

Academy Forum

Continuing the Message of the Roper Victim Assistance Academy

The Association Newsletter

Issue #52- May 2020

Just a Thought

Many participants of the Academy are initially reluctant to spend a week away from work, home, and their families, however, as one of the alum of this year's winter class shares in her essay, it is a week that one will never forget.

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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 the next few months!

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Certification News

Want to learn how to become a certified victim service professional in the state of Maryland? This section explains each level of certification, and what are the specific requirements for each.

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News From the Field

It's important to stay abreast of what legislation is working its way through Annapolis. This section highlights what recently passed, or is currently under consideration.

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Best Practices

The Roper Victim Assistance Academy of Maryland has established itself as a leader among all of the state academies. Learn about some of its most notable accomplishments over the past eighteen years.

Page 5

Just a thought...

An Unforgettable Week

As a student, both undergrad and grad, at the University of Baltimore, I had heard about the Roper Victim Assistance Academy on numerous occasions. Many of my professors, especially during the spring semester, would talk about about the Academy and describe it in a way that made it seem like this magical place full of learning and connection. While they acknowledged it would be one of the most intense weeks of our lives, it would also be one of the most rewarding and productive learning experiences we would ever have. Well, as a student, the last thing I wanted to do was spend one week of my summer break stuck in a classroom and be away from my family and friends. So, I never signed up.

Fast forward to January 2019. I was working as a Legal Advocate for a local



DV/SA agency and my supervisor, an Academy alum, suggested I sign up for the winter session, which was happening in a little over six weeks, and was going to be the first winter Academy ever offered. Now that I was really embedded in my career, I agreed to apply. I quickly completed the application and submitted it, but I really didn't think I would be selected since there so few weeks remaining before the Academy. I convinced myself that the more likely scenario would be that I could get in to the summer session. To my total surprise, however, I was accepted. I would finally be attending the infamous RVAAM

Academy I had been hearing about for so many years.

I arrived at the Retreat and Conference Center at Bon Secours on a chilly February evening. I remember wanting to get there early because there was a chance of snow in the forecast later that night. After dropping my suitcase and bag off in my room, I headed to the cafeteria to meet up with my peers for the Welcome Ice Cream Social. Even though I knew a few of my fellow classmates,

I was still a bit nervous. What had I signed up for? Having just graduated the previous May with my Masters in Criminal Justice and Trauma-Informed Certificate, I felt like there wasn't much more I could learn. Boy, was I wrong.

When I woke up the first morning of the Academy, Mother Nature presented us with a gift - instead of a blanket of snow, she had coated everything with a layer of ice, and that ice storm continued for the next two days. My first thought was, "will the Academy still take place? Will the trainers be able to get here?" followed

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Greeting Alumni!

I hope each and every one of you is staying safe during this global pandemic. None of us could have ever imagined how all of our lives could be turned completely upside down in such a short amount of time. For many of us, this definitely has made our jobs even more difficult, given the restrictions that many of our organizations and agencies are having to operate under. This can undoubtedly raise our stress level because we want to be able to continue to help our clients, and we feel like too many things are out of our control. But there are still plenty of things we can do each day to be productive. Even though you might be working from home, it's still important to create a routine - get up at the same time you normally would, get dressed like you were going into your office, and then structure your workday with activities that enable you to either assist your clients or colleagues remotely, or take advantage of the free time you may have to complete some professional development activities that will enhance your knowledge or skills for your job (e.g., participate on a webinar, catch up on some research from the field, etc.). Another great way to use some of this time is to work on your certification application! Go to www.rvaam.us and click on the certification tab to download the application and start gathering your documentation. We are still scheduling Level III presentations via Zoom, so there's no need to put this off for when things open back up.

Another important thing to stay on top of during this pandemic is self-care. While you may not be dealing with the same kinds of stressors you normally deal with on a daily basis at

the office, you still might find yourselves experiencing higher levels of anxiety, worry, frustration, etc. This stress can wear down your immune system (and that's definitely not something you want to do right now), so be sure to incorporate some kind of self-care practice in your daily routine - whether it's setting aside some time to chat with a friend on the phone, going for a walk to get some fresh air, taking a leisurely shower or bath, or making your favorite cup of tea. Remember, you can't help others if you're running on fumes. So, be kind to yourself.

While none of us know when things will get back to "normal," please know that the entire RVAAM faculty are wishing you and your family all good things and we are looking forward to when we can all be together again. Until then, stay healthy, stay safe, and stay positive!

Debbie Bradley, C.A., VASIII

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Set peace of mind as your highest goal, and organize your life around it. ~

Brian Tracy

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 of Maryland (RVAAM)

RVAAM (aka the Academy) offers participants a rare opportunity to live, work, study, and network with victim service providers from all areas of advocacy, and from across the state of Maryland. While it is assumed that participants will have had previous training in their area of specialization, the Academy provides a fundamental overview of the entire field of advocacy, including: victimology, victim rights, and victim assistance for residents in Maryland. Sessions are led by recognized leaders and practitioners in the field of victimology, criminal justice, victims rights, and clinical services, and focuses on skill building and best practices. For more information about the Academy, go to: <http://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. Be sure to check out VSPN's Twitter account [@VSPN2011](https://twitter.com/VSPN2011).

The Maryland Crime Victims Resource Center

The Maryland Crime Victims Resource Center (MVCRC) provides legal assistance for victims of crime, as well as information about current laws and policies that affect victims of crime. The Center also provides information and referrals for victims' services that

are available throughout the state of Maryland. To find out more, go to: <http://www.mdcrimevictims.org>

National Center for Victims of Crime

The National Center for Victims of Crime’s website provides a resource library that includes statistics and research related to victimization, a host of resources for victims of crime, and an updated list of upcoming trainings for victim service providers. To access these materials, go to: <http://www.victimsofcrime.org>

The National Organization for Victim Assistance

Founded in 1975, NOVA is the oldest national victim assistance organization in the United States, and is a recognized leader in victim advocacy, education, and credentialing. In addition to its national training event, NOVA offers specialized trainings for crisis response teams and individuals assisting sex trafficking victims. To learn more about NOVA and all of its resources, go to: <http://www.trynova.org/>

The Office for Victims of Crime

The Office for Victims of Crime is part of the U.S. Department of Justice, and is dedicated to supporting victims of crime and the professionals who assist them. The OVC website provides a litany of resources for victims and victim service providers, as well as information to help increase public awareness on victimization and crime victims’ rights. For more information, go to: <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc>

SAVE THE DATE!

2020 RVAAM Summer Academy

June 15th - 19th, 2020

RVAAM will be offering a summer Academy, however, please stay tuned for details.



VSTEP REGIONAL TRAININGS

The agenda for the next round of VSTEP Trainings is being finalized, so keep watch on your email and on the RVAAM website (www.rvaam.org) for the topics, dates, and locations!

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...



- **Debbie Bradley, C.A., VASIII (Class of 2005) and Kara Dager (Class of 2010)** - These two remarkable women have been awarded the

National Sheriff’s Association Crime Victim Services Award for 2020. The award is given in recognition of “outstanding achievement by a Sheriff’s Office in support of crime victims.” What an amazing accomplishment and so well-deserved! You both bring great honor to the field of victim services and we are so proud of what you represent in our field - way to go!!!

- **Emily Mitchell (Class of 2018)** - This month, Emily graduated with her Bachelor’s degree in Criminology and Justice, with a minor in Law and Society, from the University of Maryland. Way to go Emily! Congratulations!! But that’s not all ... Emily has even bigger goals for herself. This fall, Emily will continue her education and begin law school at Catholic University in Washington, DC. Go get ‘em Emily! We know you’ll do great, and can’t wait to celebrate that next milestone with you!
- **Teresa Peak (Class of 2018)** - Teresa, an alum of our first winter academy, and her brother started a new company in 2019 called The Elder Group, LLC. Its mission is to educate and train seniors, as well as the members of the general public, on topics such as: elder abuse, ways to help, and what resources are available in the community to assist victims of elder abuse. They also provide referrals and home health services. In addition to this venture, Teresa continues to serve as an Elder Abuse Advocate for Maryland and parts of Virginia. What an invaluable resource to provide the community - thank you Teresa for continuing to advocate and serve one of our most vulnerable populations.

CERTIFICATION NEWS

Why aren't you certified in victim services yet? When you pick a doctor or a lawyer to work with you, you almost always certainly base your decision on their credentials, such as the school they've attended and the cases they have worked on. After all, you want to make sure that you choose someone who knows what they are talking about and who has the most experience in the appropriate domain. The same applies to victim services - the right certification not only helps you to bolster your knowledge and skills that you can use when working with victims, but also provides quantifiable evidence of your competence in this challenging and competitive field. So, what are you waiting for? Go to www.rvaam.us 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 (VAS-I)** - a) complete application packet; b) minimum of two years experience (paid or unpaid); c) 40 hours of training (RVAAM, NVAA, or other SVAA); d) interview; e) \$50 application processing fee
- * **Level II (VAS-II)** - 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 on what changes are needed in victim services; e) \$75 application processing fee.

- * **Level III (VAS-III)** - 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 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 Victim Services Ethics training; b) written essay on what changes are needed in victim services; 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 Victim Services Ethics training; b) oral presentation on approved topic in victim as-

sistance; and c) submit renewal application packet and pay \$75 fee.

All application materials are available online at www.rvaam.us (click on the Certification tab at the top of the page). Keep an eye out for upcoming classes on ethics. For more information, or if you have any questions, please contact Debbie Bradley at bradleyd@harfordsheriff.org or by phone at (410) 638-4905.

Just a Thought (Cont.)

quickly by "Oh crap! I left my spare phone charger in my car." After cautiously making my way out to the parking lot to collect my charger, I spotted Dr. Debra Stanley on my way back. She was one of my former professors at the University of Baltimore and is the Academy's Director. As I helped her bring in snacks and some of the training material for the week, my nerves started to settle down and I became more excited about the journey I was about to begin.

The next five days went by faster than I expected. I was asked to step out of my comfort zone and to challenge myself in ways I never did as a college student. I met people from all walks of life and professions. I met SAFE nurses, law enforcement officers, social workers, victim advocates, parole and probation officers, and community leaders of non-profit organizations. Everyone had their own story, and their own experience working with victims. But we all shared a common goal - a desire to expand our knowledge and skills set so we would be better able to assist victims.

I have a lot of wonderful memories from my time at the Academy, but I think the art therapy class was probably my favorite. Using art to help process my thoughts and express what I was feeling was surprisingly relax-

ing, and then having the opportunity to see what my peers created and listen to their stories was powerful. A lot of emotions were captured and quite a few tears were shed. It was one of the most moving experiences I've had, and by the end of the session I found myself recharged and eager for the rest of the week.



Yet, despite my good intentions, the next day hit me - hard. It was an especially heavy day, and by the afternoon, I was done. I hit my wall and started to shut down. We had just started a self-care session, but all I could think of was I wanted to be anywhere but here. I tuned back in to hear the instructor tell us we were going to do a breathing exercise together. I really didn't want to do it, but I forced myself to participate. Despite my initial resistance, I soon found myself feeling calm and centered. That breathing exercise was a game-changer - not only did it help me engage again, it has since become a tool I use regularly in my job. It not only helps me keep a check on my own stress-level, but I have shared it with a lot of the victims I work with as well.

Before I knew it, Friday morning arrived - Graduation Day!! We had one more session to complete in the morning before we were to return to our rooms to prepare for graduation. As excited as I was for graduation, and to see my husband, I was a little sad. My peers and I had become a family. We laughed, cried, and supported each other. We bounced ideas off one another, and shared what worked for us when working with victims. Most importantly, we had created a sense of community. We developed a genuine respect for each other, and for me per-

sonally, I found some amazing friends, one of whom I now work with.

All in all, the Academy was a life changing experience for me. And while I regret having waited so long to participate, I wouldn't trade that week for anything. My hope is that everyone - from advocates to court personnel to nurses to law enforcement officers - find the value in this very important and extremely useful training, and take the opportunity to apply. I promise, you won't leave the same person as who walks through that front door.

Essay contributed by Helen Hall (Class of 2015).

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

It's important we all keep abreast of changes to laws and/or policies that have a direct affect on victims of crime. If you hear of new law or policy being proposed at the local, state, or federal level, be sure to share it with us!



SB087/HB1575 - Criminal Procedure - Victims of Sexually Assaultive Behavior - Waiver of Rights - Prohibition - This bill prohibits a "law enforcement agency" from seeking specified waivers from a victim of "sexually assaultive behavior." The bill authorizes an affected victim to bring an action seeking injunctive or declaratory relief against a law enforcement agency that violates the prohibition. Each law enforcement agency in the State must (1) adopt a policy to enforce the prohibition on

seeking waivers from victims of sexually assaultive behavior, by January 1, 2021, and (2) provides a copy of the policy to the Maryland Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Policy by January 15, 2021. This bill was later sent to the House, and now must also apply retroactively to any interaction between a criminal justice unit and an alleged or suspected victim of sexually assaultive behavior occurring before the bill's October 1, 2020 effective date.

BEST PRACTICES

RVAAM - A National Model of a Victim Assistance Academy

The Roper Victim Assistance Academy of Maryland (RVAAM) is one of over forty such academies in the United States; however, it is conspicuously different from the others. In general, victim assistance academies provide opportunities for multi-disciplinary professionals to acquire the basic skills necessary to effectively help victims of crime. Each one of these academies is responsible for shaping its attendees in ways that: 1) enhance professional skills and competence; 2) improve specialized education and experience with victimology; 3) promote commitment to professional development; and, 4) offer networking opportunities with other professionals. Despite the substantial amount of research that demonstrates the benefits of victim assistance academies, they still have not become permanent fixtures within each of the 50 states. Some states still have yet to have had the opportunity to develop its own academy, while others have established an academy but failed to secure the necessary funding to keep it going, or have only been able to offer limited training. This is where the Roper Victim Assistance Academy has set itself apart from its peers and has earned a national reputation.

For eighteen years, RVAAM has been offering foundational trainings to victim service professionals and allied professionals from across the state of Maryland, as well as neighboring states including Virginia, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The Academy has even hosted participants from as far away as Tennessee, New Jersey, Texas, and China. To date, over 650 professionals have attended the Academy.

Most impressively, the Academy has been overseen and managed by the same team of faculty who helped to build it. This continuity of leadership has been invaluable because it has ensured that the Academy has continued to adhere to the carefully crafted strategic plan upon which it was built. Embedded in that strategic plan is the organization's mission statement, which is: "to provide a broad spectrum of basic advocacy training that will standardize the training of crime victim service providers in Maryland, thereby expanding and enhancing the level of professionalism within the victim services field. As such, the Academy strives to increase participants' knowledge of national, state, and local resources, and to provide an opportunity to network with other victim service providers."

To support the mission, the faculty of the Academy have diligently worked to establish and enhance relationships with agencies, organizations, and programs across the public and private sectors from jurisdictions across the state, as well as on a national level. It is these relationships that have helped to bolster the quality of the programming at the Academy, as evident by its a) diverse class composition; b) relevant, data-driven curriculum; c) connection to a vibrant professional network; and, d) regular opportunities for advanced training and community engagement.

This dedication has led to four notable accomplishments for the Academy, each of which helps to illustrate why

RVAAM has become the leader among all state academies. First, after the three years of initial start-up funding from OVC expired, the Academy faculty secured permanent funding from the state through a line-item in the Governor's budget. And although the administrations have changed numerous times over the past 18 years, the Academy has never lost the support of the Governor's Office or the legislature, thus enabling it to offer its foundational academy every June since 2003.



Second, it is the only state victim assistance academy with an organized alumni base. In 2003, participants from the inaugural Academy formed an alumni organization to help continue to support the mission of the Academy and provide alumni additional opportunities to continue to build their professional network. The organization quickly grew and within a few years evolved into the Victim Services Professional Network (VSPN), a regionally recognized alumni association. Graduates of RVAAM are automatically matriculated into VSPN, and members are invited each year to return to the Academy to participate in advanced trainings. This has helped provide alum with additional networking and mentoring opportunities, as well as facilitate a sense of community. The VSPN leadership also took the lead in facilitating the creation of statewide professional standards for victim service providers and worked with the Academy's faculty to create the Maryland Victim Assistance Certification Program (MVSCP). This certification

program is the only one of its kind among all of the state victim assistance academies, and today, over 150 victim service providers have successfully attained one of the three levels of certification.

Third, in 2017, the Academy created a regional training model to further support the professional development of victim service professionals across the state of Maryland. Given the complexity of victim services and the diverse populations many of these agencies and organizations serve, the Academy regularly conducts focus groups within each region to find out what issues are most pressing in that jurisdiction, and then designs specific training curriculum that will provide participants with information and evidence-based skills needed to better serve and assist specific populations, such as victims of human trafficking or cyber-crimes. The Academy then coordinates and facilitates trainings within each region, free of charge for anyone who wants to attend. This has significantly expanded the accessibility to training for all victim service providers and their allied professionals across the state of Maryland, and has further illustrated the Academy's commitment to "expand and enhance the level of professionalism within the victim services field."

And in 2018, the Academy achieved yet another achievement - it became the first state academy to secure supplementary funding to be able to offer a second foundational academy during the calendar year. And although this second academy is offered in February, it has proven to be just as popular as its summer counterpart.

As RVAAM approaches its twentieth anniversary, it will undoubtedly continue to serve as the leader in the field and be at the forefront for developing and delivering training curriculum that continues to support and empower victims of crime.

Essay contributed by Keith Gethers.



Welcome Our Newest Alumni from the 2020 Winter Academy!

Dorothy Allen	Blake Archer
Jernell Ash	Troy Bradley
Keith Brown	Shana Bryson
Maura Burton	Lenora Davis
Sharon DiMaggio	Jason Dotson
Carol Fowler	Silvia Garwood
Jeffrey Gray	Margaret Henderson
Rachel Ingley	Adriana Jimenez
Tonya Johnson-Spratley	
Morgan Jones	Teresa Jones
Nancy Kellenberger	Frances Kerr
Kimberly Leitera	Melissa Little
Lakeisha McFall	Karen Mlynarik
Kimberly Moxley	Amy Ocasio
Jevon Patrick	Tiffinee Scott
Bille Shabazz	KaeShawn Stewart
Cristian Suarez	Eric Toga
Ann Vachon	Amber Whitaker
Adrienne Williams	

Bradley at bradleyd@harfordsheriff.org . And remember, we are also 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
Hidaya Hamilton - Contributor
Deborah Howard - Contributor
Keith Getters— Contributor
Ashley Fundack — Contributor
Kenya Pope — Contributor
Heather Pfeifer — Managing Editor

Watch for the next edition of the Academy Forum in October 2020

Thoughts, Ideas, Suggestions?



Are you looking for more information 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 can assist our Alums both personally and professionally. Please send any suggestions you might have for a future topic to Debbie