and law enforcement agencies increase offender accountability. Officers can access information about protective orders while in the field by radioing their dispatcher, who can locate the information quickly in the VINE system. Also, because judges can access and update the system from the courtroom, a change in the status of the order is reflected immediately for all key stakeholders.

VINE Protective Order is already in place in several communities, including DuPage County, Illinois, where the system helps the sheriff's department manage the

2,400 temporary and permanent orders it serves each year. We're also offering VINE Protective Order as part of a pilot project administered by the Mary Byron Foundation and funded by a \$1 million grant from the U.S. Office on Violence Against Women.

The project involves the court, law enforcement, and victim service agencies at each pilot site, including the Commonwealth of Kentucky and three counties each in Texas, North Carolina, and Arkansas. The Foundation's primary goal for the project is to build a set of best practices for handling protective orders and, ultimately, keeping victims safe from further violence.

Even with the successes we've experienced and a bright future ahead for Appriss, we intend to keep our company rooted in the victim service community. We will continue to use the best talent and resources available to ensure our services meet the needs of victims. To that end, we will soon form an advisory board among victims, survivors, and victim service professionals to learn from their experience and use it to improve the effectiveness of our services.

As the field of criminal justice changes and the needs of crime victims evolve, Appriss will be ready to address those needs quickly. That's the nature of our work. We're thrilled to have a valued partner in the National Center for Victims of Crime as we move forward.

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