

Academy Forum

Continuing the Message of the Roper Victim Assistance Academy

A Quarterly Newsletter

Issue #42- November 2016

Just a Thought

Why is it that we continue to impose a statute of limitations for victims of child sexual abuse to file civil suits? Delegate C.T. Wilson presents a passionate essay that explains why we must give these victims the opportunity for their voices to be heard..

Page 1

Web Links

You never know what resources await you on the world-wide web ...come see what our latest surfing expedition uncovered.

Page 2



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!

Page 3

Alumni Showcase

Read Rita Buckland's essay on the challenges and rewards of working as a victim/witness coordinator for juveniles in a State's Attorney's Office in small county in Maryland.

Page 3

Certification News

Want to learn how to become a certified victim service professional in the state of Maryland? This section lays out the criteria of each level of certification, along with the requirements .

Page 4

News From the Field

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

Page 6

Just a thought...

Shame on Maryland!

Why do we continue to impose a statute of limitations on child sexual abuse?

There is no doubt in anyone's mind that child sexual abuse and molestation is abhorrent and an embarrassment to our society. It must be questioned then, why is it so hard to change state laws when it comes to holding perpetrators accountable?

Since 2014, I have attempted to expand the statute of limitations for child sexual abuse by allowing individuals who have been victimized to file a civil suit against their abuser(s). Currently, the Maryland statute stipulates a victim must file a lawsuit against the person who molested them as a child before he or she turns 25

years old. After that, you lose your standing to bring civil action. Why is it important to be able to sue one's abuser? While many people understand that sexual abuse is damaging to a child, most people do not realize that the majority of that damage does not reveal itself until we are well into adulthood.

As a child, the abuse is like living a nightmare. Living with fear, pain, betrayal, loneliness, and suffering become a bastardized way of life. While some of these children will react outwardly through sexual deviance, violence, or even suicide, most children just silently struggle to get through each day - and hope that no one knows. Most victims of sexual abuse never reveal their pain and would never want anyone to know. Their silence allows them to pretend to live a "normal" life and helps keep their shameful secret safe. That was my life. Suffering in silence as I tried to navigate my childhood and adolescence.



For most of us who suffer in silence, it is only passage into adulthood that truly reveals the true breadth and depth of damage that was done. There are predictable issues such as low self-esteem, hyper-sexuality, or social awkwardness. Yet more even insidious problems can become apparent. As I got older, an unbridled anger grew once I realized that my troubled life was so abnormal, while others had it so easy. The constant lies I told to hide those horrendous events became habit forming. The fanciful normal life I created in my mind and that fictional "safe place" that I retreated to when the abuse would start, slowly took the place of my reality. My young life of pretending that those horrible and embarrassing things didn't happen caused me to avoid facing my problems and solving even the simple challenges that adults must deal with.

Worst of all, when someone who says they love you ... someone you trust ... robs you of your innocence, you lose the ability to trust or to put faith in anyone. If a loving parent, a trusted relative, or

(Continued on page 5)

EDITOR'S CORNER

Hello Alum!

I'm so excited to say that there are a lot of great things coming very soon!

With the fall upon us, you will want to keep an eye out for several upcoming events. Our VSPN Co-Chairs are hard at work making plans to keep us all together throughout the year. If your email address changes, make sure to let me know so that you don't miss out on anything.

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

Debbie Bradley, C.A., VASIII

bradleyd@harfordsheriff.org

The excitement of learning separates youth from old age. As long as you're learning, you're not old. ~ Rosalyn S. Yalow

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!

Child Welfare Information Gateway

Child Welfare Information Gateway promotes the safety, permanency, and well-being of children, youth, and families by connecting child welfare, adoption, and related professionals as well as the public, to information, resources, and tools covering topics on child welfare, child abuse and neglect, out-of-home care, adoption, and more. A service of the Children's Bureau, Administration of Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services, it provides access to print and electronic publications, websites, databases, and online learning tools for improving child welfare practice, including resources that can be shared with families. To learn more, go to: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/statistics/can/>



National Children's Alliance

The National Children's Alliance (NCA) is the accrediting body for Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs). Formed in 1988, NCA has been providing support, technical assistance, and quality assurance for CACs, while serving as a voice for abused children for more than 25 years. A children's advocacy center is a child-friendly facility in which law enforcement, child protection, prosecution, mental health, medical, and victim advocacy professional's work together to investigate abuse, help children heal from abuse, and hold offenders accountable. To learn more, go to www.national-childrensalliance.org/media-room/media-kit/national-statistics-child-abuse

The Family Tree

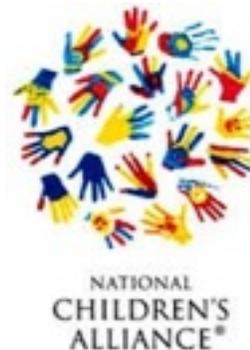
This organization focuses on assisting parents by providing them with the tools and resources needed to raise children to become healthy, productive, and competent adults. They also oversee a variety of programs including, parent education, family guidance, parent support groups, child and youth development programs, and a 24 hour parenting hot-line. To learn more, go to <https://www.familytreemd.org/about-us/our-cause/>



Children's Bureau

An Office of the Administration for Children and Families, the Children's Bureau partners with federal, state, tribal, and local agencies to improve the overall health and well-being of our nation's children and families. It provides support and guidance to programs that focus on: strengthening families and preventing child abuse and neglect; protecting children when abuse or neglect has occurred; and ensuring that every child and youth has a permanent family and family connection. To learn more, go to:

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/child-maltreatment-2013>



U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs

This agency released a bulletin that consolidates the current knowledge of professionals from several major forensic interview

training programs on best practices for interviewing children in cases of alleged abuse. The authors discuss the purpose of the child forensic interview, provide the historical context, review overall considerations, and outlines each stage of the interview in more detail. To download a copy of this bulletin, go to <http://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/248749.pdf>



Save the Date

VSPN Holiday Shopping Get-Away Bus Trip and Murder Mystery Dinner Cruise

December 10th, 2016,
11:00am-11:00pm, Departure site - Security Square Mall

VSPN's annual fundraiser for our holiday family will depart from Security Square Mall in the back of Sears Department Store. The bus will leave at 11am sharp. A second pick-up location will be on I-95 at Rt 152 Park & Ride in Fallston. Cost per ticket is \$130; seating is limited so make sure to order your tickets soon! Contact Linda Garnett to place your order at (443) 525-9011.



VSPN Holiday Party

Saturday, December 17th, 2016.

Hold the date! More details about location and activities will be forthcoming.

2017 RVAAM Academy

June 5th-9th, 2017, 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!

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!

- **Rose Albert (Class of 2012)** - A hearty congratulations goes out to Rose - she is getting married in April! We wish you and your fiance many happy days to come, and we can't wait to see the pictures of your special day!
- **Barbara Bogush (Class of 2013)** - On September 16th, Barb retired from her position as VAWA funded court advocate for IPV victims at the Family Violence Unit of the Baltimore County DSS. We wish you all the best Barb and hope you enjoy your well earned retirement!
- **Sharon Buie (Class of 2016)** - On September 30th, served as the Chairperson for Specialized Populations at the Project Homeless Connect event at the Baltimore Convention Center. Project Homeless Connect is a joint venture between the United Way of Central Maryland and Baltimore City. She also was recently promoted to an Area Manager for Recreation

Center Operations for Baltimore City Recreation and Parks. We are so grateful for everything you have done on behalf of the teens and adults of Baltimore City, and helping to raise awareness about trauma and its effects on individuals, families, and the community! Keep up the great work!

- **Rebecca Marcolini (Class of 2006)** - Rebecca was recently promoted to Co-Director of the Victim/Witness Unit for Montgomery County State's Attorney's Office, and is celebrating twelve years in the SAO office. Way to go Rebecca, you are clearly doing a fabulous job!
- **Debbie Tall (Class of 2004)** - This past June, Debbie celebrated the first birthday of her grandson, Christian. She loves spending time with him, and he definitely keeps her on her toes. Debbie and her husband will soon be taking an anniversary cruise to the English isles, Amsterdam, and Belgium. Life is good! Congratulations Debbie, we wish you and your family all the best.



Alumni Showcase

Surviving the Court System

As part of my work with the Office of the State's Attorney's for Cecil County, my duties and responsibilities entail preparing discovery for any child abuse, sexual abuse, or juvenile cases. For the juvenile cases, it is my responsibility to prepare the petition which tells the respondent the charges being

filed against him or her. With regard to sex abuse and child abuse cases, I prepare the discovery which goes out to defense counsel. In addition, I act as a victim/witness coordinator and help link victims/survivors to the services that they need.

There are many things I find both rewarding and frustrating in my job. The most satisfying part of my work is helping the children I work with find their voice. Even in situations where their abuser/perpetrator may not ultimately be found guilty in a court of law, they will have in fact still won. They summoned up the courage to come forward and confront their abuser in a public forum, and their voice has been heard. I think the thing that frustrates me the most in my job however is that I don't always get all of the information I need from victims to enable me to refer them to all of the services that could help them.

Working as a victim/witness coordinator, I have been lucky to participate in some wonderful partnerships my office has established with outside groups that has really helped us better serve victims. One such partnership is with Bikers Against Child Abuse (B.A.C.A.). This is a group of very passionate individuals who want to help children who been a victim of physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect. They make sure that every child they interact with knows that what happened was not and is not their fault, and they will be there to support them even after their legal case concludes. They understand the physical, emotional, and psychological scars that many of these children bear will go on well beyond the time their case spends in our legal system. Their devotion to these children is truly remarkable and I am very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work alongside them.

I have to say that my time spent in the SAO's office has changed my perceptions about victims, and how they are treated in the system. When I first

started in the office as a receptionist, I really didn't see the breadth of the challenges victims face when navigating the system. Now that I shifted roles to now working primarily with victims in juvenile cases, I am saddened to see that sometimes these victims don't always receive the respect they deserve from the professionals who are sworn to assist them. In attempt to mitigate that gap, I work hard every day to ensure that every victim and/or witness that I interact with is treated with dignity and compassion, and is provided the help that he or she needs. And I am happy to say that many of my colleagues whom I collaborate with from local police agencies and the Department of Social Services strive to do the same.

While I think my office is doing a lot to help victims and their families, there still is more work that needs to be done. We must continue to remind ourselves that when these individuals reach out to us for help, in whatever form that takes, we continue to endeavor to treat each victim we meet with the dignity and respect that they deserve.

Essay contributed by Rita Buckland (Class of 2008).

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.roaam.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). Keep an eye out for upcoming prep classes, as well as classes on ethics for renewals. For more information, or if you have any questions, please contact Debbie Bradley at bradleyd@harfordsheriff.org or by phone at (410) 836-5490.

Please Congratulate our newest Certified Victim Service Professionals!

* **Stacia Dashiell, VAS-III**

* **Lakendra Schwendig, VAS-I**

Just a Thought (Cont.)

a faithful pastor would hurt you that profoundly, what kind of damage do you think a stranger could cause?

This lack of trust in others caused me to question the good intentions of the people I met, and to sabotage each relationship I entered, be it with a friend,

a lover, or a spouse. At best, I maintained an attitude of "keep a safe distance from everyone" or at worst, "hurt them before they hurt me." In the end I become nothing more than a disconnected pariah whose only goal was not to cause others pain and misery, and I second-guessed every personal decision I made. I just could not ever trust myself to get close to anyone.

But ironically, I am one of the lucky ones. I have met many other adult victims of childhood sexual abuse that have fared much worse than me. I have met addicts whose pain is so unbearable that they could only survive by putting themselves in a drug or alcohol-induced malaise. I have met women who have married abusive partners because their painful childhood taught them to equate violence and humiliation with love. I have both

jailed and represented defendants whose history of sexual abuse so profoundly damaged their psyche that they will hurt anyone because they

have been hurt so deeply. In fact, I have read numerous studies conducted with many abusers (like my own adoptive father) have a history of childhood sexual abuse themselves, often times at the hands of someone they trusted. Thus, they are just continuing the cycle of pain and suffering with another generation. And finally, I have had several friends who were sexually abused as a child attempt suicide 20 to 30 years later because as adults, they just couldn't live with the pain any longer. Sadly, a number of those friends succeeded.

So you see, the damages incurred by victims of child sexual abuse are real,

expansive, and consuming, and the costs these individuals bear are immeasurable. Many lose all sense of peace and mental stability. This affects their ability to form lasting and valued bonds with others or function normally in the community. This impacts their ability to maintain gainful employment, sustain healthy relationships, or build a family. Sadly, for some of these individuals, the damage is so profound that they become predators and abusers themselves, or they can not continue to bear the pain and shame that they carry with them, and they end up taking their own life.

Because I have walked in the shoes of these victims, I understand the pain and suffering that they struggle to bear. And this is why I have been a staunch advocate for increasing the statute of limitations for child sexual abuse cases. This is not about securing

a big financial payout, nor do I claim that this will be the silver bullet to end their suffering. Nothing so grandiose. It's recognizing that many victims of child sexual abuse will not come to terms



with what happened to them until they are adults. Telling these individuals that it is too late to hold their abuser accountable simply because they could not process their trauma in a more timely fashion, or build up the courage to come forward to report their abuse, is contemptible! While nothing can be done to undo the pain and suffering that their abuser caused, allowing victims the opportunity to file suit gives them a voice they did not have as a child. It allows them to tell their abuser and the world that they are not broken, and most importantly, to hold their abuser accountable. Whether they win or lose the civil trial is irrelevant.

Yet sadly, our state continues to protect sexual abusers and the institutions that knowingly looked the other way, instead of protecting the rights of victims. We should be ashamed. It is time we do right by these victims, and I for one, will never stop fighting for their voice to be heard.

Essay contributed by Delegate C.T. Wilson



News From The Field

House Bill 237: Courts -

Prohibition Against Testimony by a Perjurer (Repeal) - The Governor has approved a bill repealing the prohibition on a person convicted of perjury from testifying in a proceeding. This would allow an individual who has been convicted in the past (no matter the conviction date) to participate in a hearing and their testimony can be used as evidence. This bill would not allow the individual's credibility to be attacked. While a Senate bill (SB 673) 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. The bill went into effect on October 1, 2016.*

House Bill 659: Criminal Procedure - Victim's Right to Restitution - Appeal - The Governor has approved this bill which expands the rights of victims of a 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 the denial (or failed consideration). It would also allow a court to enter a judgment of restitution, on behalf of the victim, if the court finds that the victim's rights to restitution was not considered or improperly denied. *This bill was first read in the Maryland General Assembly on February 10, 2016. The bill went into effect on October 1, 2016.*

Best Practices

Working with victims of child abuse

Major sources of relevant data indicate that between four and seven children die annually in the United States. According to the 2014 Children's Bureau, over six million children come to the attention of child protective services. Approximately 50% of those cases are referred to social service agencies. Many years of interventions has proven that the support of advocates does contribute to healthy outcomes. Being keenly aware of what child abuse is and how to work with others is an essential part of effectively addressing the epidemic. Additionally, to increase the detention and to engage in early intervention this awareness must extend to individuals and agencies with even limited contact with children.

The steady occurrence of child abuse requires advocates to seek resources to combat the presence and ill effects of the problem. Child abuse occurs when a parent or caregiver, whether by act or omission, causes injury, death, emotional harm or exposure to serious damage to a child. The many forms of abuse include child neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, exploitation and emotional abuse. Whether children are exposed to one or more of these forms, the conse-

quences are costly. Beyond the initial effects associated with the trauma, victims are at an increased risk of mental health conditions, addiction, maladaptive behaviors, and even criminal activity.

Knowing the common signs of abuse is the first step to combat the problem. Based on the extant research, these signs include the following:

- Uncharacteristic or sudden changes in behavior;
- Suspicious or unexplained injuries, such as bruises, burns, sprains or broken bones;
- Frequent injuries;
- Inattention to formally enjoyable activities;
- Decreased school attendance or academic performance;
- Drug or alcohol usage;
- Inappropriate sexual conversations or activity;
- Anxiety related to staying home or returning home;
- High levels of defensiveness or aggression; and
- Suicide attempts

Making prevention, detection, and assistance a community concern is a necessity. By paying attention to the common signs, a stakeholder outside the child welfare field, such as coaches, doctors, child care providers, teachers, and clergy can certainly provide valuable assistance in curbing child abuse. Beyond incorporating common signs into a toolbox, profes-



sionals should also seek to enhance current practices. The Office of Victims for Crime endorses collaborative processes such as multidisciplinary teams and information sharing among agencies that have the primary responsibilities of caring for children following abuse. One of the most important strategies is to help kids learn how to talk about the issue. One program that addresses this goal is TAALK - Talk About Abuse to Liberate Kids. The program has five objectives:

- Raise awareness to the fact that child abuse happens in every community
- Inspire all adults to learn to protect kids by participating in prevention training
- Teach adults, teens, and children the “language of abuse” and open the lines of communication
- Help survivors understand that they are not alone and support their healing journey
- Put offenders on notice that we are watching and our kids are off limits

(To learn more about the TAALK program, go to <https://www.taalk.org/child-sexual-abuse-education/child-sexual-abuse-best-practices/child-sexual-abuse-best-practices-for-advocates.html>)

What we all need to do is to be more proactive in searching out new initiatives and programs to help educate our communities and to identify and assist victims of child abuse. The costs are too immense for us to sit idly by.

Essay contributed by Keith Gethers

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 2016 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.

Editorial Board

Debbie Bradley — Editor
Hidaya Hamilton - Contributor
Deborah Howard - Contributor
Keith Gethers— Contributor
Ashley Fundack — Contributor
Heather Pfeifer — Managing Editor

Watch for the next edition of the Academy Forum in January 2017