

Academy Forum

Continuing the Message of the Roper Victim Assistance Academy

A Quarterly Newsletter

Issue #34- April 2014

Just a Thought

All of us have experienced setbacks in our personal and professional lives at one time or another. Read one Alums journey of self-discovery that began during her time at the Academy.

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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 spring!

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Alumni Updates

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



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Best Practices

Wonder what you can say to a colleague to convince them to apply to the Academy? Have them read Linda Fair's synopsis of the unique learning experience every Academy participant will have the benefit of enjoying during the week-long stay

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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...

"I Didn't Know My Own Strength"

In May 2011, I had the honor of attending the Roper Victim Assistance Academy of Maryland. Ironically I almost didn't go because four days before the training began, I lost my job of 16 years as a Community Liaison for crime victims and communities in South-east Baltimore. I loved what I did and when my job ended unexpectedly, I thought my world came to an end. Little did I know, it was only the beginning of something much greater. But at that time, I was broken, hurt, and afraid because for the first time in my life, I didn't have a



plan. Despite my sadness and sense of uncertainty, I decided to attend RVAAM anyway. That decision changed my life in ways I could never have imagined.

Going to the Academy opened my eyes to areas of victim advocacy that I had never really known about. The week-long training afforded me the opportunity to learn, to network with my classmates, and to absorb the wealth of knowledge that the staff and presenters had to offer. Most importantly, the feelings of trepidation and self-doubt I had brought with me at the beginning of the week started to wane, and I began to see the opportunities that lay before me. At the end of week, the Academy staff asked if I would sing at our graduation ceremony. I agreed and I chose to sing a song called "I Didn't Know My Own Strength" because I knew that I would have to draw on my own inner-strength once I left the Academy to make my own path.

Once I got back home, I knew I had to put my RVAAM training to use. I reconnected with my community and police resources, went back to attending com-

munity meetings and offering resources to people who needed information. I even went on "ride-alongs" with Baltimore City Police Officers so I could provide on-site advocacy and resources to the crime victims they encountered. Surprisingly, I learned that despite being the 8th largest metropolitan police department in the nation, they did not have their own victim advocates. This got me thinking - why couldn't I serve in that role?

Later that summer, I attended the 2011 NOVA Conference in Philadelphia and learned even more tools to be an effective victim advocate. After the conference I came back to Baltimore fired up and ready to make changes in the way the City responded to its crime victims. I had so many ideas on how law enforcement could respond more effectively to crime victims I couldn't wait to write a proposal that I could share with "the powers that be" in Baltimore. And while I was able to start the conversation with one of my contacts in the Baltimore City Police Department, I knew I couldn't just sit

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Happy Spring Alumni!

After the long winter we have all endured this year, I'm sure you all are just as excited as I am to see the trees beginning to bloom, the flowers beginning to poke up through the earth, and to feel the warm rays of the sun.

Well with the warm weather comes lots of activities, such as the Roper Victim Assistance Academy. This is the 11th year of the Academy, can you believe it? Once again it will be held at the beautiful Bon Secours Spiritual Center in Marriottsville from June 1st-6th. I hope you will consider popping in at some point to show your support to the new students and to catch up with your fellow Alums. Just think back to your own experience at the Academy and how special it was to see Alumni there and to have the opportunity to network with them. Once again the Academy week will start off with the Ice Cream Social that Sunday evening, so please join the Academy faculty and staff in greeting the members of the 2014 class and share a bowl (or two) of ice-cream with them to help them start off the week on a "sweet" note. Just email Linda Fair at lfair@ubalt.edu to let her know if you plan on attending.

There are also lots of exciting things coming up for VSPN this year, so please keep your eyes and ears open for news! It looks like we are going to try another train and shopping excursion since so many people told us how much fun they had the last time, and once again we will be soliciting your help in identifying a family we can sponsor during the upcoming holiday season. VSPN will also offer a few trainings this year, as well as help out at the advanced training which will be held during this year's Academy. So keep watching your emails and upcoming newsletters so you don't miss out on any of these great events!

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

Debbie Bradley, C.A., VASIII
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"Don't judge each day be the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant." - Robert Louis Stevenson

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 Attorney General - Victim Services

Looking for a website that provides a list of all the crime victim services and programs offered throughout the state of Maryland? Look no further! Go to: <http://www.oag.state.md.us/victim.htm>

Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services

Wonder which services are available to crime victims during each stage of the criminal justice process? Then check out DPSCS's website - it provides a comprehensive list of all the statewide agencies that are involved at each stage of the process, and which services they provide. To learn more, go to <http://www.dpscs.state.md.us/victimseros/>

Maryland Crime Victims Resource Center: Victim Resources

MCVRC provides a detailed list of crime victim services throughout the state of Maryland, including information on where victims can obtain counseling, social services, and legal services within the state. For more information, go to <http://www.mdcrimevictims.org/victim-services/resources/other-maryland-victim-resources/>

Maryland Community Services Locator

This website provides a way for you to search for victim services by county and city, and provides a description of the type of services each organization provides. To learn more, go to http://www.md-csl.org/avjsc/csl_hotlines_vs.asp

Save the Date



2014 RVAAM Academy

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

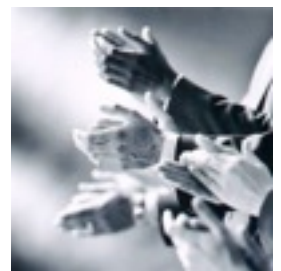
Believe it or not, this year's Academy is right around the corner and seats are filling up fast! Go to the Academy's website at www.rvaam.org and download a copy of this year's application to give to a colleague. Don't delay - we have a great curriculum agenda this year!!

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!

Jennifer Burton (Class of 2011) - This past January, Jennifer graduated Magna



Cum Laude with a Master of Science in Criminal Justice from the University of Baltimore. The day of graduation she found out she had been hired as a crime analyst for the Frederick Police Department in the Special Operations Division. What a graduation gift! To top it all off, on Valentine's Day, her boyfriend of six years proposed. What an amazing year, and we wish you all the very best Jenn in your professional and personal life!



Best Practices

The Academy Experience

The Roper Victims Assistance Academy (RVAAM) is one of many victim assistance academies in the United States. In general, these academies provide opportunities for multi-disciplinary professionals to acquire the basic skills necessary to effectively help crime victims. Each one of these academies is responsible for shaping its attendees in ways that: acknowledge professional skills and competence; acknowledge specialized education and experience with crime victims; confirm commitment to professional development; and offer networking opportunities with other professionals. This is true of RVAAM as well, however this list of features are only one of the many indicators of its best practices.

Most RVAAM applicants anticipate that they will be taking a programmed course that will provide them with an opportunity to obtain relevant information, improve skills that will help them at work, and mingle with colleagues. Inevitably what many come to discover over the

course of the week is something altogether different. RVAAM is an experience that produces positive residual effects that change students and alumni forever. Instead of a mere course of studies, those who pass through the Academy doors find themselves moved to be better - better therapists, victim advocates, witness coordinators, social workers, law enforcement officers, college students, and most importantly - better people.

One of its most unique features is that RVAAM has a beginning but does not have an end. Since its inception in 2004, the Academy has made steady incremental strides to its attendees, who come from all over the state of Maryland. The instruction, commonly provided by regionally and sometimes nationally recognized subject experts, is a rigorous course of study supplemented by a wide range of interactive activities. A constant commitment to improvement is fueled by a core group of faculty and staff that uses a blend of leadership and management styles and embrace inclusion as the "norm" as evident in the RVAAM process, which involves:

- * Careful screening that allows for non-traditional candidates to be considered;
- * Selection with a strong emphasis on diversity, to include those with varying levels of professional experience, from seasoned veterans to those who are preparing to enter the field;
- * Early opportunities to interact with alumni prior to the start of each Academy class;
- * A comprehensive and strategically aligned agenda with balance;
- * Student-centered learning environment with therapeutic support;
- * Close monitoring during all emotionally sensitive blocks of instruction; provision of immediate therapeutic assistance if needed, as well as follow-up with suitable wraparound services

- * Promotion of self-care through a variety of forms and activities during the day, as well as after class; and
- * Immediate opportunities for steady and continued involvement

The open and safe student-centered environment is the setting for a unique inside-out method of teaching and caring for the attendees. The success of this method is confirmed during each session when students witness how their classmates are sometimes overcome by grief or other feelings associated with past trauma. When this occurs, the staff "spring into action," compassionately using some of the techniques or principles discussed in the classroom while caring for those in need.

What students leave with:

- * Increased clarity of the issues related to victim services and increased confidence and how to use information they have gained to better serve victims.
- * A new appreciation for collaboration with an increased number of stakeholders in the care of and concern for victims.
- * Knowledge that they are part of a family committed to providing support, training, and continuous opportunities for personal and professional growth.

In sum, this experience provides a host of positive residual effects that continues to resonate in students' lives well after they return home from the Academy. The excitement built at the Academy is so infectious that prior students have banded together to build a vibrant alumni association - the Victim Services Professional Network [VSPN]. VSPN not only helps support the Academy, but it has been actively engaged in service projects in the community, has facilitated advanced trainings for all victim service providers, has actively promoted networking and employment opportunities for its members, and has created a three-level statewide certification process for victim advocates to help professionalize the field.

So you see, the Academy is just the start for a lifelong journey of professional and personal development, and the opportunity to be a part of a community that supports each and every one of its family.

* *Essay contributed by Linda Fair (Class of 2004).*



News From the Field

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

* **House Bill 0803/Senate Bill 1005:** Increase of funding to the Maryland Victims of Crime Fund to help increase the funds available for criminal courts costs for victim services.

* **House Bill 0355/Senate Bill 1085:** Allocate annual funding for services for survivors of homicide victims statewide.

* **House Bill 1245/Senate Bill 0922:** Victim notification statutory changes to consider changes in technology implementation by now allowing victim notification to be incorporated into the impending Maryland Electronic Court Initiative.

* **House Bill 0705/Senate Bill 0940:** Clarification of who can act on behalf of the victim when the victim is unable (i.e., child/disabled/elderly) and there are no family members to protect the inter-

ests of the victim. This bill would allow the courts to have the authority to designate representatives for victims and alert the court when there may be no one to protect the victim's interest.

* **House Bill 0031/Senate Bill 0272:** To expand a victim's right to be heard in cases not filed by information or indictment in the Circuit Court. If passed, the revised law would provide that all victims would have the right to be heard when practical.

Certification News

Want to learn more about the certification process and learn how you can be a cut above the rest? Here's what you need to know!

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 train-

ing); 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@harfordsheriff.org or by phone at (410) 836-5490.



Just a Thought (Cont.)

around waiting for something to drop into my lap - I needed to make things happen for myself. So the next thing I decided to do was to attend a training on Death Notifications. This was a big challenge for me because I have never been comfortable with anything related to death, but I knew the people I wanted to serve out in the community deserved someone who could deliver that news in a compassionate and professional manner. So I turned to Roberta's House to learn more about grief and loss. I was so impressed with the staff there and learned so much, I decided to become one of their volunteers. Through that experience I attended many more trainings and eventually began working with families and children who had lost loved ones to natural causes or to homicide. Through it all, my level of compassion and desire to serve others only grew stronger.

A year after I lost my job I found myself still unemployed but feeling more optimistic because I wasn't sitting idly by while waiting for a position to open up. Every day I was actively taking steps to better myself as an advocate and a person. In many ways my journey during that year reminded me of the character Daniel in the movie, *The Karate Kid*. Each and every 'menial' task he completed helped him become a champion. Well my shot at that 'championship' arrived 14 months after losing my job, when I was invited to an interview at the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board (CICB). One month later, and with only one week left of my unemployment benefits, I started my new job as the Victim Services Coordinator for CICB. All of the trainings and volunteer work I had completed during my unemployment prepared me for this position. And I came to realize that if I had not taken advantage of those opportunities I would have never known how good it feels to help people through one of the most difficult experiences in life - the loss of a loved one. In fact, because of my training and skill set in working with families of homicide victims, the Director

of CICB added grief support to my job description. Although I work with all victims of crime on a daily basis at CICB, I hold a special place in my heart for helping homicide survivors heal.

Sometimes the situations we think are the worst things that could happen to us turn out to be a blessing in disguise. It's one thing to have a job, it's an entirely different thing to know that you are doing what you were born to do, and love every moment doing it! After 15 months of rebuilding my career and figuring out what my purpose is, I finally felt like I found my niche. My faith in God, the love and support of my husband and family, coupled with the continual encouragement I received from my friends and RVAAM family, made a huge difference in my life. Without my "village" I cringe to think of where I might be right now if I hadn't been given this opportunity to discover my true passion. So while one door closed in my life back in Spring of 2011, God opened another door for me when I went to the Roper Victim Assistance Academy that year. A seed was planted during that week that has since grown into a passionate calling. Three years later, I have completed the requirements to be certified as a Level III Victim Assistance Specialist, and have decided to pursue additional educational training in grief counseling.

So whenever you find yourself at the end of a chapter in your life ... don't dwell on what you have lost - look at it as an opportunity for you to gain new experiences and an opportunity to find another path for you to grow as an individual. Trust me, you don't know your own strength.

*Essay contributed by Michelle Lee
(Class of 2011)*

"Don't Quit"

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,

When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,

When the funds are low and the debts are high,

And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,

When care is pressing you down a bit,

Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and turns,

As every one of us sometimes learns,

And many a failure turns about,

When he might have won had he stuck it out;

Don't give up though the pace seems slow -

You may succeed with another blow.

Success is failure turned inside out -

The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,

And you never can tell how close you are,

It may be near when it seems so far,

So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit -

It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.

~ Anonymous



*Giving up is not an option, every avenue should be tried
Leave no stone unturned, then luck will be on your side
~ Michael Sage*

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 Shifrah Hill, Class of 2013

My favorite TV show is ...

My favorite show is an Israeli drama called "Hatufim" - it's about 3 prisoners of war who returned to Israel after 17 years in captivity. The show depicts their transition back to their lives and families, and what was lost after so much time. It is a very real depiction of the challenges of living with PTSD, and is impeccably written and acted. It's actually what HBO based their show "Homeland" on.

My favorite smell is ...

I LOVE the smell of lilies. But I also like anything baking and the smell of cinnamon.

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

Probably red because I am hard to miss, and I think red is a very powerful color

When I was little, I wanted to be a (blank) when I grew up ...

A fashion designer, a pediatrician, and an amazing Mom. Well one out of three ain't bad!

If I could go anywhere in the world, it would be ...

I'd love to see every corner of the world, especially Africa, Spain, and Australia

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

One of my college professors once told me, "You are the student, not the master. You are here to learn." I try to use that advice every day since there are ALWAYS things to learn.

Something I think I do well is ...

I'm lucky to have a strong sense of empathy so I listen to others well. It has helped me greatly in all of my relationships and my work with families.

My favorite book is ...

I really like to read historical fiction - I recently read *The Nazi Officer's Wife* and couldn't put it down. But I think my all-time favorite books are *Catcher in the Rye* and *Animal Dreams*.

My most memorable birthday in recent years was ...

My 30th - I was able to go to Israel. It was such an amazing experience and made the transition to 30 much smoother.

The last thing I did to pamper or treat myself was ...

I try to take time for regular self-care but I admit that eating junk food is probably the thing I do the most.

My favorite movie is ...

My favorite movies are "The Notebook" and "What Dreams May Come" - I'm a total sucker for the romantic ones!

My favorite time of the year is ...

I'm partial to Autumn - I just love seeing the leaves change.

If I could see anyone in concert, it would be ...

I'd love to see the band The Weepies, especially since the lead singer is currently undergoing chemotherapy. It would also be fun to see Jack Johnson because I love singing along to his songs.

The quality I appreciate most in others is...

Honesty and emotional openness in other people

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

I can't stand when people are emotionally unavailable or unable to have a substantive conversation with others

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

For relaxation I rely on reading, cooking, sleeping, and spending time out in nature. I'm learning to use tapping for stress relief when I'm at work.

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

If I could start all over, I would chose to go into film or pediatrics

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

I wouldn't want to work in any really dirty jobs or in a job where I would have to deal with blood ... guess that's why I didn't go into pediatrics!

The Super Hero I think best fits my personality is ...

I don't know much about Super Heroes, but I think that given a cape and a nice tiara, I could save the world.

One of my goals for 2013 is to ...

To continue to grow my business and to experience continued progress as a survivor. I'm also getting married this year, so I hope I can be a wonderful wife and support for my daughter in her transition to having a stepdad.

Editorial Board

- Debbie Bradley — Editor**
- Michelle Lee — Assistant Editor**
- Keith Gethers — Assistant Editor**
- Ashley Fundack — Assistant Editor**
- Heather Pfeifer — Managing Editor**

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

Watch for the next edition of the Academy Forum in July 2014