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Network a comfort for crime victims

By Ashley Broughton
The Salt Lake Tribune

Although she knows that the men who murdered her daughter Amy nearly two years ago are behind bars, that knowledge does little to comfort Lori Tavey when things go bump in the night.

That's when she reaches for the phone -- not to call police or a trusted friend, but to reach the Victim Information and Notification Everyday (VINE) automated system. "It's a comfort that cannot be measured," she said.

Available in Utah since August, the system keeps track of inmates under supervision of the Utah Department of Corrections.

And the VINE is growing.

Over the past few months, the system has been expanded for people keeping tabs on inmates in county jails or wanting updates and notification on court hearings.

"It's a tool that's long overdue," said Carbon County Sheriff James Cordova, announcing the expansion of VINE during Thursday's 17th annual Crime Victims Conference in Sandy. "It gives control back to the victim."

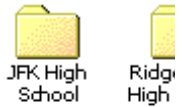
Users can call the system toll-free at 1-877-UT4-VINE on a touch-tone phone to check on an inmate's status using the inmate's name or prison number. They also may register for automatic calls to notify them if the person's status has changed -- if they are paroled, released or if they escape, for instance.

To register, callers must enter their telephone number and choose a four-digit code. If a change occurs, the system will call the person every few hours or until they acknowledge the message by entering the code. The process can also be completed online at <http://www.vinelink.com>.

Users can also keep track of the progress of court cases and register to be notified about upcoming hearings. The system initiates a call if the hearings are canceled and will call again when they are rescheduled, providing the time and location. Data is transferred from county jails every 15

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minutes, from prisons four times daily and from courts daily.

"Since this system has been up, we have not had problem one," said Sharon Daurelle, Corrections' administrator of victim services.

The expansion to county jails currently is about 85 percent complete, she said. A few jails, including Salt Lake County's, will be online later this summer, as well as the Division of Adult Probation and Parole and the state Board of Pardons.

The program is funded by the state Office of Crime Victim Reparations.

The previous victim notification process in Utah was spotty. The state Board of Pardons would, upon request, notify victims of parole hearings, but they had to be "victims of record" -- those an offender was convicted of committing a crime against. If an inmate was not charged in a victim's case, or it was dismissed as part of a plea deal, they would not qualify.

In addition, Corrections would notify victims, upon request, of an inmate's release. But very few of those requests were made, officials said.

Appriss, a Louisville, Ky.,-based company, provides the technology for the VINE program, which has been implemented in 36 states. Utah is the 19th state to implement the program statewide, said Mike Davis, president of Appriss.

Also Thursday, a videotape aimed at training law enforcement officers on issuing Amber Alerts debuted at the conference.

The 11-minute tape guides officers through the criteria for an alert in case a child is abducted. The video, co-produced by the Utah Attorney General's Office and FOX 13, will be sent to every law enforcement agency in the state.

The video shows how the alert was first used in Utah when Elizabeth Smart was snatched in June 2002. It also demonstrates how the Utah Highway Patrol recovered 11-year-old Cindy Bruno of St. Cloud, Minn., near Heber City less than 45 minutes after an alert was issued by Provo police on May 7, 2003.

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