

Academy Forum

Continuing the Message of the Roper Victim Assistance Academy

A Quarterly Newsletter

Issue #41 - April 2016

Just a Thought

The Roper Victim Academy of Maryland is a training experience like no other. Keith Gethers reflects on what makes it so unique, and what participants can expect to take away with them after they complete the one week of training.

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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 during these spring months!

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Alumni Showcase

Read Valda Rotolo's essay on the challenges and rewards of working in the field of victim services in a small county in Maryland, and how she has remained grounded after twenty years in the field.

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Certification News

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It's always important to try to stay abreast of what legislation is working its way through Annapolis. Read about two bills that are currently under consideration.

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Just a thought...

Broadening the Definition of Advocacy

RVAAM and VSPN

According to the FBI's 2014 Crime Clock, there was a murder every 36.9 minutes, a rape every 4.5 minutes, and robbery every 1.6 minutes. Without a doubt, crime in America is an unsettling reality, and law enforcement personnel stand on the front lines in the fight, while lawyers and therapists stand ready to assist victims and their families. Thanks to heightened awareness, however, volunteers and advocacy professionals are increasingly being recognized as valuable assets in meeting the needs of victims and their families.

An advocate works to inform and assist victims with navigating the criminal

justice and related systems, and in Maryland, the Roper Victim Assistance Academy (RVAAM) is largely responsible for populating the state with some of the most qualified and committed victim advocates. The key to the Academy's success is its philosophical approach to broadly defining what an advocate is.

RVAAM's expert staff is committed to redefining who can participate in the annual one week concentrated residency program. During the application process for each class, the staff strives to assemble a modest size group of diverse professionals. This is done to allow for quality interactions, and to impress upon the students that everyone can participate in advocacy, regardless of their role in life (e.g., officer, minister, student, doctor, teacher, lawyer, etc.)

The Academy provides students with fundamental, comprehensive, and academically-based education and training.



The educators and practitioners who serve as the instructors provide in-depth lessons on a wide range of topics that address how significant life experiences affect individuals. Many of the interactive learning experiences are intended to point out the shared benefits of being equipped to assist victims. In interviews with former participants (aka, Academy alum), they consistently offered praise for the Academy's ability to incorporate exercises that exposed the importance of collaborative processes to extend the network of support to victims. Just as a tree has branches with leaves, so does the advocacy network.

By the end of the week, the students often find themselves sitting together and sharing their beliefs about advocacy, their role in their community, and how they can best help move the field forward. Immediately after the closing ceremony, the graduates are recognized as alumni, and as such, are welcomed into the Victim Services Professional Network (VSPN). Everyone leaves knowing that they have a place in the advocacy circle

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Hello Alumni!

I'm so excited to see spring arriving! The warm weather is definitely a welcome break from the long winter we endured, however with that warm weather comes a busy next couple of months. Don't forget to take some time for yourself each day to recharge so you can stay on top of your game.

This is also the time of year that all of the plans for the upcoming Academy are being finalized, and applications really start to pour in. So be sure to talk with your friends and colleagues now about the Academy, and go to the RVAAM website (www.rvaam.org) to download a copy of the application to hand them. The class always fills up fast, so don't delay!

Keep your eyes open over the next few weeks for announcements for upcoming advanced trainings - I know you won't want to miss any of them. I don't know about you, but I always learn something interesting and useful at these trainings that I can use in my job to help me be more effective in serving the victims in my community. No matter how many years we have spent in this field, there is always more to learn!

I look forward to seeing you all soon. Wishing you all the best. Until next time ...

Debbie Bradley, C.A., VASIII

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The capacity to learn is a gift, the ability to learn is a skill, the willingness to learn is a choice. ~ Brian Herbert



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!

Roper Victim Assistance Academy

The Academy offers a rare opportunity to live, work, study, and interact with victim service providers from all areas of advocacy, and from all over the state. While it is assumed that participants will have had previous training in their area of specialization, the Academy provides a foundational overview of the entire field of advocacy, including: victimology, victims rights, and victim assistance for residents in Maryland. Sessions are facilitated by recognized leaders and practitioners in the field of victimology, criminal justice, and victims rights, and focuses on skill building and best practices. For more information about the Academy, or to download an application for the 2017 Academy, go to <http://www.rvaam.org>

Victim Services Professional Network

The alumni organization affiliated with the Roper Victim Assistance Academy, VSPN, advocates for the professionalization of the field of victim services. In addition to supporting and collaborating with RVAAM, VSPN strives to foster opportunities for its members to network with their fellow victim service professionals from various specializations across the state of Maryland through both professional

and social events hosted throughout the year. Check out VSPN's Facebook page at VSPN Roper, or subscribe to their Twitter account @VSPN2011.

Save the Date

2016 RVAAM Academy

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



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

Death Notifications: Delivering the News with Compassion

June 3rd, 2016, 7:30am-3:00pm, Harford County Sheriff's Office Training Academy, 401 Thomas Run Road, Bel Air, MD

This training is designed to give participants the necessary tools to provide a proper notification and to deal with the aftermath of the notification. It is important to understand that a death notification is given only one time! This means that you only have one chance to say the right words, in the right tone, with just the right degree of compassion!

The training is free, and participants can earn up to 8 CEUs. Space is limited, so sign up early. To register, call the Academy at (410) 638-3860.

20th National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect

August 31st-September 2nd, 2016, Grand Hyatt Washington, Washington, DC

The 20th NCCAN will focus on the connections among research, practice, and policy in a wide variety of subject areas related to our theme of **Building Community, Building Hope**. The Conference is designed for child abuse and neglect prevention and child protection workers, supervisors and administrators, social workers, educators, those in law enforcement and the courts, in health care and public health, therapists, researchers, child advocates, parents, and others committed to ensuring the safety, permanency, and well-being of children. Conference organizers expect more than 2,000 in-person and virtual attendees will participate from across the United States, its territories, and around the world.

For more information on how to register for the conference, go to: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/calendar/cbconference/twentieth/>

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 alumni have experienced since we last met...

Look at Our Movers & Shakers!

• **Autumn Linderborn-Nash (Class of 2011)** - On January 29th, Autumn and her husband Kevin welcomed their baby girl, Ashlyn Michelle Nash, into the world. Autumn and Kevin are enjoying watching her get bigger with each passing day, and they are loving parenthood! Con-

gratulations to the Nash family - it's such a precious time in life. We hope you enjoy every minute of it!

• **Deb Stanley (Director, RVAAM)** - On March 4th, Deb was informed by the University System of Maryland's, Office of the Board of Regents, that she was selected to be the recipient of the 2016 USM Regents' Faculty Award for Excellence in Public Service. This award is the highest honor that the Board bestows to recognize exemplary faculty achievement. Deb was selected in large part because of her work in building the Roper Victim Assistance Academy and helping to professionalize the field of victim services within the state of Maryland. Way to go Deb, we are so proud of you, and very grateful for everything that you have done!



Alumni Showcase

My Journey in Victim Services

I have been with Cecil County State's Attorney's Office since September 2007. Prior to this position, I was a Family Advocate for the Cecil County Child Advocacy Center/Department of Social Services for ten years. So, I have close to 20 years of experience in working in victim services.

As part of my current duties, I ensure the rights of victims as they maneuver through the justice system. As such, I accompany victims to court, assist them with filing applications to the Criminal Justice Injuries Compensation Board, assist them in writing vic-

tim impact statements, help prepare witnesses and victims for court, and provide victims with referrals to local and state services. Because I work in a small county, we often use nontraditional services. For example, when working with victims who are in need of grief support, we refer them to our local hospice foundation. This organization has become an invaluable partner to our office, helping us with our annual Memorial Wall and Walk that honors the memory of victims of homicide, and even making 'memory bears' out of lost loved one's clothing and giving it to surviving family members.

Since I have started working in this office, I have witnessed several positive changes to how services are provided to the victims and their families in our county. For example:

- Our office has fully embraced a team approach to providing victim services - it's not just my job, or one of my colleague's job. It's the whole unit's job and we work together collaboratively to support one another and the victims we serve.
- Judges have started asking if the victim or family is on board with a plea if the prosecutor does not address the issue.
- Prosecutors are now requesting to be made informed if a victim's rights are being abused.
- Restitution payments are being made because Parole and Probation is becoming more proactive.

All of these advancements have significantly improved the level of services I, and my colleagues in the State's Attorney's Office, have been able to provide to the victims and their families who seek our assistance. And I'm proud of how well we, as a Unit, have been able to help victims and their families navigate through the justice system. Yet what I am most proud of, and what I have come to realize is the most important duty and responsibility

ty I have in this job, is to listen. Really listen. I will hold hands, and sit quietly while someone cries. And I give victims the time to talk when no one wants to listen anymore. *Because the reality is, people just want to be heard, even if you can't "fix" the problem.* People just want to be treated with dignity, and for their concerns and feelings not to be minimized. So this is the expectation I hold myself to, as well as others, when it comes to providing services. We should all ask ourselves at the end of each day - did I provide the kind of service I would want someone to provide one of my family members if they were in a similar situation? If you aren't able to provide this level of service, then you are not going to be able to help victims and their families come to peace with the final outcome.

Maintaining this standard does take a toll on me, physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Therefore I have also learned over the years the necessity of taking care of oneself. If we are overwhelmed and physically worn out, we are no longer effective service providers. So I have been diligent at incorporating self-care into my daily life - whether it's doing something little, like setting aside time to read a good book or listening to music on my drive home, or taking some time off to go visit my children and grandchildren or go explore a new country. The point I'm making is that if you want to have a long, meaningful career in victim services, you have to find ways to decompress and recharge your soul.

While working in this field for as many years as I have has come with a series of challenges, it also has been incredibly rewarding. Each one of us has the ability to make a significant difference in the lives of the people we encounter on a day to day basis - depending on how we *choose* to do our jobs will determine the type of impact we have - do we help to heal the wounds of the people we serve, or do

we do further harm. I will always strive for the former.

Essay contributed by Valda Rotolo (Class of 2004).

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.

Please Congratulate our newest Certified Victim Service Professionals!

- * **Sherry Jones, VASIII**
- * **Jessica Dickerson, VASIII**
- * **Theresa Hiegel-Sherman, VASII**

Just a Thought (Cont.)

on a level that's comfortable for them, whether it's volunteering at academy-sponsored events, obtaining various nationally recognized certifications, or attending advanced trainings. In short, VSPN offers alumni a multitude of opportunities to continue to build on the network they started to create during their time at the Academy.

So while it may appear at first glance that the Roper Victim Assistance Academy is a singular training experience, ask any of its 300+ alumni and they will tell you that their week at the Academy was just the beginning of a relationship that has provided them with both personal and professional support. There are not many training experiences that can make such claims. So if the opportunity presents itself to you, or a colleague, to participate in this year's Academy, don't hesitate. I promise, you won't regret it.

Essay contributed by Keith Gethers

News From The Field

House Bill 659: Criminal Procedure - Victim's Right to Restitution-Appeal - This bill expands the right of victims of crime, in which a defendant is charged, to file an application for leave to appeal to the Court of Special Appeals after it has either denied, or failed to consider, their rights to secure provisions. This would allow victims who allege that their right to restitution was not considered or improperly denied, to file a motion requesting relief within 30 days of denial (or failed consideration). It would also allow a court to enter a judgment of restitution on behalf of a victim, if the court finds that the victim's right to restitution was not considered or improperly denied. *This bill was first read in the Maryland General Assembly on February 10, 2016.*

House Bill 237: Courts - Prohibition against Testimony by Convicted Perjurer - Repeal - This bill repeals the prohibition of a convicted perjurer from testifying in court proceedings. The current law does not allow a perjurer to testify in court proceedings and this proposed law would allow such testimony. While a Senate Bill (SB 673) was passed with amendments, it failed to get support from the House Judiciary Committee. *This bill was first read in the Maryland General Assembly on February 1, 2016.*

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 2015 Alumni Directory, which includes the addition of the most recent Academy class members is now available for distribution. However, we still would like your help to keep the Alumni Directory up to date! If any of your personal and/or professional information changes, please contact Debbie Bradley via email at bradleyd@harfordsheriff.org or by phone at (410) 836-5490.

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

