

Academy Forum

Continuing the Message of the Roper Victim Assistance Academy

A Quarterly Newsletter

Issue #37- January 2015

Just a Thought

Working with the survivors of homicide can present some of the most challenging circumstances in our professional lives. To do it successfully, we should always follow the four principles of the L.O.V.E. model. Read this edition's essay to learn what this model entails.

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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 winter!

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Read Monique Mitchell's moving story about her journey to help other homicide survivors after experiencing her own painful loss of a beloved family member.

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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

Would you know how to assist surviving family members of a cold case homicide if you received the call today? Learn about some insightful strategies you can use in such cases that was shared by a Cold Case Unit in Maryland.

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Just a thought...

Tips for Working With Homicide Survivors

Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them humanity cannot survive - Dali Lama

When working with survivors, it is important we as victim advocates provide them with the L.O.V.E. they need to help them navigate the unexpected and unwanted journey they now find themselves on. To provide this type of support, it will require us to do all of the following: **L** (listen), **O** (be open), **V** (validate), and



E (empathize).

First, we must become skilled listeners. This requires us to pay attention to both the verbal and non-verbal messages a survivor is sharing with us. So when they answer with "I'm fine" or "I'm okay," take a moment to look for the feelings behind those words. Many times those phrases are echoed to uphold a mask many survivors wear in attempt to try to subdue their true feelings or disguise their pain. Sometimes they are also used as an attempt to protect us, the observer, from having to deal with the reality of the emotional turmoil they are struggling with. So when a survivor offers such a response, repeat what you feel you heard the person say to ensure that what is being communicated is really accurate. And always be aware of your own body language and facial expressions when interacting with a survivor to ensure that you are always projecting the level of compassion that you want the person to feel.

Second, openly acknowledge the loss of the survivor's loved one by name and relationship. This conveys a mes-

sage to survivors that their loved one is more than a number or a statistic. Although many of us have worked on numerous homicide cases over the years, every survivor wants their loss to be recognized, and that the life of their loved one mattered. We can also show this level of compassion by asking open-ended questions when trying to identify a survivor's needs. Just as we are open to listening to what they have to say, we also always must be honest in our responses to their questions - we must never make promises we can not keep!

Third, validate the feelings a survivor expresses. This doesn't mean you always have to agree with what is expressed but authenticate the roller coaster of emotions that they may experience, and confirm for them that such feelings are natural. Even when they express a homicidal and/or suicidal thought, don't become alarmed; validate those feelings and then work to provide them with the supportive

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Happy New Year Alumni!

Well it is the beginning of yet another year - where did the time go? 2014 seemed to zip by! I can remember years ago when I was just a child, my mother used to say, "Don't rush your life away, it goes fast enough!" I never understood that until I got older - time seems to go by so much faster now than when I was a child. So in this New Year, I challenge each of you to take a step back and cherish some time - whether it is with your loved ones, your friends, or some quiet time on your own - cherish every minute. Contemplate your past, cherish the present, and plan for the future.

So while I'm on the topic of time, let's start recruiting for the upcoming RVAAM class - trust me, it'll be here before we can blink an eye! Think about the people you work with - do you know somebody who would benefit from attending the Academy? If so, give them a copy of the application. Get them excited by sharing with them some of your own experiences at the Academy. Reassure them that a week away from home (and the office) is well worth it! And don't forget to carve out some time that week for yourself to attend one of the advanced trainings we will be offering. Plus you'll get the opportunity to get to know the newest Academy participants and catch up with old friends as well. So help us out to make this year's Academy the best one yet!

Wishing you all the best in the New Year. Until next time ...

Debbie Bradley, C.A., VASIII

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"Another fresh new year is here. Another year to live! To banish worry, doubt, and fear ... to love and laugh and give. This bright new year is given to me to live each day with zest ... to daily grow and try to be my highest and my best! I have the opportunity once more to right some wrongs, to pray for peace, to plant a tree, and sing more joyful songs!" - William Arthur Ward

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!

**Cold Cases - Maryland State Police**

This website lists all of the current unsolved homicide cases in Maryland by victim and county. The site provides a detailed description of the case, and helps to advocate for the victim and their survivors by never forgetting their story. To learn more, go to <https://www.mdsp.org/Organization/CriminalInvestigationBureau/CriminalEnforcement-Division/HomicideUnit/ColdCaseUnit/ColdCases.aspx>

Maryland Missing Persons Network

This website lists all of the solved and unsolved homicide cases in Maryland, and also includes information on missing persons and unidentified persons. The site provides information on when and how to report a missing person, and provides links to various agencies throughout the state. Go to: <http://www.marylandmissing.com/home.html>

National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children, Inc.

Parents of Murdered Children (POMC) provides the on-going emotional support needed to help parents and other survivors facilitate the reconstruction of a "new life" and to promote a healthy resolution. The staff of the National Headquarters of POMC will assist any survivor and if

possible, link that survivor with others in the same vicinity who have survived their loved one's murder. POMC also provides training to professionals who are interested in learning more about survivors of homicide victims and the aftermath of murder. To learn more about POMC, go to their website at <http://www.pomc.com>

Serving Survivors of Homicide Victims During Case Investigations: A Guide for Developing a Law Enforcement Protocol

Cold case homicide investigations are about more than seeing a case solved, a conviction rendered, and justice meted out, as important as these are to law enforcement and survivors. The Office for Victims of Crime recommends that every law enforcement agency with a cold case homicide have a written cold case homicide protocol. Improving the systemic processes of cold case homicide investigations is a critically important task for law enforcement. These processes provided include the non-technological aspects of investigations, such as, sensitivity to survivors' needs, the improvement of which will also improve law enforcement's investigatory outcomes in the solving of more cold cases. The information and recommendations outlined in this guide will inform law enforcement about establishing a protocol with the foundational tools necessary to more effectively work with survivors while better serving survivors' needs. To read this report, go to <http://www.sheriffs.org/sites/default/files/uploads/guide-fordevelopingalawenforcementprotocolaugust172011.pdf>

Maryland Crime Victim Resource Center

The Maryland Crime Victim Resource Center provides assistance to all victims of crime and provides an array of services, including legal assistance, court accompaniment, assistance with

financial issues, and referrals to a host of support services around the state. For more information, go to <http://www.mdcrimevictims.org/victim-services/>

Save the Date



Want to learn about how you can become a Certified Victim Assistance Specialist in Maryland? Then come join us!

Friday, February 13, 2015, from 10:00-11:30am at the Baltimore Child Abuse Center - 2300 N. Charles St., Baltimore

Come learn all the ins and outs of the application process, as well as the testing procedures. All are welcome but we need you need to call to reserve your spot! This event is sponsored by VSPN. Don't delay, call today - (410) 396-6147.

2015 RVAAM Academy

June 1st - 5th, 2015, Bon Secours Spiritual Retreat Center, Marriottsville, MD

Mark your calendars! The 12th 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!

Upcoming Trainings!

Keep checking your inbox! We are in the process of scheduling two special events for all RVAAM Alum ...

In February, Dot Holley will be leading Drum Art Therapy - date, time, and location will be announced shortly.

And then in March, William Archie Griffin is going to lead a self-defense training - date, time, location to be announced shortly. So keep checking your inbox!

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!

Carolyn Breck (Class of 2004) - This past July Carolyn joined the Howard County Police Department's Victim Assistance Section as a Victim Assistance Advocate. Congratulations on your new job and journey Carolyn!

Linda Fair Garnett (Class of 2006) - Please extend a heartfelt congratulations to Linda the next time you see her - she got married!! We wish you and your wonderful groom all the best!



Eric King (Class of 2014) - Eric just became the new Pastor of Metropolitan Church in west Baltimore - way to go Eric, we know you'll lift your congregation's spirits with your infectious spirit and energy!

Michelle Lee (Class of 2011) - A big congratulations to Michelle for becoming a Nationally Credentialed Victim Advocate as well as a Level III State of Maryland Credentialed Victim Advo-

cate! Way to keep striving to always be better and to find ways to use that expertise to assist victims of crime in Maryland!

Rosemary Raiman (Class of 2005) - Rosemary was recently selected to receive an exemplary service award by the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence. Congratulations Rosemary, it is so well deserved!

Alumni Showcase

Murder in Baltimore

Death leaves a heartache no one can heal, love leaves a memory no one can steal. An Irish Proverb

I grew up in West Baltimore, a neighborhood stricken with drugs, violence, and poverty. Seeing death on the street was no stranger to me. At 13, I saw my first dead body on the corner of the block where I lived. By 16, eight people from my neighborhood had been murdered. Although I knew all of them, and even saw that dead body, I thought I wasn't affected by the trauma from homicide. I just became so numb to the violence because it happened so frequently. It was normal ... or so I thought.

On June 27, 2010, my cousin, Eric Vaughn Williams, Jr., was murdered in West Baltimore. He was 28 and a father of two. Because our family was so small, Eric and I grew up more like siblings than cousins. So when I received the phone call about his death, I immediately felt all of the emotions many other survivors of homicide know all too well - anger, despair, confusion. But there were three thoughts that soon dominated my mind:

- * I didn't want anybody to feel this level of pain I was feeling;
- * I immediately forgave the individual(s) who killed Eric. In my mind they had no idea that their actions

would cause his family, friends, and the community, the amount of pain we were experiencing. In my mind they thought they were only hurting Eric, and that's where it ended.

* I had to do something about this.

After the funeral I organized a city-wide candlelight vigil called "More Than Just a Number." I wanted City officials to know that homicide victims

were more than just a statistic to report on the evening news, or in some agency report. They were somebody's child, somebody's parent, somebody's sibling, somebody's niece or nephew or cousin, somebody's friend. They were human beings, and their lives meant more than how they died.



The night of my vigil, nobody showed up but my friends. No one from my own family attended. In total, there were only 20 of us. For a city that averages 200 homicides a year, but no one would make an effort to participate left me feeling disillusioned. However we still held the vigil for the thousands of people who have suffered this plight. At the end while we were praying for all the families of homicide victims, a young man randomly walked up and started praying for his friend who was in Johns Hopkins recuperating after being shot multiple times. The young man looked like he had been living on the streets but the words he offered in prayer were like that of a prophet. I was so grateful and felt so blessed by his words because I saw that our small vigil to honor my cousin life, had touched one person positively.

It was right then I chose to channel my pain by working in the community and assisting other survivors of homi-

cide. In August 2011, I attended Roberta's House Homicide Transformation Project, and later became the case manager for the program. Then in 2013 I attended the Roper Victim Assistance Academy. The week I spent at the Academy further changed my life. The knowledge I gained, not to mention the opportunity for self-reflection. Specifically, I reflected on the victimization in my own life and finally acknowledged there were some wounds that I had not addressed. This experience enabled me to be even more empathic towards the victims I work with because I realized that the present trauma some of these individuals are facing may also trigger past unaddressed trauma. At the end of the week, I felt so liberated, powerful, and fearless. My spirit

had been rejuvenated and I left with more clarity about what segments of society, and within my own life, that I wanted to challenge and to advocate for change.

Working with homicide survivors is my passion because I understand their pain. This level of understanding has allowed me to assist many survivors as they go through their own journey of healing, and by doing so, my own spirit has been healed. Watching wounded souls go from a place of pain and defeat to a place of strength and victory is liberating, and has allowed me to keep Eric's legacy alive and helped me honor the vow I made to be an agent of change.

As Elizabeth Gilbert wisely noted in her book *Eat, Pray, Love*:

"Deep grief sometimes is almost like a specific location, a coordinate on a map of time. When you are standing in that forest of sorrow, you cannot imagine that you could ever find your way to a better place. But if someone can assure you that they themselves have stood in that same place, and

now have moved on, sometimes this will bring hope"

Essay contributed by Monique Mitchell (Class of 2012).



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!

The following criminal procedures address a victim's, or a victim's representative, right to know about the steps to follow in order to gather information regarding cold cases.

* **Criminal Procedure 11-104:** When a victim (a person who suffers from an actual threat whether physical, emotional, or financial) has initial contact with a law enforcement officer, a District Court Commissioner, or a juvenile officer, they should be provided with a Victim's Representative Information pamphlet. A law enforcement officer, upon written request, should contact the victim, or a victim's representative, when a DNA profile of the perpetrator(s) is obtained, entered into the statewide DNA database, or when a match of the DNA profile of an alleged perpetrator is received.

* **Criminal Procedure 11-914:** Subject to the authority of the Executive Director, the Board shall develop pamphlets to notify victims, and victims'

representatives, of the rights and services provided under Article 47 of the Maryland Declaration of Rights or State Law which addresses how to request information about an unsolved case. Two pamphlets are provided. The first pamphlet addresses the MDEC system registration process and what the victim, or victim’s representative, should expect before, and immediately after, the filing of any charge document that is not an indictment. The second pamphlet addresses what the victim, or victim’s representative, should expect after an indictment.

* **Criminal Procedure 11-1002:** A victim, victim’s representative, and/or a witness, upon written request, should be informed by the State’s Attorney, or law enforcement, of the arrest of a suspect and the closing of a case.

Best Practices

Assisting Survivors of a Homicide Cold Case

As a victim service provider, would you feel comfortable assisting a family with a homicide cold case if you received the call today?

To answer that question with confidence it is necessary to have a fundamental understanding of what a homicide cold case is, and what service providers do. A homicide cold case involves the deliberate and unlawful killing of one person by another that has not yet been fully solved, but for which new information could emerge from witnesses, reexamined records, emerging technology, or other means of developing sufficient information to identify and to prosecute a defendant.

Statistically the first 48-72 hours of an active homicide investigation are critical to identifying suspects and sources of information; however, after days, months, or even years, as leads are

eliminated and cases become inactive, there must be a procedure or unit in place to accept and handle the matter of the homicide as a “cold case” and for service providers to assist the survivors.

Since the formal recognition of the first cold case unit in 1983, a strong collaborative network of stakeholders has been an essential part of making the cold case concept work. The presence of such a network can ensure that in the midst of increasing demands on limited criminal justice resources; competing interests; unpredictable funding; increasing populations; and incongruent laws, the efforts of cold case units remain a priority.

Common obstacles surface during the aging process - the fading memories of witnesses, the disposal of vital evidence, legal stalemates, and the death of witnesses sometimes reduces the probability of a resolution. It is during this time that family members and friends experience a host of unique, unresolved feelings that because of the lack of procedural finality (e.g., no body; absence of essential evidence) reportedly make “closure” unachievable. Whatever the case, there are some things service providers and others can do to be prepared to assist or advocate for survivors.

Veteran cold case investigator Detective Carroll Bollinger of the Baltimore County Police Department shared some features of his agency that allow for a seamless approach to assisting family members of a cold case homicide victim. First, he ad-



dressed the common misconceptions about such cases, such as “Nobody’s working on the case,” to the opposite, “Someone knows everything about the case and it’s being worked on every day.” Detective Bollinger noted each of his investigators care a great deal about every one of their cases, and they want to succeed in closing it. However the way such cases are handled is unique. Each case is assigned to one Detective who passively works on the case until new information is developed, at which time the case is shifted to a team of investigators and staff members who will fully investigate all leads.

Recognizing that homicides and other designated crimes against persons are especially traumatic and pose a serious threat to the community, the Baltimore County Police Department has established a group of specially trained officer, called the Critical Incident Support Team, to assist victims and surviving families. These officers explain the processes that lie ahead and introduce the parties involved to the resources that are available through the State’s Attorney’s Office, such as victim advocates and support groups.

The assigned investigator to a homicide case will also select a point of contact among the survivors - usually a family member - to provide verified updates as they become available. The investigator also ensures that the point of contact and other members of the community are provided with the correct methods for forwarding information and leads.



Detective Bollinger shared the following advice for service providers when working with survivors:

- Stay connected to the survivors, especially through the trial process and beyond;

- Make sure they are passing along information to authorized personnel
- Instruct survivors to **never** act on leads themselves
- Advise survivors to not believe everything they hear
- Recognize that emotions sometimes get in the way, so be careful not to let them interfere with the integrity of information and messages
- Coordinate all actions with the assigned case detective

A few additional general suggestions you can follow:

- Proactively contact your law enforcement agency and State's Attorney's Office to determine what resources are in place for survivors of homicide, and cold cases
- Consider working with local networks of interested parties to establish a protocol for working with survivors of cold case homicides
- Determine and establish your position in the process
- Connect with allies, such as established support groups and government agencies, to identify resources

Always remember the most important thing you can do to help survivors of a cold case homicide is to be there for them - while their loved one's case may never be resolved by the justice system, we can and should, always continue to provide them with the emotional support they need and deserve.

Essay contributed by Keith Gethers (Class of 2011) ... special thanks to Detective Carroll Bollinger, Baltimore County Police Department.

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.

Just a Thought (Cont.)

services to address those ideas.

Finally, empathize with the survivor. This requires you to be fully present for the individual - being in tune with their now, and being sensitive to their needs. Try to place yourself in the survivor's shoes to help anticipate what is needed to help them feel safe, to feel free to express what they are feeling and thinking, to be informed, and to help calm any anxiety they may be struggling with.

In closing, the most important thing you can provide survivors of homicide is your presence. To be there to hear their pain and to acknowledge their struggles. Here is how one homicide survivor so eloquently put it in a poem she wrote:

Please see me through my tears

You asked, "How are you doing?"

As I told you, tears came to my eyes ... and you looked away and began to talk again.

All the attention you had given me drifted away.

How am I doing? ... I can do better when people listen, though I may shed a tear or two.

This pain is indescribable. If you've never known it, you cannot fully understand.

Yet I need you.

When you look away, when I'm ignored, I am again alone with it.

Your attention means more than you can ever know.

Really, tears are not a bad sign, you know!

They're nature's way of helping me to heal ... they relieve some of the stress of sadness.

I know you fear that asking how I'm doing brings me sadness ... but you are wrong.

The memory of my loved one's death will always be with me, only a thought away.

My tears make my pain more visible to you, but you did not give me the pain ... it was already there.

When I cry, could it be that you feel helpless, not knowing what to do?

You are not helpless, and you don't need to do a thing but be there. When I feel your permission to allow my tears to flow, you've helped me.

You need not speak. Your silence as I cry is all I need. Be patient ...do not fear.

Listening with your heart to "how I'm doing" relieves the pain, for when the tears can freely come and go, I feel lighter. Talking to you releases what I've been wanting to say aloud, clearing the space for a touch of joy in my life.

I'll cry for a minute or two ... and then I'll wipe my eyes, and sometimes you'll even find I'm laughing later.

When I hold back the tears, my throat grows tight, my chest aches, my stomach knots ... because I'm trying to protect you from my tears. Then we both hurt ... me, because my pain is held inside, a shield against our closeness ... and you, because suddenly we're distant.

So please, take my hand and see me through my tears ... Then we can be close again.

- Kelly Osmount, Survivor

Essay contributed by Dee Gardner, LGSW, Survivor Programs Supervisor at Roberta's House.

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 ... 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 2014 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.

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Watch for the next edition of the Academy Forum in April 2015

