

Academy Forum

Continuing the Message of the Roper Victim Assistance Academy

A Quarterly Newsletter

Issue #39- October 2015

Just a Thought

Sometimes we may not understand why a victim focuses on a particular thing or issue when we believe there are more pressing matters to address. But being sensitive to all the needs of a victim is paramount if we want to be able to help them move forward to a life without abuse.

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Web Links

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

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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!

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Alumni Showcase

Read Marzana Parvin's essay on how she began her journey as a victim advocate in the Family Violence Unit in Baltimore County's Department of Social Services.

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News from the Field

Know what's been going on in Annapolis recently? Catch up on the most recent bills debated, passed, and enacted.

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Best Practices

Before making assumptions about what is best for a survivor of domestic violence, review these eight tips on how to more effectively communicate and connect with a victim of domestic abuse.

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Just a thought...

You need what ...?

A Reminder for When We Think A Victim's Needs Aren't Urgent

When we are working with victims, how many times do we catch ourselves thinking, "Is this really your main concern?" I once had a victim who absolutely, positively, needed her leather coat and was more concerned about this article of clothing than her immediate safety. This coat was something that I thought could be replaced and was not urgent to her safety, but my client insisted on its importance.

As we know, a victim's needs aren't always black and white, and sometimes they may even appear to be irrational or illogical. As service providers, we need to remember that a victim's self-

determination, or their sense of control over their own life, is often key to following through with their safety plan and exit strategies. Too often, I've heard victims say "I went back to my abuser because it was predictable, less scary than uprooting everything and not knowing where to start. I felt more secure in the comfort of my home." For me, the key words in those statements are "secure" and "comfort." For many victims, that is what keeps them from leaving - it is too scary losing everything, moving to a new place, raising children on their own, figuring out how they can afford to live, and finding a new sense of normal. For the victim I worked with, she needed that specific leather coat because it was one of a kind and she could sell it to support herself and feel more secure.



Domestic violence is a huge stressor that feels like an uphill battle - it's often one struggle after another for victims who don't know where they might sleep that

night, if they're going to be safe there, and if they can afford to leave. The amount of stress and uncertainty that a victim of domestic violence goes through often leaves them feeling hopeless and helpless.

Let's talk about how we react to stress. We all function on an equilibrium. Think of it as a linear line with hyper-vigilance on one end and dissociation on the other. We all want to be in the middle - at the place where we are most comfortable and most secure. Trauma, such as domestic violence, disrupts our equilibrium and therefore, causes us to deviate towards one end of the spectrum. The main stressor may be the verbal explosion or physical assault, but when you factor in the many other stressors and barriers a victim has to face, they are continually pushed towards either end of the scale. Sometimes they get so overwhelmed, they become so hyper-vigilant, they show signs of paranoia, anxiety, and extreme irritability. Other

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Hello Alumni!

What a wonderful time of year! I just love fall. The beautiful colors and the smell of the fresh crisp air. Can you believe how fast the summer went this year!? I hope you all enjoyed some time relaxing with family and friends.

We were very sorry we had to skip the last distribution of our newsletter; however it was due to circumstances beyond our control. Fortunately everything is back on track, and we used the information we collected for the last newsletter to highlight in this edition. So you didn't miss anything!

I am so excited to welcome the RVAAM Class of 2015! What a wonderful group of people!! This year's Academy was just amazing. Despite the rainy weather, it was such a wonderful week. So much information was learned and so many friendships were formed. And we even have a new baby alumnus!! I would like to throw out a very special thank you to all of the alumni who came out throughout the week to lend their support to the new class. You guys rock! I also want to thank Aaron Specter, Elaine Witman's son, for leading a fantastic advanced training - I hope we can convince him to come back for a future training. I also hope to see more of you at the advanced trainings as you are really missing out on some spectacular training - and they're free to boot!

Keep your eyes and ears open for some upcoming exciting events - there are lots of plans in the works! And just remember if your contact information changes, especially your email address, please contact me so we can get that changed in the directory right away and keep you in the communication loop.

I look forward to seeing you all very soon. 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!

U.S. News World Report on Domestic Violence

This article provides a realistic view of domestic violence occurrences in society. Great in-depth article with statistics that show the seriousness of domestic violence. To learn more, go to <http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/data-mine/2014/09/25/domestic-violence-is-as-american-as-apple-pie>

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence

This website provides information about what domestic violence is, examples of abusive behavior, as well as the dynamics of abuse and the abuser. To learn more, go to: <http://www.nead-v.org/need-support/what-is-domestic-violence>

National DV Hotline

This website offers support and help for domestic violence victims and a myriad of resources available. The site also includes information for victims of specific types of domestic violence (LGBT, Immigrant, etc.) to help direct them to appropriate resources. For more information, go to: <http://www.thehotline.org/resources/statistics>

House of Ruth

This website provides information on signs of domestic violence and offers a hotline to seek help. They also offer a variety of services and resources that are available in the state of Maryland. Go to: <http://www.hruth.org/get-help.asp>

Responding to Domestic Violence: Tools for Mental Health Providers

This article is a wonderful tool for assisting victims of domestic violence. In the article you can learn more about how to interact with victims and assess their specific individual needs to connect them with the best resources. For more information, go to <http://www.nationalcenterdottraumamah.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Responding-to-DV-Tools-for-MH-Providers.pdf>

Save the Date

2016 RVAAM Academy

June 6th-10th, 2016, Bon Secours Spiritual Retreat Center, Marriottsville, MD

Mark your calendars! The 13th annual RVAAM Academy is scheduled for the first week of June at the lovely Bon Secours. Go to the RVAAM website (www.rvaam.org) to download a copy of this year's application and pass it along to your colleagues!



Alumni Showcase

My Journey in Victim Services

I have one of the coolest jobs. I work for Baltimore County Government, at the Family Violence Unit. I am originally from Bangladesh and I came to the United States in 2000 with my family. I have two brothers and a sister, I am the oldest. I graduated from Towson University with my Bachelors in Science degree in Family and Human Services, with a concentration in services to children. My original focus was to work with children with disabilities and help families who are in need. So you may ask, how did you get into this field? Well, it's a long story and I won't bore you with all of the details. In short, during my undergrad, I needed to complete an internship to fulfill my major requirement, so I looked around to see what I could do. I called several agencies to see what opportunities were available, one of those being the Department of Social Services, Family Violence Unit. I had no clue what this unit did, but I decided to email the department head. Lo and behold, I received a response the same day and was invited to come into the agency the next day for an interview. To my surprise, I was offered the internship! I had no idea what I was getting myself into.

My first day on the job was an eye-opening experience. I spent the day at Towson District court, and one of my first experiences was listening to a domestic violence victim tell her story to the victim advocate. I just sat in shock listening to her. But at the same time, a light bulb went off inside my head. This is what I wanted to do with my life - help people like her! I grew up in a country where domestic violence occurs on a regular basis, but no one advocates for the victims' rights. Moreover, this behavior was normalized in the culture. Growing up, I witnessed many incidents of domestic

abuse in my extended family and among my friends, but the victims would just cry and accept the abuse. I was so heartened then to see a woman fighting for her rights, and there were actual victim advocates in the court system who would fight for these women's right for justice. I decided that was a career path I wanted to pursue. Over the next few months, I learned about the other services provided at DSS, but my heart was set on helping victims of intimate partner violence in the Family Violence Unit.

After graduating from Towson, I found a job working for independent-living foster care children, while hoping an opening would occur in the Family Violence Unit. After five months, I received a call from my former internship supervisor who told me a position had opened up in her unit, and she encouraged me to apply. I jumped at the chance! After three interviews, I was offered the position. My dream had come true!

Today, I am a Court/Victim Advocate in the Family Violence Unit. My role is to assist all victims of domestic violence in identifying and reaching their immediate needs, such as shelter, counseling, and legal aid. I provide assistance for these victims at every stage of the criminal justice process and try to help them navigate what are often complex and confusing judicial processes. I explain legal terminology, review the criteria for protection and peace orders, help them develop a safety plan, and explain case dispositions and criminal sentences. I try to provide every victim I interact with the information, resources, and emotional support they need and deserve. One of the other aspects of my job I have really enjoyed is participating in a number of community outreach initiatives (e.g., presentations at schools, women's clubs, and community groups) to help educate others on domestic violence and how to better serve these victims. Furthermore, I do case consultations with agency staff,

such as social workers and CPS workers, who might be dealing with a domestic violence matter.

During my internship, I noticed that many victims who are from South Asia or the Middle East were more reluctant to reach out to get help. So when I started working for the Family Violence Unit, my goal was to connect with victims from different ethnicity and backgrounds to encourage them to seek help. With my personal experience coming from Bangladesh, the ability to speak four languages, and the trainings I have completed in cultural competency, I have been able to reach out to more hidden non-native victims of domestic violence. By educating my colleagues and other criminal justice personnel about different cultural values, religious beliefs, and attitudes towards the legal system that inhibit a victim from reaching out for help, we can begin to break down these barriers and finally get these individuals the help and support they need.

There is not a single day when I am not excited to do my job. When one of the victim's I am assisting offers a smile or thanks me for my assistance, I know that I have made a positive mark in the world, and in that individual's life. While I may not always be able to fix all of the problems victims of crime are struggling with when they come to my office, I will always offer them my smile, my patience, and my undivided attention. By offering this level of compassion, I know I can effect change in their lives, as well as my own.

Essay contributed by Marzana Parvin (Class of 2014). Marzana works at the Baltimore County Department of Social Services, Family Violence Unit.





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!

Dianna Abramowski-Liberto

(Class of 2007) - This past spring, Dianna passed the bar and is now an official attorney with the Baltimore City State's Attorneys Office. Way to go Dianna! We couldn't be more proud of you!!

Welcome New Alumni, Class of 2015!

Please join us in welcoming the newest graduates of the Roper Victim Assistance Academy ... we are delighted to welcome you into our alumni family!

Shilesa Adams, Sarah Adenjugba, Valarie Brice, Ruth Barkley, Latisha Carter, Shannon Cartwright, Alecia Chapman, Karen Darby, Brandie Forrest, Tyrone Garnett, Helen Hall, Deborah Howard, Juanita Holland, Joseph Hsiao, Anitra Jackson, Matthew Huelkamp, Matthew Johnson, Delaino Johnson, Jamal Johnson, Sherry Jones, Hazel Lewis, Therese Lewis, Nancy Mercado, Celinia Ondeck, Elmer Pace, Edith Palacios, Claudia Poole, Gregory Prioleau, Katlyn Ritter, Courtney Smith, Darall Smith, Melissa Smith, Thelma Snipe, Delicia St. Hill, Robin Strozier, James Timpson, Kimberly Varros, Ellen Wallis, Jerrica Watson, Arnesha Woods

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!

*** Chapter 93/House Bill 549 - Video Lottery Facility Payouts - Intercepts for Restitution Payment:** This new law requires that video lottery operator's licensees are to inform individuals who participate in the lottery, that their winnings may be withheld to provide restitution for any victims of crime that they have perpetrated. The lottery operator is required to help facilitate specific payment amounts, honor specific orders, and authorize any specific transfers of the monies to victims of an individual's crime. Governor Hogan signed the bill in April 2015 and it went into effect on October 1, 2015.



Best Practices

8 Tips for Working with Survivors of Domestic Violence

Before making assumptions about a survivor's actions, wants, needs, desires, and motivations, consider: 1) is it domestic violence? 2) is it culture? 3) is it trauma? These considerations lead to improved understanding of and interaction with survivors. It enables us to demonstrate empathy and respect and to validate the incredibly difficult circumstances of their situation. Now that there is better understanding of how trauma impacts the brain, professionals working with sur-

vivors of domestic violence are taking new approaches. The good news is that you don't have to be a brain surgeon to use these commonsense strategies!

1. **Understand Trauma:** Did you know that domestic violence can cause intense reactions and changes in someone's body, thoughts, feelings, and actions? Chronic health and mental health conditions, including: feeling sad, tired, hopeless; being disorganized or indecisive are all common trauma reactions. The first step to responding to survivors therefore is to understand that all of these reactions are normal. When we know this, it changes our approach. Instead of taking a survivor's defensiveness or anger towards us personally, we can come from a place of compassion and understanding that these attitudes may stem from trauma. Rise above the average response someone may get by letting survivors know that their feelings and reactions are normal for what they have experienced.
2. **Validate Strengths:** When you meet with a survivor, they may appear very put together and focused, or they might be injured or high. There is no right or wrong way to act or feel: everyone is different. If they are living and breathing in front of you, they have survived. Many people have to do unthinkable yet resourceful things to survive. They may have sold their bodies to pay rent, drank alcohol to cope, taken beatings to spare their children, or lied about the abuse out of fear. Acknowledge whatever someone has done to survive. Validate that their efforts kept them alive and helped them stand before you today. Some survival strategies are creative and genius; others are potentially harmful. You can acknowledge what helped them to survive while also mentioning your concerns. This acknowledgment of strengths helps to

build confidence and self-worth and builds trust and connection, which puts you in a better position to help.

3. **Assume Nothing with Regard to Gender or Sexual Orientation:** The Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) underscored the reality for many survivors: we must overcome gender bias and discrimination. People of all genders can be survivors of domestic violence - men, women, transgender, and gender non-conforming individuals. Do not assume a person's gender. Just ask! How do they like to be addressed? You may learn that a woman likes to go by Ms. Brown instead of Sarah. Or that everybody calls Robert, "Bobby" and you should too. You may learn that Patrick goes by PJ and is genderqueer. Or that Jason goes by Mary, and lives as a woman outside of work. Be sure to use their preferred pronouns as well (he/him, she/her/ zhe/hir, they/ their, etc.). While this takes practice and you may make mistakes, your efforts demonstrate respect.

4. **Consider Culture:** Culture permeates every aspect of our identity and interactions - from how we greet others in which language, to how we wear our hair and clothes, to what we find helpful and who we trust. For example, survivors may stay married because of religious beliefs or refuse to testify in public because it is against their cultural beliefs. Survivors may not make eye contact with you because it is disrespectful to make eye contact with authority figures in their culture, not out of disrespect or because they are lying. They may be what you perceive to be "late" because the concept of time operates differently in their culture. Before making assumptions, consider culture. Inquire about and explain any cultural misunderstandings. You can be an ambassador and provide information that will help them succeed

in seeking help from you and other organizations.

5. **Consider Domestic Violence Dynamics:** The dynamics of domestic violence are often a driving force that dictate the behaviors and decisions of survivors. When consequences for disobeying the strict rules the abuser uses to govern the relationship are severe, other priorities take a back seat. While getting to work on time, going to counseling, or taking legal action may be what the survivor wants, with every action they conduct a "risk analysis." Oftentimes, this analysis results in a decision not to follow through because the consequences would be too great. If you are working with someone and they are unsure or change their mind, ask about what their partner would do, what would the potential consequences be, if they took a certain action? Safety planning around these risks is a crucial and potentially life-saving service offered by every domestic violence program.

6. **Be Survivor-Centered:** Everyone can be survivor-centered! This means that survivors make their own decisions. It may include safety planning with survivors who stay in the relationship; other times it is helping them get an apartment. Some survivors want their abuser in jail; others seek safety through a protective order. Some survivors want one or more of these things! And that's okay. In an abusive relationship, survivors often have very little choice. We, as professionals, can model healthy relationships by offering choices and options whenever possible. How can you assist survivors in meeting their needs? Social workers can provide referrals, legal advocates



can assist with protective orders, assistant state's attorneys can decide if and how to prosecute a case, police officers can consistently conduct Lethality Assessment screens and link survivors to resources, knowing it is their choice to get help. If your position requires you to take certain actions (e.g., arresting, prosecuting, reporting child abuse, or removing children), notify the survivor in advance whenever possible. This allows the survivor to safety plan, as interventions like these can escalate abuse.

7. **Be Transparent:** Survivors of domestic violence can be overwhelmed with the number of professionals they encounter as they seek help. Explaining your role and the scope of support you can offer helps alleviate misunderstandings and focus your conversations. If your communications with survivors are privileged or confidential, let them know this as well as any limitations. If you do not have privilege or confidentiality, fully disclose to survivors the information you collect, its purpose, and who could possibly see it. This way, survivors can decide what is safe to share. It is important to build this trust so they continue to see your assistance.

8. **Be Individualized and Be Creative:** If I asked each of you for your life goal, each answer would be different. Some say family, some say love, others say money. This is also true of survivors. Too often we become caught up in a recipe or formula for success that we think it is best for everyone. Survivors may want one or more options that you offer. They may also have their own options and resources that are not on your list. These creative and individualized options and goals can lead to a survivor's happiness, success, and healing in ways we cannot imagine.

If a survivor wants something you cannot offer, be creative and reach out to your community partners.

Overall, by taking trauma, domestic violence, and culture into consideration, you open yourself up to better connection, trust, and rapport with survivors. Once a survivor can be open and honest with you about what they need, you are positioning yourself to do a better job by being able to offer the most relevant and helpful resources for their situation.

Essay contributed by Erin Boguski, Director of Training & Services at the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence.

Certification News

Do you want to be more recognized in the field of Victim Services? Do you want to show people that you are a cut above the

rest? Then become a certified Victim

Assistance Specialist in the State of Maryland! Social Workers started here too and look

how far they have come over the past 10 years! Victim Service Professionals need to unite and do the same thing - so take this important step for your career. Go to www.rvaam.org to learn more about the certification process and download a copy of the application today!

There are three levels of certification in Maryland, each require a specific set of qualifications and are described in detail below:

*** Level I (VASI)** - a) complete application packet; b) minimum of two years experience (paid or unpaid); c) 40 hours of training (RVAAM, NVAA, or other SVAA); d) multiple

choice exam; e) \$50 application processing fee

*** Level II (VASII)** - a) complete application packet; b) minimum of five years experience (paid or unpaid); c) 80 hours of training (40 hours RVAAM, NVAA, SVAA and 40 hours advanced training and/or University level coursework in victim services, including 3 hours of Victims Rights training and 3 hours of Ethics in Victim Services training); d) written essay/short answer exam; e) \$75 application processing fee.

*** Level III (VASIII)** - a) complete application packet; b) minimum eleven years experience (paid or unpaid); c) 120 hours of training (40 hours RVAAM, NVAA, SVAA and 80 hours advanced training and/or University level coursework in victim services, including 3 hours of Victims Rights training and 3 hours of Ethics in Victim Services training); d) oral presentation on approved topic in Victim Assistance; e) \$100 application processing fee.

There is also a similarly tiered renewal process in place for those advocates who want to remain current with their certification:

*** Level I** - a) complete 40 hours of continuing education (completed within the past 3 years) which must include 3 hours of Victims' Rights training and 3 hours of Victim Services Ethics training; and b) complete renewal application packet and pay the \$25 renewal fee.

*** Level II** - Without an upgrade - same as Level I. To upgrade from Level I to Level II - a) complete 40 hours of continuing education (completed within past 3 years) which must include 3 hours of Victims' Rights training and 3 hours of Victim Services Ethics training; b) complete written exam; and c) submit renewal application packet and pay \$50 fee.

*** Level III** - Without an upgrade - same as Level I. To upgrade from

Level II to Level III - a) complete 40 hours of continuing education (completed within past 3 years) which must include 3 hours of Victims' Rights training and 3 hours of Victim Services Ethics training; b) complete oral presentation; and c) submit renewal application packet and pay \$75 fee.

All application materials and study guides for the written exams are available online at www.rvaam.org (click on the Certification tab at the top of the page). For more information, or if you have any questions, please contact Debbie Bradley at bradleyd@harford-sheriff.org or by phone at (410) 836-5490.

Congratulations to Our Newest Certified Victim Advocates!

Jole' Gibson
(Class of 2013) - Level 1



Just a Thought (Cont.)

times they disassociate so completely, they feel completely numb, and may have difficulty focusing and processing information.

The needs that we don't see as the most urgent, but which are extremely important to the victim, are the ones that provide a sense of normalcy and comfort to the victim. It is these things that can help the victim reestablish his or her sense of equilibrium. When victims feel comfortable, they feel secure, and it is only in this state when they can start focusing more on their goals, and begin to listen to what we as service providers are advising them to do in order to keep themselves safe and begin to move forward. As

providers, we therefore need to find a balance of educating and empowering victims to make goals that will help them remain safe without diminishing their own personal needs.

So please, when you catch yourself thinking that a certain need of a victim isn't what should be on the forefront of their brain, try to ask yourself if it's something that can help them feel more normal and more secure. Is this need something that will help them cope with stress, or empower them? Will it provide them with a sense of control over their life? Only after we help victims with these needs will we then be able to help them focus on what they can do to keep themselves safe and help them begin to map out a plan that will help them move forward towards a life free of abuse.



Essay contributed by Christin Fox (Class of 2012)

"Someone" - Anonymous

Someone to love me, someone to hug me

Someone to see me, someone to be with me

Someone who doesn't take from me, someone who doesn't break me

Someone to respect me, someone to let me be

Someone who doesn't forsake me, someone who doesn't close their eyes to me

Someone who sees the good in me and who likes what they see

Someone to make me whole again and build back strength in me

Someone who doesn't crush me, reduce me, or ignore me

Someone to nurture me, someone to wait for me

Who will that someone be? Is there someone out there for me?

Even when there is nothing left for me, please God, let there be someone who takes me for what I am and who can see what is really me.

Someone to find a way to set me free and let me live again, not to hide away. Someone who sees how down I am, and when all I know of myself is gone, they find the pieces I need to carry on.

When you're lost to yourself and hidden from the rest of the world, there must be someone who sees what the rest can't see. The person who once was me, hides in the person you have made me be.

Let us all try to be that Someone for each of the victims we serve.

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 pro-

fessionally. 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 ... 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!

Alumni Directory

The 2015 Alumni Directory, which includes the addition of the most recent Academy class members is now 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 or by phone at (410) 836-5490.

Editorial Board

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Watch for the next edition of the Academy Forum in January 2016