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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT HONORS FLORIDA CRIME VICTIM WITH SPECIAL COURAGE AWARD

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department’s Office for Victims of Crime, a component of the Office of Justice Programs, awarded the Special Courage Award to Jennifer Luther, a crime victim. The Special Courage Award category honors a victim or survivor who has shown exceptional perseverance or determination in dealing with his or her own victimization. It may also acknowledge one who has acted bravely to aid a victim or to prevent victimization.

“Jennifer Luther is a true inspiration, using her experience as a victim to gain insight into the cultural and societal complexities of crime and to fully understand what leads people to commit acts of crime and violence, whether it’s poverty, substance use, parental neglect, low self-esteem or a combination of those factors,” said OJP Acting Assistant Attorney General Maureen A. Henneberg. “She has devoted years to educating herself and to volunteering, mentoring and developing supportive programs – all in an effort to prevent the next victimization.”

Jennifer Luther’s life path was tragically altered in 1992 when two young men attacked her and one of the assailants robbed her and shot her in the arm. During her recovery, Luther took it upon herself to understand the issues leading to crime and how to help those whose lives had become intertwined with criminal behavior. She engaged in volunteer work; started a mentoring program at a local middle school; studied human behavior, criminal justice and correctional rehabilitation; trained others in evidence-based practices, like cognitive-behavioral interventions and motivational interviewing; and, most recently, developed innovative ways to support reentry. Currently, Luther is the Chief Executive Officer of Correctional Rehabilitation Services, consulting internationally and locally to support effective correctional practices and corrections reform.

“Ms. Luther is a model of courage and compassion,” said OVC Acting Director Katherine Darke Schmitt. “She is strong, resilient and dedicated to the betterment of our society, and her commitment to helping others is a true inspiration.”

The selection committee for the NCVRW awards this year chose two individuals to receive the honor of the Special Courage Award. In addition to Jennifer Luther, Jennifer Elmore, a sexual assault survivor and advocate, was honored for advocating for changes in the way the military investigates and prosecutes sexual assault.

Every April, OVC leads communities across the country in observing National Crime Victims' Rights Week. President Ronald W. Reagan proclaimed the first Victims' Rights Week in 1981, calling for greater sensitivity to the rights and needs of victims. The 40th anniversary of NCVRW took place this year, April 18-24, and featured the theme, "Support Victims. Build Trust. Engage Communities," which emphasizes the importance of leveraging community support to victims.

The Office of Justice Programs provides federal leadership, grants, training, technical assistance and other resources to improve the nation's capacity to prevent and reduce crime, advance racial equity in the administration of justice, assist victims and enhance the rule of law. More information about OJP and its components can be found at www.ojp.gov.

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