

# Academy Forum

*Continuing the Message of the Roper Victim Assistance Academy*

A Quarterly Newsletter

Issue #30- May 2013

**Just a Thought**

*One of the most overlooked issue by victim service professionals is how to address a victim's spiritual needs. Rev. Nick McDonald shares the benefits of collaborating with faith-based leaders to better serve victims of crime*  
**Page 1**

**Web Links**

*You never know what resources await you on the world-wide web ...come see what our latest surfing expedition uncovered*  
**Page 2**



**Save the Date!**

*Find out what trainings and events are just around the corner. It looks like there are lots of ways to keep you busy this fall!*  
**Page 2**

**Alumni Updates**

*Always find yourself thinking, "I wonder what happened to..." Check out what your fellow Alumni are up to!*



**Page 3**

**Best Practices**

*One of the most important things we can do to better help our clients is to first help ourselves by taking care of our own physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Read Sabrina N'Diaye's essay on her wonderful strategies for self-care*  
**Page 3**

**The 20/20**

*Each newsletter get an inside look at one of the RVAAM peers - 20 questions, 20 unique answers*  
**Page 6**



## Just a thought...

### *Spirituality in Victim Services - A Chaplain's Perspective*

Early in my public safety chaplaincy ministry, I arrived at the scene of a working cardiac arrest. As the EMT crew administered medications and CPR to the husband on the living room floor, I tried to support his wife as she witnessed their efforts. I had worked down my mental checklist of various ways I could offer concrete assistance and concluded by asking, "Is there anything else that I can do for you right now?" She looked at me incredulously and nearly shouted, "Just pray for my husband! You *can* pray for my husband, can't you?" That was a powerful moment for me because in the midst of trying to be "all things" for

this woman, I had failed to offer the one thing she needed in that crisis - prayer.

I wondered later how I had "forgotten" something so obvious. It occurred to me that most human service personnel and I had been trained in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of need. My mental checklist had actually started not at the "top" but at the "bottom" of Maslow's pyramid. While I was reviewing scene safety and comfort needs, maybe I was working my way up the pyramid too slowly. Perhaps prayer, sacred texts, and ritual offered precisely the comfort and safety that wife needed in that moment? There would be time, later, to make sure she had called her adult children, had a warm coat for the ride to the hospital, and had picked up her husband's insurance cards for the emergency department registrar. In short, offers of prayer, sacred texts, or ritual are always a fair expectation of chaplains working in health care, public safety, or victim services.

Unfortunately, many of us have also been prepared to serve as the sole clergyperson in fairly isolated settings, which can en-

gender a sense of being a "Lone Ranger." We get so used to doing it ourselves that we're prone to becoming "turf-minded" and occasionally, "don't play well with others." However, most well-trained volunteer or board-certified professional



chaplains also bring more to the family table or hospital bedside. They usually have a minimum of 400 hours of supervised clinical experience; have pursued continuing education in crisis management, behavioral health, and specialized ministry settings; and have been required to demonstrate both the will and

the proficiency to serve collaboratively as a part of a team.

In both Abrahamic and Christian tradition, there are strong themes of shared ministry, whether it's Aaron being appointed to serve as Moses' mouthpiece or Jesus instructing the disciples to go out "two by two." Partnerships between victim services personnel and well-oriented Chaplaincy Services chaplains offers the

**(Continued on page 5)**

EDITOR'S CORNER

Greetings Alumni!

*I am very happy to welcome our new alumni class of 2013! What an amazing week!! It was full of excitement, bonding, fun, learning, tears, wonderful food, and great surprises. I think it was such a great week and one that will be remembered, especially being the 10th Anniversary class - congratulations to all of you! If you haven't done so already, check out your pictures at the RVAAM Facebook page.*

*Don't forget that the Maryland Certification for Victim Service Providers is now up and running. If you are interested, go to [www.rvaam.org](http://www.rvaam.org) and under the certification tab you can download your application. Please make sure to follow all the instructions carefully so your application is not delayed. There is a payment form that has to be filled out and mailed to the address on the website. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.*

*This is an exciting time of year when we can start looking forward to warmer weather, but it's also a busier time of year for us as crime tends to increase during the summer months. Be sure to take care of yourself. As service providers we tend to forget about ourselves, but it is very important for you as well as the victims you serve that you are physically, emotionally, and mentally sharp. So take a break this summer! Whether you go away somewhere or just take a few days off and have a "stay-cation" at home, take the time to refresh and recharge.*

*And stay tuned for further information on the 10th Anniversary celebration coming later this year. It will be a very exciting and fun event!!*

*Wishing you all the best ~ until next time...*

Debbie Bradley, C.A., VASIII

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Web Links

*Although we have a virtual library at our fingertips every time we turn on the computer, we often lose sight of the forest through the trees just trying to navigate the world-wide web. Here are a few sites that relate to this issue's "Just a Thought" ... happy surfing!*

Looking for resources and tools to assist clients with obtaining spiritual help? Then check out the Office for Victims of Crime's "Building Victim Assistance Networks with Faith Communities" website at



[http://www.ovc.gov/publications/information/faith\\_based\\_vict\\_asst/need\\_collaboration.html](http://www.ovc.gov/publications/information/faith_based_vict_asst/need_collaboration.html) Victim advocates can read the sample case studies and materials provided to help identify ways to better help their clients spiritually.

Looking for more information about how the faith community can assist victims of crime, then check out Safe Places website at <http://www.safeplaceslr.org/Violencepreventionspiritualcareforvictims.html> Safe Places provides "If This is Not a Place" - a violence prevention and intervention training curriculum for faith communities and clergy.

Not sure what the spiritual needs are of those you serve? The Maryland Crime Victims Resource Center has a faith needs assessment victim service providers can give to their clients to properly assess their spiritual needs. You can find this assessment at: <http://www.mdcrimevictims.org/victim>

[-services/resources/faith-based-programs-for-crime-victims/faith-based-needs-assessment/](http://www.arvoad.org/Guideforspiritualcare.php)

Want to learn more about how to address the spiritual needs of victims after a large-scale disaster occurs such as the events that transpired in Boston? Go to <http://www.arvoad.org/Guideforspiritualcare.php> to download a copy of "Light Our Way - A Guide for Spiritual Care in Times of Disaster"

Save the Date

The 39th Annual NOVA Conference

September 15th - 18th, 2013, Hyatt Regency Columbus, Columbus, OH



This year's conference theme is "Implementing the Tools of our Trade to Build a Comforting Justice" and will offer over 100 workshops and plenary events. Registration is now open. For more information, visit NOVA's conference website at <http://www.trynova.org/39novaconference/overview/>

2014 RVAAM Academy

June 2nd-6th, 2014, Bon Secours Spiritual Center, Marriottsville, MD

Although we just wrapped up this year's Academy, we already have next year's dates reserved!! So mark it on your calendars and start recruiting!! Additional notifications will go out when the application is posted on the RVAAM website - so stay tuned!



## Alumni Updates

*It seems like only yesterday when we were all together at the Academy. But in a blink of an eye another year has passed us by. Here's just a snapshot of some of the special events and milestones our alums have experienced since we last met...*

### Look at Our Movers & Shakers!

**Diane Champe (Class of 2008)** - Diane recently contributed to a blog addressing the silent epidemic of child sexual abuse in the United States published by Health Affairs. You can read the blog at <http://healthaffairs.org/blog/2013/01/30/not-even-discussed-in-private-rooms-childhood-sexual-abuse-and-abuse-survivors/> Well done Diane!

### Icia Ragsdale and Blaque Diamond (Class of 2013)

Already we have some members of the most recent class of the Academy. Both of these exceptional women have published their life story to educate others about the effects of abuse and trauma. Be sure to check out Icia's book "Letter 4 You" and Blaque Diamond's book "In My Mother's House." Thank you both for your bravery in writing your stories!



**RVAAM Faculty and Staff receive a Governor's Citation for Excellence in Victim Services** - At this year's annual Governor's luncheon honoring victim service providers and agencies for their work serving Maryland's victims of crime, the faculty and staff of the Roper Victim Assistance Academy were recognized for their contribution to the field of victim services over this past ten years. A heartfelt congratulations and thanks to Dr. Debra Stanley, Dr. Heather Pfeifer, Elaine

Witman, Dave Thomas, Linda Fair, and Debbie Bradley for your dedication and passion to the Academy, its alumni, and the field of victim services!



## Best Practices

### The Art of Self-Care in Victim Services: Loving Acts for the Healer Within

*"There is only one reason to do anything: as a statement to the universe of who you are ..."* Neale Donald Walsh, *Conversations with God*

My first "statement" occurred before much of the universe knew that I could speak in complete sentences. My family and I lived in a small apartment in the South Bronx, where our neighbors had a 14-year-old daughter with severe cerebral palsy. While the other children in my building stared or cried when Sylvia's mother brought her outside, I would play with her for hours, completely oblivious to her disfigured face and the smell of her diaper. As a tiny 3-year-old girl, I quietly and lovingly announced to the universe who *I* was - a healer, servant, and protector. Although I did not yet have the language, I *knew* that I was born with a gift of connection, and used it to express empathy and help others.

My statement is probably not much different from yours - we are part of a worldwide collective of souls who have been called to serve the vulnerable. Our work as protectors, guides, and advocates is more than just a day at the office. We

touch lives in a way that transforms our career from a paycheck into an expression of love.

For twenty-five years I embarked on a search for a clearer definition of this elusive term. I felt compelled to bring a deeper meaning to my work in the community. That search led me to M. Scott Peck's classic text, *The Road Less Traveled*. Dr. Peck defined love as, "extending oneself for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth." Our spiritual growth is more than just memorizing text and speaking from a pulpit - it is about our connection with creation, the world, and ourselves. For many, it is also about connection to a Higher Power, or God.

The former priest and psychotherapist, Thomas Moore, wrote, "love is the impetus that propels us to our life's work." While many of us in this field have been able to embrace the idea of loving service to victims, we continue to struggle with the idea of loving ourselves with the same passion in which we choose to love the people who we serve. Self-love, in the form of self-care, guides us in maintaining the primary tools of our work - our bodies, minds, and spirits.

This concept of self-care is not new to many spiritual/religious traditions. The Buddha told his followers, "If your compassion does not include yourself, then it is incomplete." The Prophet Muhammad once said, "He who knows himself, knows his Lord." Many of the shamanic traditions require the healers to achieve optimum healing for themselves before they can commence the work of guiding others. The Jewish tradition of *shabbos* could be considered one of the most perfect forms of self-care in any tradition - 24 hours of conscious separation from the whirlwind of life for personal reflection and connection.

So what can we, the modern-day guides and healers of this fast-paced world, do to express our love and care for ourselves? Where can we go to regenerate the bodies and spirits that have been drained by the daily experiences of

other's pain? What can we do to return to our essence, so that we may remain effective in our life's work? Here are a few strategies:

\* **Honor your humanity** - While we may be experts at guiding others through extreme challenges, healers, we will also be faced with similar challenges in our lives. Expect to make mistakes. Choose to forgive yourself for errors in judgment.

\* **Seek personal therapy** - Sharing a sacred space with a non-judgmental source of support and guidance is a courageous and powerful act of self-love. Numerous studies have demonstrated that psychotherapy can actually change the neural pathways in the brain, resulting in increased self-awareness and healing.

\* **Practice nutritional therapy** - Choose to honor the primary tools of your work by feeding it well. Those wonderful, carbohydrate and sugar-laden lunches and snacks that we are consuming are actually negatively impacting our mental and physical health. Ultimately, they also inhibit our presence and performance in the workplace. Consume the daily "rainbow" of green, yellow, and purple foods. Take your vitamins. Drink plenty of water. Strengthen the source of your wisdom that lies in your "second" brain - your own gut.

\* **Limit your alcohol intake** - Alcohol is the fuel for the "car" of depression. That "Man, this was a tough day, let's go have a drink" conversation that you have with your peers can cost you the precious gift of your mental health.

\* **Move!!** You want to really get high? Take that priceless body of yours to a place of euphoria through the natural release of endorphins. While it may feel like torture in the beginning, allow your brain a few weeks to clear out the clutter that grew in your inertia. In return, it will present you with a taste of the natural opiates that only come from exercise.

\* **Take a Sacred Pause** - My fantasy is to run an agency in which all employees take a mandatory nap at 3:00pm. I live

out this fantasy every day, by taking what I refer to as the "sacred pause" - a moment to slow down, close my eyes, become centered, and gather up the necessary energy for completing my day. Witnessing pain and sorrow, celebrating achievements, and even noticing our own rage, fatigue, or imbalance, can serve as wonderful opportunities to check-in with our innate wisdom.

\* **Pray...Meditate...Learn** - Larry Dossey, physician and author of *Prayer is Good Medicine*, found that people who engage in the regular practice of prayer and/or meditation experience more positive outcomes when faced with surgeries and other health challenges. A consistent yoga or other meditative practice also increases emotional awareness and guides in control of our reactivity. As a student of Islamic Sufism, a major requirement of my religious/spiritual lifestyle involves praying five times a day - at dawn, noon, late-afternoon, sunset, and evening. In addition to the required prayers, I also pray a minimum of 10 other times during the day - as my feet touch the ground to start my day, when my children leave for school, and before and after each of my clients. Simply allowing ourselves a sacred moment of quiet contemplation, self-reflection and the processing of emotions can counteract the heartache that is the reality of our daily work with victims of trauma and abuse.

\* **Connect!** Although we might sometimes feel that we are alone in this work, the reality is that we are deeply connected with a rope called, "Need." Reach out to friends and colleagues daily. Check-in with beloveds (even when you cannot provide details of your work). To choose to do this work in isolation is to choose to engage in what the Christian mystic Thomas Merton referred to as "violence against ourselves." Open your heart to the reality that you are never alone.

During a recent talk in Washington, DC, Buddhist psychologist Tara Brach reminded her audience that a true spiritual path is one of forgetting and remember-

ing. When we become engrossed in the daily work of guiding vulnerable members of society, we often forget our own needs for compassionate care. Our self-care practices serve as wonderful tools for reminding us that we are worthy of love. These practices bring us back to our essence.

I invite you to continually return to *your* essence, and the tremendous gifts that you have been given. I invite you to remember the essential qualities that led you to this meaningful work - the kindness in your eyes, your empathic spirit, and the openness that rests in your heart. Remember that your life of service is not an accident - that you give meaning to actions and events that are often beyond comprehension. My prayer for each of you is that you embrace the deep knowing that in order to serve others, you must be equally willing to serve your own soul.

\* *Essay contributed by Sabrina N'Diaye, founder of the Heart Nest Wellness Center, Catonsville, MD. For the past 25 years, Sabrina has served as a guide for trauma survivors, couples, and women in recovery. She is a highly-respected member of the treatment community, and frequently lectures on cultural diversity, spirituality and psychotherapy, stress management, couples work, self-care for healers, and addictions. She mentors young therapists, and runs regular retreats for women healers. Sabrina is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Mind-Body medicine from Saybrook University, where she is exploring the connection between mental, physical, and spiritual health.*



## News From the Field

*Everyone knows that the field of victim services is always evolving. The challenge is to find a way to keep on top of all the changes ... we're here to help!*

**\* House Bill 428: Child Abuse and Neglect - Reports and Records - Disclosure to Public Institutions of Higher Education** - Authorizing the disclosure of a report or record of child abuse or neglect to specified officials of specified public institutions of higher education for specified purposes if the abuse was committed under specified circumstances. Status of the Bill - In the House; Returned Passed.

**\* House Bill 478: Crimes - Committing a Crime of Violence in the Presence of a Minor - Penalties** - Prohibiting a person from committing a specified crime of violence when the person knows or reasonably should know that a minor is present in a residence; establishing specified circumstances under which a minor is present; establishing an enhanced penalty not exceeding 5 years for a violation of the Act; authorizing a court to impose an enhanced penalty if the State's Attorney provides a specified written notice to the defendant and if specified elements have been proven beyond a reasonable doubt; etc. Bill is cross-filed with SB0861. Status: In the Senate - Favorable with Amendments Report by Judicial Proceedings..

**\* House Bill 631: Family Law - Preventing or Interfering with Report of Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect** - Prohibiting an individual from preventing or interfering with the making of a specified report of suspected child abuse or neglect; and making a violation of the Act a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment not exceeding 5 years or a fine not exceeding \$10,000 or both. Bill

cross-filed with SB0534; Status: In the House - Returned Passed.

**\* House Bill 250: Criminal Procedure - Victims' Rights - Remedy and Priority of Restitution** - Expanding the applicability of specified appeal rights from a victim of a violent crime to a victim of a nonviolent crime; authorizing a victim to appeal to the Court of Special Appeals from a specified final order; etc. Status: In the House - Returned Passed.



**\* House Bill 1838: Sentencing Procedures - Statement by Victim or Victim's Representative (Alex's Law)** - Requiring, in a sentencing or disposition hearing, a juvenile court to allow a victim or the victim's representative to address the court under oath before the imposition of sentence or other disposition under specified circumstances. Status: In the Senate - Hearing April 3rd at 1:00pm.

**\* Senate Bill 258: Correctional Services - Inmate Earnings - Compensation for Victims of Crime** - Requiring the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services to withhold 20% of the earnings of an inmate in the Private Sector/Public Industry Enhancement Certification Program of the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance for compensation for victims of crime; requiring the Department to allocate earnings that are withheld in a specified manner; etc. Status: In the Senate - Returned Passed.

## Just a Thought (Cont.)

benefits of having: another pair of eyes, ears, and hands for complicated or traumatic circumstances; a readily-available spiritual care resource person for individuals, families, or communities requesting prayer, sacred texts, or ritual as a means of "marking the moment," and, a colleague with whom we can ventilate or debrief after particularly critical incidents, which may leave us feeling shaken or exhausted ourselves.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience." Those very human experiences are the core of the work we have embraced, and those spiritual beings, which we call "victims" are at the center of those experiences. Is there a better case for our two disciplines to work hand-in-hand?

*Essay contributed by Rev. Nick McDonald serves as the Director of Spiritual Care/Chaplaincy Services for Upper Chesapeake Health in Harford County, Maryland. He has over twenty-five years of public safety and healthcare chaplaincy experience and is board-certified by the Association of Professional Chaplains. He may be reached at [nmcdonald@uchs.org](mailto:nmcdonald@uchs.org)*



# The 20 / 20

*Each newsletter we pose twenty questions to one of our members to get an inside look at who they are ... this month get to know Icia Ragsdale, a graduate of the 2013 Academy*

**My favorite TV show is ...**

Scandal

**My favorite smell is ...**

I love to smell my flowers outside, any kind, because they represent the newness of the day, and that with every day you can start fresh

**If I were a crayon, the color I would be is..**

Passionate Purple

**The Super Hero that best represents my personality is ...**

Selina Kyle (aka Cat Woman) - a life shaped by tragedy, but not defined or bound by it

**If I had to pick an animal that best represents my personality, it would be a ...**

Eagle, because they are strong and their impact is far reaching with their wing span. I hope that people who come in contact with me leave stronger ready to spread that strength to others they come in contact with.

**The best piece of advice I've ever been given is ...**

The instruction I choose to obey determines the future I can create - Pastor Rod Parsley

**Something I think I do well is ...**

Speak publicly and empower others to step out of their comfort zone to show themselves what they can really do and become

**The thing I like the most about my current job is ...**

Being a therapist, I love that I can help clients without a lot of politics and/or policies written by people who aren't doing the job. I also love the flexibility.

**My most memorable birthday in recent years was ...**

My 30th birthday this past year. I was afraid of turning 30 and my husband and daughter made a collage of all the things I have accomplished in my 30 years to make me feel better!

**The last thing I did to pamper myself was ...**

I actually treat myself every other week to a pedicure. Recently I even treated myself to a massage

**My favorite movie is ...**

I actually have many - depending on my mood. But right now I would have to say "Sophie Scholl - The Final Days"

**The technological device I would love to get rid of is ...**

If anything happened to my cell phone, I would probably die a terrible death because I'm totally a technology geek. I love all my gadgets!!

**The thing I like least about my job is ...**

All of the paperwork

**The quality I appreciate most in others is...**

Courage and perseverance

**The quality I dislike the most in other is ...**

Passiveness and helplessness

**My favorite thing to do to help unwind after a rough day is to ...**

Relax by watching something funny on TV with my family

**An occupation I wouldn't mind working in would be ...**

Advocate or Politician

**An occupation I'm really glad I'm not working in is ...**

Accountant or some kind of computer programmer

**My favorite professional sports team is...**

Hands down, totally a Baltimore Ravens fan!

**One of my goals for 2012 was to ...**

Graduate and publish my book, both of which I did!

## What do you want to hear? Have any news to share?

*Are you itching to learn more about a particular issue in the field of victim services? The Editorial Board is always looking for new topics to profile in the newsletter that would be beneficial for our Alums both personally and professionally.*

*Please send any suggestions you might have about a topic to profile in one of our upcoming newsletters to Debbie Bradley at [bradleyd@harfordsheriff.org](mailto:bradleyd@harfordsheriff.org) ... We also are happy to share any information you have about job openings and professional trainings you might think your fellow Alums would benefit from!*

## Editorial Board

- Debbie Bradley — Editor**
- Jessica Winpigler — Assistant Editor**
- Dianna Abramowski — Assistant Editor**
- Keith Gethers — Assistant Editor**
- Ashley Fundack — Assistant Editor**
- Heather Pfeifer — Managing Editor**

## Alumni Directory

The 2013 Alumni Directory, which includes the addition of the most recent Academy class members, is available for distribution. However, we still would like your help to keep the Alumni Directory up to date! If any of your personal and/or professional information changes, please contact Debbie Bradley via email at [bradleyd@harfordsheriff.org](mailto:bradleyd@harfordsheriff.org) or by phone at (410) 836-5490.

**Watch for the next edition of the Academy Forum in August 2013**