

Academy Forum

Continuing the Message of the Roper Victim Assistance Academy

A Quarterly Newsletter

Issue #28- October 2012

Just a Thought

The field of victim services has one of the highest rates of professional "burnout" - learn more about the signs of vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue, and what we can do to take better care of ourselves

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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 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

One of the most difficult issues we grapple with as victim service providers is how to balance our professional and personal lives. Read about how one advocate finally figured out how to maintain this delicate balance

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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...

The Positive and Negative Experiences of Traumatic Stress Therapists

It is no secret in the field of traumatic stress that helpers can expect to encounter some occupational hazards (Canfield, 2005). The empathic attunement to traumatized clients and exposure to their stories takes a toll on helpers. The psychological harm associated with professionals who work with traumatized persons has been termed vicarious traumatization, secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, and burnout. Helpers who are susceptible to some form of vicarious traumatization include: therapist trainees, family violence workers, child and adult protective services workers, social work-

ers, military and veteran caregivers, and others who routinely encounter traumatized persons on a daily basis.

Negative Impact

Working with traumatized persons involves engagement with a challenging population and exposure to stories of terrible experiences. Exposure to these stories and the impact of trauma on victims can lead to a range of symptoms experienced as a result of the painful impact of the work including: intrusive imagery, avoidance, hypervigilance, emotional numbing, cynicism, decreased self-esteem, isolation, disrupted cognitive schemas, decreased trust, and a decreased sense of competence. These symptoms, if unchecked, have been associated with burnout among mental health providers, which in turn is associated with high rates of absenteeism, illness, and poor performance.

Vicarious Traumatization

Coined in the 1990s by McCann and Pearlman, vicarious traumatization (VT)

characterizes the negative impact of trauma work on the helper as a result of empathic engagement with traumatized persons. Changes due to VT are characterized by alterations in the helpers' views of themselves and the world

around them. VT is a result of the cumulative effects of long-term work with trauma survivors. This long-term impact is a normal response to hearing traumatic stories and witnessing the painful impact they have on victims. Trauma therapists are continually confronted with the danger of professional over-

commitment as they work intensively with people who have suffered deep psychological harm. That over commitment can contribute to the cumulative impact of the work. Over time, the VT response could lead to decreased empathy, motivation, and efficacy. These factors are similar to the dimensions of burnout described by Maslach (2003): emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced sense of personal accomplishment.



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EDITOR'S CORNER

Happy Fall Y' All!

Don't you just love this nice cool weather and the beautiful colors on all the trees! This is my favorite season.



So are you all ready for the 10th Academy?! This is going to be such an exciting year

for RVAAM and you won't want to miss out on it! The Academy is actually going to take place earlier this year in April, so mark your calendars and plan to be a part of the anniversary celebrations!

On another note, I'm sure most of you have read in the paper or seen on the news what we here in Harford County law enforcement have been enduring in the way of loss during the month of September. It has been a very trying time for us all and a really good reminder that we all need to take better care of ourselves. Therefore I truly encourage each and every one of you to set aside some time every day to give your mind, body, and soul some time to rest and heal. Whether it's taking a walk outside, journaling your thoughts, or grabbing coffee with a friend to just catch up on other parts of your life. The point is, don't forget to take care of YOU. We are all strong people - if we weren't, we wouldn't be in this line of work - but we also have to remember, we are not invincible! So take the time to take as good care of yourself as you devote to taking care of your clients.

Wishing you all the best - until next time!

Debbie Bradley, C.A., Editor

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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!

This article addresses how to manage vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue, and describes in detail the signs and symptoms that counselors and advocates might develop when approaching burnout, and offers ways to heal and self soothe:

http://www.lianalowenstein.com/artcile_helm.pdf

This article provides a thorough description of vicarious trauma and lists a variety of behavioral, physical, and emotional signs clinicians and advocates should watch for and address:

<http://www.counseling.org/sub/dmh/FACT%20Sheet%209%20-%20Vicarious%20Trauma.pdf>

This article is directed towards the caregiver, providing a detailed 3 step list that will help to minimize or reduce their chances of developing vicarious trauma:

<http://www.plu.edu/womenscenter/widgets/documents-forms/items/vicarious-trauma.pdf>

This article focuses on self care for caregivers and provides a risk assessment tool to measure VT and provides suggestions for individual, organizational, and social interventions that can be utilized by caregivers to reduce their risk of burnout:

http://www.melissainstitute.org/documents/Meichenbaum_SelfCare_11thconf.pdf



Save the Date

Maryland Children's Alliance - Mid-Atlantic Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect

October 24th - 26th, 2012, Doubletree Hotel, Annapolis, MD

This year's conference will offer over 40 workshops with expert presenters from around the country. Enjoy some exciting networking events, meet other professionals, and take time to visit the sights of downtown Annapolis. Registration will open in just a couple of weeks, so please check the MCA website for updates on the workshops that will be offered.

To make reservations at the Doubletree call (410) 224-3150. Hotel Rate is \$110.00 per night. For more information on this event, go to <http://www.mdcha.org/midatlanticconference.html>

2013 RVAAM Academy

April 14th - 19th, 2013 at Bon Secours Spiritual Center, Marriottsville, Maryland

Help us celebrate our 10th anniversary by recruiting for this year's Academy. We will be marking the occasion with some special events for alumni and new students during the week of the Academy, so be sure to hold these dates on your calendar!

The application is now posted on the RVAAM website <http://www.rvaam.org> so please share this information with your colleagues! You can also email Dr. Debra Stanley with any questions you may have at dstanley@ubalt.edu - just

please help us spread the word and recruit for this year's class!!!

teach a class at this year's Academy!
Congratulations Karen!



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!

Suzy Boisclair (Class of 2012) - Suzy just celebrated her 50th birthday - her family took her on fun trip to the beach to mark the occasion and even had their family portrait taken. Who knew turning 50 could be so much fun! Happy Birthday Suzy - here's to many, many more!

Amy Jarkiewicz (Class of 2012) - Amy was nominated by the Baltimore County Police for the 2012 Advocate of the Year Award given by the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence - and she WON!! We are so very proud of you Amy, and are so happy that you have been recognized for the contributions you have made in field and in people's lives.

Michelle Lee (Class of 2011) - Michelle is the new Victim Service Coordinator for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board! We couldn't think of a better person to fill that job - what an asset she will be for CICB! Congratulations Michelle!

Karen Payne (Class of 2010) - Karen is now a licensed Zumba instructor. Talk about a great way to take care of yourself AND help others! We hope you'll come

A Special Round of Applause!

At the Maryland Crime Victim Resource Center's 30th Anniversary celebration, held at the 9th Annual Chocolate Affair Charity Gala on October 20, 2012 in Mitchellville, MD, several of our Academy alumni were recognized for their outstanding years of service and dedication to crime victims in Maryland.

Anne Litecky (Class of 2004) was awarded the 2012 Maryland Champion for Crime Victims' Award for her many years of dedication as a victim advocate. She currently serves as the State Victim Services Coordinator/Program Manager with the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention

Gale Seaton (Class of 2012) was awarded the 2012 Maryland Champion for Crime Victims' Award for "unsung heroes" for her volunteer services and long commitment to the MCVRC.

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Best Practices

Striking a Balance: Understanding the Impact of Vicarious Trauma

Advocates, caregivers, and mental health professionals frequently report feelings of depression, irritability, and hopelessness. Studies have found that constant exposure to the suffering of others can produce vicarious trauma, commonly referred to as "secondary trauma" or "compassion fatigue." It results in a subtle and permanent change in the individual's personal, professional, and even global outlook and may affect their relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and the broader community. Not surprisingly, this problem is very prevalent in the field of victim services.

Victim service providers begin their careers with a hope to change the world for the better. Many however become quickly overwhelmed by the emotional and psychological demands of the work, and they end up leaving the field for less demanding careers. Those that do end up staying in the field compliment themselves on their courage and strength to stay the course but often minimize the toll of witnessing abuse, violence, death, and dysfunction on a daily basis takes on their personal and professional lives.

As a child welfare worker in the early 1990s, I worked with numerous families whose lives were impacted by domestic violence, child abuse, drug abuse, homelessness, and poverty. Because everyone in my agency seemed overworked and tired, I believed that my experience was "normal" and ignored the effects all of the trauma I witnessed started to have on my job performance and my relationship with my family. I blamed myself for being "too sensitive" and agreed with others who recommended that I "toughen up" and learn to separate my life from my work. Over time, I questioned my ability to survive in my chosen career and internalized my feelings of sadness and despair. When it became difficult to get out of bed in the mornings, I realized I was "burnt out" and I left my job to find another one that would offer better pay and fewer responsibilities. At the time I did not realize that I would carry my client's stories with me as I continued my career as a social worker and victim advocate and that this line of work could cause permanent changes which continue to effect my emotional, physical, and spiritual health.

As victim service providers, we work in one of the most demanding fields that often requires more outcomes with fewer resources. Providers are generally overworked and rarely have time for personal

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reflection and self-care. The willingness to go “above and beyond” for clients often results in many providers overlooking the signs and symptoms frequently associated with vicarious trauma, such as difficulty managing one’s emotions, difficulty making good decisions, problems in managing boundaries between yourself and others, the development of physical ailments (e.g., difficulty sleeping, headaches, changes in appetite, etc.), difficulty feeling connected to others and the world around you, loss of meaning and hope.

In order to effectively serve clients, providers must acknowledge that vicarious trauma is a normal and expected outcome of helping others. Therefore it is important to recognize the signs of VT and develop appropriate skills to balance our professional work with our personal lives. While it is important for each person to discover and nurture the things that bring them joy and strength (e.g., our hobbies, our friendships, our faith, etc.), it is also important for us providers to limit the effects of trauma by establishing boundaries between our clients and ourselves, continuing professional development and training, remaining connected with others, establishing a strong support system, and most importantly, giving ourselves permission to relax, recharge, and renew.



* Essay contributed by Michelle Dodge, JD, LICSW, LCSW-C, JMD Counseling and Therapeutic Services

News From the Field

Everyone knows that the field of victims services is always evolving. The challenge is to find a way to keep on top of all the changes ... we're here to help! Here's an overview of the Bills currently in session:

- * **Senate Bill 291 - Unemployment Insurance - Coverage - Victims of Domestic Violence** - This bill prohibits the Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation from charging specified unemployment insurance benefits against the earned rating record of an employing unit and authorizes the Secretary to find that a cause of voluntarily leaving employment is good cause if it is directly attributable to the individual or the individual’s spouse, minor child, or parent being a victim of domestic violence. The bill was signed by the Governor on April 10 and will be effective on October 1, 2012.
- * **House Bill 766 - State Government - Commemorative Days - Crime Victims and Advocates** - This bill requires the Governor annually to proclaim April 3rd as Crime Victim and Advocate Commemorative Day. The bill was signed by the Governor on May 22 and will be effective October 1st, 2012.

***House Bill 647/House Bill 1146 - Domestically Related Crimes - Reporting** - This bill requires the court to determine, at the request of the State’s Attorney, whether a crime for which a defendant is convicted or receives a probation before judgment disposition is a domestically related crime, and to enter that finding into the court record to become part of the defendant’s criminal record. This bill was signed by the Governor on May 22 and will be effective October 1st, 2012.

* **House Bill 1160 - Family Law - Interim and Temporary Peace and Protective Orders - Duration** - This bill extends the duration of a temporary peace order or a temporary protective order under specified circumstances, such as when the court is unexpectedly closed. This

bill was signed by the Governor on April 10 and will be effective October 1st, 2012.

- * **Senate Bill 1082/House Bill 860 - Children in Need of Assistance and Child Abuse and Neglect - Sexual Abuse-Definition** - This bill alters the definition of “sexual abuse” for provisions of law relating to children in need of assistance, child abuse, and child neglect to include specified actions relating to human trafficking, obscene material, pornography, and prostitution. This bill was signed by the Governor on May 2, and will be effective October 1, 2012.
- * **Senate Bill 175/House Bill 8 - Crimes - Electronic Communication - Harassment** - This bill prohibits the use of electronic communication to maliciously engage in conduct that alarms another and clarifies the term “electronic mail” to “electronic communication” and alters the definition. This bill was signed by the Governor on April 10 and will be effective October 1st, 2012.



Just a Thought (Cont.)

VT is associated with the percentage of trauma survivors on an individual’s caseload and the length of time that the helper has been doing the work. Younger therapists and advocates are likely to have the most difficulties. Some predic-

tors of vicarious traumatization include empathic engagement with the victim, previous history of trauma, the degree of exposure, previous life stress, previous psychological diagnosis, and negative coping styles.

Secondary traumatic stress

The term secondary traumatic stress (STS) refers to the emotional disruption and *posttraumatic stress symptoms* that therapists sometimes experience as a result of working with traumatized persons. Whereas VT is thought of as the cumulative effect of the work, Figley (1999) suggests that STS can come on suddenly and without warning. In addition to milder PTSD symptoms like avoidance, hyperarousal, and intrusive symptoms, STS includes disruptions to one’s sense of meaning, worldview, identity, and psychological needs. In this way, STS overlaps with the symptoms of VT.

Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue (CF) has been used interchangeably with STS but with fewer negative connotations. As with the literature on STS, long work hours and caseloads with higher percentages of trauma survivors have been linked to CF, and those with a high proportion of survivors of interpersonal trauma and child abuse have been shown to be at greater risk for STS and CF. Also, the signs of CF overlap considerably with both STS and VT including intrusive imagery, avoidance, sadness, irritability, grief, difficulty concentrating, hypervigilance, depression, and anxiety.

Positive Impact

Researchers have not only focused on the negative impact of trauma work, but there are only a few studies that systematically address the positive outcomes associated with this line of work. Stamm (1995) noted that not all trauma workers seemed to experience STS and that they must have some protective mechanism supporting them. She termed this factor *compassion satisfaction*. Additional factors that work as a buffer are hardiness and social support.

Compassion Satisfaction

Compassion satisfaction is the pleasure



that a helper derives from being effective at his or her work (Stamm, 2005). It also reflects on feelings of personal growth that are derived from the work, such as feeling wiser and more experienced about life. Compassion satisfaction and personal growth are associated with the following factors: engaging in personal therapy, receiving clinical supervision, and receiving professional training.

It is important to recognize that compassion fatigue and vicarious traumatization are culturally bound concepts that have not adequately addressed the notion of growth through adversity. The emotional cost of doing trauma work has to be balanced by some sort of reward. That reward might come from helping people, seeing them succeed, and from experiencing personal growth. Recently, researchers found two factors that were significant predictors of compassion satisfaction: years of clinical experience and use of evidence-based practices. Thus as years of clinical experience increased and use of evidence based practices increased, so too did compassion satisfaction. Perhaps these two factors combine to form an expectation of success that translates into a positive, productive working alliance between the helper and the client.

As helpers serving traumatized persons, it is essential to conduct periodic self-assessments of compassion fatigue. Stamm (2005) developed the Professional Quality of Life (ProQol) questionnaire as a way to assess Compassion Fatigue and Compassion Satisfaction. It is an excellent

tool for supervisors and agencies who wish to track the impact of trauma work in a way that can allow them to support compassion satisfaction and address compassion fatigue and burnout. The ProQol is a free instrument, and can be downloaded here: http://proqol.org/ProQol_Test.html

Essay contributed by Elizabeth G. Vermilyea, MA.

Occupational Outlook

Here’s are some opportunities currently available in the field of victim services!

- **Anne Arundel County State’s Attorney’s Office has an opening for a Victim Witness Specialist (Advocate).** The position requires a four year degree, but does not require a specific major. Starting salary is \$37,132 plus benefits. If you are interested, please fax your resume to Heather Amador at (410) 222-1196.



- **Baltimore and Carroll County’s Domestic Violence Hotline is looking for volunteers - both day and overnight shifts!** If you enjoy talking to people, are a good listener, and want to make a difference in your community, please call Tammy Cline at (410) 853-3033. Volunteers must complete a 30 hour mandatory training, which is free of charge.

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 Ruby Nelson, a graduate of the 2009 Academy

The last movie I saw in the theaters was ...

"Good Deeds" - I'd recommend it because it shows you that blessing can come when you least expect them

My favorite time of year is ...

Spring

The three adjectives that best describe my personality are ...

Engaging, enthusiast, giving, strong-willed, and lovable. I could not stop at three!

When I was a child, I wanted to be a ____ when I grew up ...

An airline stewardess

My favorite ice cream flavor is ...

Rocky Road

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

Get a full body massage

Something I think I do well is ...

Relate to other people

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

The flexibility and creativity my Executive Director allows me

The strangest thing I ever ate was ...

Falafel in Cairo, Egypt

My favorite book is ...

The Help

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

Get into the hot tub and then take a nap

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

"Be able to do for you yourself"

The most challenging thing about my job is ...

Trying to understand why people are not in an uproar about what is happening to our children every day, and financially supporting the mission to protect children

The quality I appreciate most in others is...

Honesty

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

Deceitfulness

If I could go anywhere in the world on vacation, I would...

Take a trip around the world making sure I went to every continent

My favorite two colors are ...

Red and black

If I had to pick whether I'm a morning person or a night owl, I'd say ...

I'm a morning person but I'm learning to be a night owl because I'm back in school

My favorite TV show is ...

Scandal

One of my goals for 2012 is to ...

Enroll in school for my PhD in Social Work. Goal accomplished. Now I just need to finish!

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!

Editorial Board

- Debbie Bradley — Editor**
- Jessica Winpigler — Assistant Editor**
- Dianna Abramowski — Assistant Editor**
- Heather Pfeifer — Managing Editor**

Alumni Directory

The 2012 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 January 2013