

Academy Forum

Continuing the Message of the Roper Victim Assistance Academy

A Quarterly Newsletter

Issue #12 - October 2008

Just a Thought

One of the more challenging tasks is to interview a child who has been a victim of a crime. Learn about those interview strategies that protect the emotional well-being of the child and produce successful results
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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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Hot Topics

Learn more about the role of the Child Advocacy Center, and the efforts Howard County has made in implementing this warm and supportive model to better meet the needs of child victims of crime.
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A Window to the Soul

Check out our newest addition to the newsletter - a section to better help us meet the spiritual needs of ourselves, as well as of those we help. This edition - we focus on helping child victims reconnect with their spirituality
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Alumni Updates

Always find yourself thinking "I wonder what happened to..."



Check out what our Alumni are up to these days.

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The 20/20

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

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Just a thought...

Interviewing Child Victims of Crime - Why a "One-Size Fits All" Approach Does Not Work

Anne Hoffman, LCSW-C

Conducting a successful interview of a child who has been the victim of abuse or assault is both an art and a science. Several variables come into play including: the number of interviews conducted, a child's developmental level, the use of a protocol, and the circumstances and setting of the interview.

The Child First Principle

When establishing procedures for conducting child interviews, an agency should adhere to the *Child First* principle which strives to limit the number of times the child is subjected to the interviewing process. The goal is to interview the child once. However, a singular interview requires the cooperation of multiple agencies, including Child Protective Services,

Law Enforcement, the Child Advocacy Center, the State's Attorney's Office, and the County Attorney if applicable. Each of these agencies requires different information from a child victim and the interview must be conducted appropriately in order to satisfy all of those various agencies needs.

Collaboration is at the heart of a successful child forensic interview. Each jurisdiction must determine how each agency can and should participate in the process. Having representatives viewing the interview from a monitor room while the interview is being recorded is considered the optimal situation. Other methods such as audio-taping or written note taking may be the local policy and procedure. The key is to have buy-in to whatever procedure is currently in use in the local jurisdiction from each agency involved.

Developmental Considerations

Another critical element to a successful child interview is assessing a child's level of development, and thereby adopting the use of specific interviewing protocols that mirror the child's stage of development. Having a set, pre-determined methodology assists the interviewer in correctly assessing the developmental level of the child in question. Whatever the process may be, certain issues must be considered; for example, can the child provide

correct information in response to non-trauma related questions such as names, gender and relationships of household members? During the initial rapport building stage of the interview, can the child provide any narrative about non-threatening information, such as "what did you do for your last birthday?"

Additionally, is the child able to follow the line of questioning and respond appropriately?

Professionals need to recognize that many factors can influence a child's "interview performance." Beyond the developmental needs of the child that were discussed prior, there are additional factors that can play a role in the success or failure of a child inter-



view. For example, many children have suffered significant emotional trauma, as well as physical trauma, thereby making it very difficult for them to talk with anyone (let alone a stranger) about their experiences. Additionally, the interview setting itself can play either a positive or negative role. Not surprisingly, children may be easily intimidated by the sterile and large nature of many agency settings, therefore professionals should strive to make the

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Greetings Alumni!

Can you believe another summer is over already? Why can't winter fly by as fast?! I hope you all had time to relax and to refresh your mind, body, and spirits - heaven knows you all deserve it. But now that Fall is upon us, there are many new events and changes we can celebrate ...

This is such an exciting time for the Roper Victim Assistance Alumni Association. There are lots of plans in the works and some amazing goals have been set. You will definitely want to be on board with us. There have been a few changes and we are currently working on updating the by-laws to reflect our current vision. The Executive Board is working very hard to make our Alumni Association the best in the country!

As such, a few new committees have been created to better support the mission of RVAAM. If you are interested in participating on any of these committees, please contact Alicia Johnson-Davis at johnson2davis@yahoo.com to be added to the list. Most of the communication will be handled electronically, so we can include everyone around the State and to keep everyone connected. The new committees, and their respective missions, are as follows:

Fundraising Committee - to establish and maintain non-profit status for Alumni Association, facilitate donations, acquire permits and oversee planning for Fundraising activities. This committee will work very closely with most of the other committees.

Resource Committee - to validate credibility of resource material (e.g., new programs, services, best practices, training, etc.), provide resources for submission to RVAAM Alumni Association web page and to keep updated on movement to standardize training for victim service providers.

Mentoring Committee - to develop best practice guidelines, establish qualification and roles of mentors, to ensure confidentiality and maintain professionalism.

The other existing committees of the Alumni Association include:

Marketing Committee - to ensure that future Academies are well attended by a diverse representation of victim service professionals, across the spectrum of service agencies/venues.

Operations Committee - to facilitate alumni participation and support in the annual Academy and other training activities, as well as to assist Academy staff with organizing Academy activities and events.

Outreach Committee - to provide an opportunity to develop and maintain a network of victim service professionals, while increasing participants/alumni knowledge of national, state, and local resources/opportunities. To assist with the development of the Academy Forum, the Alumni newsletter, and the Alumni Association web page.

We hope you will find time to join us on one of the aforementioned committees, and help us to continue to grow the Alumni Association.

Wishing you all the best!

Debbie (Creswell) Bradley, Editor

bradleyd@harfordsheriff.org

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!



Maryland Children's Alliance - MCA is a non-profit organization created

to better serve abused and neglected children by giving them a voice and by encouraging healing. The agency provides support to jurisdictions that are seeking to develop interdisciplinary teams and establish new Child Advocacy Centers while also enhancing the services available at existing Centers. MCA provides training, resources, and networking opportu-

nities for child abuse professionals in Maryland.. www.mdcha.org

National Children's Alliance - Child Forensic Interview Model - The National Children's Advocacy Center has developed a child forensic interview model, which is forensically sound, flexible, and may be used by a variety of professionals. The model can be adapted for children of different ages and cultural backgrounds, as well as different types of victimization experiences. http://www.nationalcac.org/professionals/model/forensic_interview.html

"The Forensic Interview of Children" - this links to an article written by Dale Koons, provides a summary description of the various stages included in the forensic interview process when conducted with a child. <http://members.iquest.net/~dkoons/technique.html>

The President's Corner

I would like to begin with offering you my best wishes for a safe and happy holiday season. It is right around the corner and I know with the pressures of the job, along with the stress of preparing for the holidays, we as service providers tend to take care of others and not ourselves. I encourage you to take care of yourself this season and to enjoy all that it has to offer.

The Executive Board has been working hard on updating our By-Laws to ensure our Alumni Association continues to grow and to meet the needs of our organization. Many of you signed up to work on the committees. We plan to have committees working on task by the January General Membership Meeting.

For those members that did not feel they have the time to be on a committee, please let me know if you have free time to do small jobs the committees may need completed. It may be something as simple as creating a flyer or helping make copies, or even just submitting ideas for future projects. I really want "our" Association to belong to all Alumni.

Deb Stanley, Heather Pfeifer, Elaine Witman, and Dave Thomas are in full support of the Alumni Association growing and are available when we need them. We now have a procedure in effect to report to our Advisors after Board Meetings. This frees them up from attending our Board Meetings so they can direct their attention to working with other

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Just a thought...

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surroundings as 'child friendly' as possible. This can be achieved by incorporating comfortable, home-like furniture, cheerful colors, and child-friendly activities (e.g., art supplies, stuffed animals, etc.). The interview skills of the interviewer are yet another set of factors that can promote or inhibit the success of an interview with a child. Keeping questions concrete and simple, and avoiding shifts in time will also support a child in the interview process. Given the proper circumstances, children can be excellent reporters of personal history.

In short, do it once, assess for understanding and provide the child the best possible circumstances and opportunity to disclose what, if anything, has happened

Anne Hoffman, LCSW-C, CPS Supervisor, Montgomery County, MD.

Best Practices

Sometimes it's hard to take what we've learned and apply it out in the field. In this section, we highlight a best practice other agencies have implemented to better serve victims of crime.

Howard County Child Advocacy Center

Kim Vasco, Victim Support Liasion

The Howard County Child Advocacy Center (CAC) is located in a beautiful home, on a pretty tree lined street, in a quiet neighborhood in Ellicott City. A walk up the driveway may reveal someone's chalk masterpiece, the remains of spilled bubbles, or an offering of nuts on the wood railing for the squirrels. A picnic table in the wooded niche next to the

house is a great place to see and hear the pair of red-tailed hawks who frequent the woods behind the house or to catch a glimpse of the occasional passing deer attracted by the flowers and shrubs surrounding the house.

One step inside the doorway and our guests are greeted by the friendly and welcoming face of Miss Demetra, administrative support technician, goddess of the XBOX, DVD player, referee and master of misdirection, and the person who can rattle off the number of every child friendly T.V. station on the Howard County cable roster. The living room, with its overstuffed couches, sports a mural of a large tree with the baby pictures of every staff member who works at the CAC, hanging as apples on each of its branches. While our visitors are waiting for their turn to talk with the staff, the playroom, painted floor to ceiling with a continuous meadow scene, provides a



soothing, relaxing, and safe place to play, read, or color.

"The House" (as it is affectionately known) operates very effectively within

the multi-disciplinary team model advocated by the National Children's Alliance. Staff members function with the ability to appreciate, understand and interact with members of the diverse cultures which are the bounty of Howard County. Detectives, CPS workers, victims advocates, crisis counselors, nurses, physicians, and prosecutors all specialize and are highly trained in the sexual and severe physical abuse of children. All staff members operate within their area of expertise to enhance the Team's efficiency in minimizing trauma, and to ensure that children are not further victimized by the system's intended to protect them. Throughout the investigation and prosecution stages and beyond, families are supported and kept informed, in an effort to empower the family to move forward in the healing process. Every Wednesday, staff comes together to engage in case review, to provide mutual support, share concerns, ideas, occasional laughter, and sometimes a birthday cake or homemade treat. We have found that the multi-disciplinary team approach also has untold benefits in the care of those who serve.

The Child Advocacy Center movement started in 1985 with the founding of the first CAC in Huntsville, Alabama by then District Attorney, now Congressman Bud Cramer. Maryland had one of the earliest existing Child Advocacy Centers in the United States, and the Howard County Child Advocacy Center

was one of the first fully accredited CAC's. Although there are now Child Advocacy Centers in every state in the United States, District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands, many jurisdictions within these states still do not have a CAC. The National Children's Alliance continues to work to support jurisdictions that have a goal to establish a CAC within their community. For more information about the Child Advocacy Center movement, please contact the National Children's Alliance www.nca.org, or the Maryland Children's Alliance at www.mdcha.org



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 almost passed us by. Here's just a snapshot of some of the special events and milestones our alums have experienced since we last met...

Sharon Alstat (2008) - As of November 1st, Sharon will be moving to Montpelier, Vermont to work with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement as a Law Enforcement Technician. We wish you all the best in your new endeavors Sharon and hope you will keep in touch!

Stacey Bolin (2008) - Stacey just celebrated her 40th birthday on August 8th - be sure to give her a big birthday hug the next time you see her!

Dee Gardner (2006) - Dee recently accepted a new position as the Coordinator of Victim Services with the Maryland Crime Victims Resource Center. Congratulations on your new job Dee!

Hannah Kamsheh (2007) - Hannah has had so many new and wonderful things happen in her life. She recently got married, and began a new job with the Naval Criminal Investigative

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Service (NCIS) as a Counter-Terrorism Intelligence Analyst. We are so happy for you Hannah, and wish you all the best in your new job!

Cathy Oatman (2007) - We want to extend our congratulations to Cathy and her congregation, the United Evangelical on Dillon Street, who will be celebrating 135 years of ministry in Baltimore City. They will be celebrating with an anniversary concert on Sunday, November 2 at 6:30pm. Come and join them in the celebration!

Camielle Weigel (2007) - On June 27th, Cami married her long time boyfriend and became Cami Young. She continues graduate school at the University of Baltimore. Congratulations Cami!

President ... (continued from page 3).

professionals in the field, to further improve the field of Victim Services. We are fortunate our Advisors have entrusted this Association to us and believe we will build upon the foundation they have already laid.

I hope to see all of you at the January General Membership Meeting. This Association belongs to all of us and we need everyone's input to make this the best Alumni Association in the United States. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, recommendations, or concerns about the Alumni Association. Beyond that, please feel free to call me if you just need to talk.

Again, my best wishes to each of you and your families~

Valda Rotolo; Alumni President

A Window to the Soul

- Addressing the Spiritual Needs and Well-being of Ourselves and Those We Assist

"The Spiritual Consequence of Childhood Victimization" by Father Ray Chase

The journey to understand and respond to child victimization has been a long one of ex-

ploration and discovery. More recently is the growing awareness that victimization may have a significant impact on a child's fragile and developing spirituality. As with the law enforcement and mental health communities there needs to be a thoughtful and careful exploration of the nature of the immediate and potential long-term impact of victimization on a child's spirituality. This deepening knowledge combined with the great spiritual wisdom of the various religious traditions will provide greater clarity regarding effective ways to be helpful to those who struggle with the spiritual aftermath of childhood victimization. This could lead to the important development of a type of spiritual forensics and spiritual practice suited to the needs of victimized children.

With such a wide diversity of religious traditions it becomes important to find a definition which can be easily accepted and successfully used by every religious tradition ... or even among those with no religious tradition or affiliation. A definition which would satisfy



this requirement seems to be one where spirituality is defined as the beliefs, feelings, and actions/behaviors which are built upon or flow from a person's image of God. The health or disease of a person's spirituality is directly related to this particular and very personal image of God. This image is learned in two very different yet equally powerful ways: by what one is taught and, as importantly, by what one experiences. Therefore the image of God - of the nature of a higher power - begins in the kind and quality of experiences between a child and his/her caregivers. As the child continues to grow, he/she encounters other forms of power in experiences with people of various degrees of relationship. By the time the child hears the word "God" as the higher or highest power, the child already has a powerful set of experiences that give shape to what his or her image of God may be. As the child begins to experience what his or her religious tradition says about God, the child may be facing a complex and perhaps troubling mix he/she must fit together in some

meaningful way. In many ways the analogy of putting together puzzle pieces is relevant and helpful. There may be certain forms of intense experiences of power (e.g., victimization) which may be experienced as puzzle pieces that don't fit at all and create concern, anxiety, and doubt for the child. Because of their intensity, the particular puzzle pieces may, unfortunately, also take on a weight of meaning and influence for the child. The implication which follows is a child who is not able to develop or is handicapped in his/her ability to develop a healthy personal spirituality and consequently life quality is compromised.

The following case example may be helpful in deepening our understanding of this issues, as well as the urgency in addressing it:

An adolescent male who was in a sex offender treatment program made the following statement to his therapist - *"Where was God when the man was holding a gun to my head and forcing me to perform oral sex on him?!"* What one can't see in this question is the challenge, the anger and perhaps, hidden beneath, the sadness in his voice. This was an intensely personal and critical statement and question. His previous knowledge and understanding of God had now run full force into an experience which severely challenged his belief.

The response of the helper is critical in terms of whether it all ends here and the adolescent's fears are validated or whether this statement/question becomes an entrance and exploration which holds hope. For the helper a number of critical steps must follow in order to be helpful. First, this young man has voiced a question. By voicing it he makes a statement that he wants someone to hear it and engage him. Additionally, by voicing it with this particular person he may be indicating that there is something about this person that makes posing such a troubling and profound question possible and that this person holds some potential to engage him in a creative way to find the answer to the question. One has to note that the question is raised with some expectation or hope that it can be answered ... and answered successfully. The helper must acknowledge this trust and assure the adolescent that he will become part of the dialogue that seeks to find an answer to the question.

Next, the helper must then thoughtfully and carefully examine the various components of the question and use the result of that examination to engage the person in an exploration which peels back successive layers of meaning and deeper questions which lie there. This requires the helper to allow the adolescent to give full expression to his/her feelings about God, no matter how difficult it may be to hear

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Save the Date

The Maryland Crime Victim Resource Center's 5th Annual "Chocolate Affair"

Saturday, October 17, 2008, 6:30 - 9:30pm; the Florian Hall, Bowie, MD.

Come enjoy the fantastic food and the silent and live auctions! For more information, please contact MDVRC at (410) 234-9885.

The Mid-Atlantic Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect

October 28 -30th, 2008; Clarion Resort and Conference Center, 10100 Coastal Highway, Ocean City, MD

2009 National Crime Victims' Rights Week

April 26 - May 2, 2009. A few of the scheduled events: OVC's National Observance and Candlelight Ceremony - April 23; Attorney General's Crime Victims' Service Awards Ceremony - April 24.

Did you know 2009 marks the 25th anniversary of the passage of the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)?

It's Here! Check Out The Academy's New Website!!!

After a year of planning and design, the Academy launched its new website on August 1st! The site, www.rvaam.org, not only provides the community with information about the Academy, but also provides a place for the Alumni Association to highlight all of its activities and resources, thus allowing Alumni to direct potential recruits to the site to not only learn about the Academy but be able to download an application form directly.

Ultimately, we want this website to serve as a vehicle that Alumni can use to help remain in contact with one another. Over the next year, we will explore additional ways to expand the site to further promote networking opportunities. In the meantime, if you have any training announcements or come across a job opportunity you would like to share with your peers, please email Heather at hpfeifer@ubalt.edu or rvaam@mac.com so she can post the information.

We are really excited about our new site and we hope you will take the time to visit it each month to see what's the latest news!

A Window to the Soul (continued)

negative, even abusive language directed toward God. By not expressing either fear or avoidance, the helper validates this important step and thereby encourages and supports the adolescent in also facing his fear and avoidance and moving cautiously forward. Don't look for easy religious answers. They may be interpreted as the helper either not having heard or understood. These questions, like those posed by the young man, are too deep for that and such answers may only be a source of further frustration.

The deeper engagement with the question will, over time, provide the road map for both helper and victim for the process that lies ahead of them: of identifying, and then releasing the damaged image of God with its impact; and the subsequent replacement with an image of God which is powerful in affirming the person and his/her life.

This process will parallel the therapeutic process ... with the telling of the story playing a critical role in healing and with the therapeutic and spiritual processes working to support one another.

The person's struggle and his/her telling of the story of that struggle, along with the carefully garnered spiritual wisdom of religious tradition, will be the dual guides in the direction of spiritual healing. Trusting the process and being patient are necessary requirements.

Remembering spirituality is always unique to each person is essential. The person who is victimized always holds all the information necessary for spiritual healing and growth. The helper simply assists the person in gaining clarity in the state of his/her spirituality: what he/she intuitively needs and wants his/her spirituality to be; assisting him/her in the

process of moving from the present dysfunctional spirituality imposed upon him/her by life experiences to the spirituality he/she is drawn to.

To continue this important exploration and to further this urgent dialogue you may want to explore the following resources which should then be brought into a dynamic conversation with the best of spiritual traditions:

"The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence" by Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, Pamela Ebstyn King, Linda Wagner, & Peter Benson (Eds.)

"Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development" by James W. Fowler

"The Spiritual Life of Children" by Robert Coles

"The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study" by Dr. Ana-Maria Rizzuto

"Why Did Freud Reject God? A Psychoanalytic Interpretation" by Dr. Ana-Maria Rizzuto

Have a Suggestion?

Is there a topic you would like to see profiled in an upcoming edition of the Academy Forum's "Just a Thought" section? Do you know of an innovative program or initiative you would like to share with your fellow Alums in the "Best Practice" section?

We are always looking for new material and resources to incorporate into our newsletter ... if you have something to share, we'd love to hear from you! Please email any suggestions to rvaam@mac.com



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 Mona Metz, a graduate of the 2004 Academy

My favorite sound ... Thunder

My favorite time of day is ... morning, just before dawn

If I could learn any language, it would be ... Jamaican - I love the sound of it

My favorite retreat is ... time at home without phone calls

My motto or favorite saying is ... Whatever happened to guilt and shame?

If I could invite any three people (alive or deceased) to dinner, it would be ...

My Grandma Eddie, to see the sparkle in her eyes one more time; my Dad who always loved a great meal; and Jerry Crocker, a co-worker from the past but not forgotten in 30 plus years.

If I had to choose an animal that symbolizes my personality, it would be a ... Clydesdale - strength and endurance!

My childhood ambition was ... to have a family and be just like my Grandma Eddie

The three words that best describe my life are ... responsibility, simplicity, humor

My proudest moment ... graduating summa cum laude in Criminal Justice at age 38.

My favorite movie is ... Rogers and Hammer-

stein's Cinderella - I still believe in fairy tales

My inspiration ... retirement - enough said.

The biggest challenge for me is ... Life isn't fair.

My favorite indulgence ... having coffee with my best friend

The occupation, other than the one I am currently in, I would want is... Forestry

The occupation I would certainly not like to have is ... computer programming

My greatest accomplishment (so far) ... to realize when I met my husband, I did deserve the best

I appreciate ... Life! It's always a challenge

The soundtrack that best exemplifies my life is ... Pink Floyd's "The Wall" - says it all

One of my goals for 2008 is... to remain employed

2009 RVAAM Date Announced!

We are pleased to announce that the 6th Annual Roper Victim Assistance Academy will be held June 1-5, 2009, at the Maryland Public Safety Training and Education Center in Sykesville, MD. We hope you will help spread the word and recruit members for the upcoming class. Applications will be available in January 2009.

Alumni Directory

The 2008 Alumni Directory, which includes the addition of the most recent Academy class members, has just been completed and 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. We will then publish those changes in the following newsletter.

We Need Your Help!

The Academy Forum is looking for volunteers to serve as Assistant Editors. Responsibilities include contacting RVAAM alumni for information and updates, preparing the 20/20 section of the newsletter each quarter on a different member, and providing current, useful websites to the victim services field. If you are interested, please contact Debbie Bradley at bradleyd@harfordsheriff.org

Editorial Board

Debbie (Creswell) Bradley — Editor
Heather Courtney — Assistant Editor
Alicia Johnson-Davis - Assistant Editor
Diana Abramowski - Assistant Editor
Heather Pfeifer — Managing Editor

Watch for the next edition of the Academy Forum in January 2009