



The Michigan
DVOCATE

IN THIS ISSUE

.....

SPOTLIGHT:
NOVA Joins Campaign
to Save Crime Victims
Fund – available online at
www.trynova.org

and

**Congressional Update
on the Crime Victims
Fund**

**BEREAVED CHILDREN:
COPING WITH
HOMICIDE**

**PHISHING – HIGH TECH
VICTIMIZATION**

**SEVENTH ANNUAL
COUNCIL OF ADVOCATES
HELD**

**VOCA GRANTEES
MAKING A DIFFERENCE:
Creating a Volunteer
Managers League**

**SEXUAL ASSAULT AND
PREDATORY DRUGS**

**HEARING-IMPAIRED
VICTIMS: RESOURCES
FOR IMPROVED SERVICE**

**WALTER'S WORDS OF
WISDOM:
The Browser War
Heats Up Again**

A publication of the

***MICHIGAN CRIME VICTIM SERVICES
COMMISSION***

THE MICHIGAN ADVOCATE was created in 2000 to provide information and resources to VOCA Grantee-agencies, other crime victim programs, and advocates in Michigan and throughout the country. This publication strives to help professionals maintain comprehensive and quality services for victims of crime and to inform advocates of broader issues affecting crime victim services.

THE MICHIGAN ADVOCATE is published twice yearly and has recently evolved into an electronic format allowing for broader distribution of news relevant to crime victim services.

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Congressional Update on the Crime Victims Fund

■ By Leslie O'Reilly

There have been important developments regarding the status of the Crime Victims Fund. The current proposed federal budget for FY 2006 includes a "rescission" of \$1.267 billion from the Fund. If adopted, this rescission will equate to the liquidation of the Fund's assets by October 1, 2006. Efforts are underway by supporters of VOCA to defeat this proposal.

On June 23rd, the full Senate Appropriations Committee concurred in its subcommittee's recommendation to reject the attempted rescission of the Crime Victims Fund and is recommending a VOCA cap for FY 2006 of \$625 million. The full Senate may take action on the bill (H.R. 2862) sometime the week of July 5. *Even though it appears likely that the appropriations bill passed by both houses will not include the rescission, it is still possible for Congress to change course as part of the budget reconciliation process. Therefore, it is still important to continue informing Congress of the importance of VOCA and the need to retain the entire Crime Victims Fund.*

The House passed its appropriation bill on June 16th rejecting the rescission and setting the FY 2006 VOCA cap at \$625 million. Despite its defeat in the House, the Administration is still trying to rescind the Crime Victims Fund. In a June 14th *Statement of Policy* in response to the House appropriations bill, the Administration stated:

Each year, the Congress enacts obligation limitations for the Crime Victims Fund. Without the obligation limitation, the formula under which most funds are spent would result in a dramatic spike in mandatory spending over the prior year - based on unspent balances carried in the Fund in recent years. As a result of these

funding delays, discretionary savings have been credited when no reduction in spending is fully implemented. For 2005, the Committee has delayed the expenditure of \$1.3 billion from the Crime Victims Fund. In recent years, roughly the same amount in savings has been claimed each year by including similar language. The Administration urges the House to achieve permanent savings by canceling, rather than temporarily blocking, the excess funding for this program.

Important actions

- ◆ Governor Granholm and 16 other Governors signed a letter dated June 9, 2005 to leaders of the Senate and House opposing rescission of the Crime Victims Fund.
- ◆ On behalf of the National Governor's Association, Governor Granholm and Mississippi's Governor Barbour sent a letter dated May 26, 2005 to House Appropriation leadership opposing rescission of the Crime Victims Fund and reduction in Byrne justice assistance funding.

Visit the National Association of Victim Assistance Administrators website frequently at www.navaa.org for more information and to keep updated on the efforts to Save the Crime Victims Fund. In addition, the Spotlight article for this edition of the Michigan Advocate, *NOVA Joins the Campaign to Save the Crime Victims Fund*, is an excellent article available on the National Organization for Victim Assistance website www.trynova.org.

Leslie O'Reilly is the Program Specialist with the Crime Victim Services Commission.

Bereaved Children: Coping with Homicide

■ By Sarah Rockstad

“Anyone old enough to love is old enough to grieve.” – Alan Wolfelt

Historically, the child’s experience of grief following a death has been minimized and misunderstood. It was believed, for example, that children should not attend funerals and that children should not be included in conversations about the deceased. Thankfully, a great deal of progress has been made in recent years in recognizing and understanding children’s grief and their need for support.

The death of a family member or friend, even when anticipated, is often traumatic for children. A sudden, unexpected, and violent death results in a more complicated and difficult journey of grief for young people, and often requires skilled and sensitive intervention. Additionally, some young survivors of homicide may experience post-traumatic stress reactions that prevent them from working through their grief.

Children’s reactions to a violent death will vary depending on many factors, including their age, emotional maturity, cognitive abilities, previous losses, coping skills, and relationship to the deceased victim. Because it is not possible to predict exactly how a child will grieve, it is important for advocates, counselors, teachers, and other caring adults to understand normal reactions to grief, as well as the special challenges faced by children coping with a violent death. Children are very sensitive to the non-verbal cues of adults. Therefore, it is essential that adults who are in a position to provide support and guidance to grieving children have addressed their own grief

issues in a healthy manner and have the ability to tolerate the intense feelings of grief.

Children Need Information

Children of all ages need to have honest, age-appropriate information about the death. This is often an overwhelming task for their immediate family, since there has been no opportunity to prepare and they are struggling to grasp the reality of the death themselves. Parents may be tempted to protect their children from news of the death, but it is important that children be informed and included in the family’s mourning. Children may hear confusing or inaccurate information from others; they need to know that their family can be trusted to tell them the truth.

Families often need encouragement and support to communicate honestly with children. Advocates and other supportive people can help by encouraging the parent to rehearse what they want to say. It is best to use language that is clear and concrete. Use the words “dead” and “died.” Explain to young children that “dead” means the person’s body stopped working. Homicide can be defined as “the act of killing someone else so that his or her body stops working” (Goldman, 1996).

It is helpful to “layer” information for children: tell them a little at a time, adding more detail as they ask for it or seem ready to hear it. For children, as for adults, understanding the finality of the death is a process that occurs over time. Disbelief, denial, numbness, and shock are all normal responses. Young children do not understand the finality of death and frequently expect

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Bereaved Children: Coping with Homicide continued...

that the person will come back. Children often need to have the information repeated over and over, and they need to incorporate aspects of the death into their play as a way of making sense of death.

Children coping with a sudden, violent death have to come to terms not only with the loss of their family member, but also with the way the person died. Decisions about how much detail to share should take into account the child's age and maturity, as well as the likelihood that he or she will be exposed to this information from the media or other sources. Direct questions should be answered as honestly as possible.

Children Need to Experience and Express Their Feelings

Grief is painful, and, as much as we want to spare children from pain, they need to work through their grief in order to heal. With the support, patience, and reassurance of caring adults, children have the capacity to cope with even the most devastating losses. It is usually a long, indirect process as children move toward and away from their intense feelings.

Although children don't have the verbal skills or life experience needed to express their feelings in the same way as adults, children have many of the same feelings. Common reactions in bereaved children include anger, worry, separation anxiety, regression, confusion, sleep disturbances, guilt, and lowered self-esteem, to name just a few. These feelings are intensified when the death was a homicide, and children may have much more difficulty managing these feelings.

The violent death of a family member shatters a child's sense of safety and security. Children may have persistent and specific fears, such as the fear that someone else in the family will die, or they may experience more generalized anxiety. They may need to sleep with a parent or have difficulty being apart from their parent during the day.

Homicide is often a stigmatized death, where the victim is perceived to be at fault, and children may feel ashamed about the way their family member died. The sense of isolation and self-consciousness that grieving children often feel is magnified, making it difficult for them to seek support or to share their feelings. Their peers don't have any way to understand these children's experience, and it is not unusual for children to be teased about the death.

Children may be consumed by feelings of anger and rage and have fantasies of revenge. They need to be reassured that these feelings are normal and that having those feelings is not the same as acting on them. Sports and other physical outlets may help provide some relief for these intense feelings.

Children often feel guilty following a death as they struggle with feelings that they somehow "caused" it by their thoughts, words, or actions. This magical thinking is a normal part of child development. It lives on in adolescents and adults who are preoccupied by "what if..." questions and a belief that they should have been able to prevent the death. Regrets that are not acknowledged can be very destructive and can erode a child's confidence and self esteem. Children can be reassured that they are not at fault and encouraged to express what they wish they could have done differently.

Families coping with the homicide of a family member often have difficulty supporting each other. Each person's feelings and needs are powerful and unique, and the adults in the family may be overwhelmed and have little patience and energy for the children. Parents need to get the support they need in order to be able to meet their children's needs. Support groups can be a wonderful resource for families. Support groups provide opportunities to connect with others who understand and allow families to express difficult feelings in a neutral environment. Advocates and other support people can identify and encourage families to make use of appropriate resources.

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Bereaved Children: Coping with Homicide continued...

Children Need to Commemorate the Deceased Person's Life

Every culture has rituals to acknowledge major milestones of life and death. Children are generally very responsive to commemorative rituals, which provide comfort and reassurance that life has value and is not forgotten. Even very young children can benefit from attending a funeral if they are given information about what will happen, choices about their participation, and support from someone who can give them undivided attention. An adult with whom the child is familiar is usually the best choice to provide support at the funeral or similar gatherings. Older children may wish to participate in some way, such as by choosing photos for display or reading a poem. Commemorative activities on special occasions, such as birthdays and holidays, are also helpful to children.

Children Need to Move on With Their Lives

No one “gets over” a major loss, but when grief is experienced in a healthy way, the bereaved are able to integrate the loss and reinvest in life. Because children grieve a little bit at a time—alternating periods of grief with periods of normal functioning—it can be hard to tell how a child is doing. A happy, active child may still be a grieving child. Significant changes in the child's functioning that persist over time are good indicators that the child needs additional help.

Publicity surrounding the death and the criminal justice procedures can significantly prolong the grief process for survivors. Grieving may be delayed until the case is resolved. Survivors may experience difficulty healing when there are public reminders of the crime.

Children who have experienced a violent death are at greater risk for traumatic reactions. The risk increases if children witnessed the homicide or have witnessed violence in the past. Children with traumatic reactions may suffer from extreme anxiety, night terrors or significant sleep disturbances, generalized anger or rage, repetitive behaviors, or intrusive thoughts. Unresolved

trauma can inhibit the grieving process and is best treated by professional intervention.

All grieving children benefit from the support and attention of caring adults. Children have a wonderful capacity to heal, but they can't do it in the absence of a safe, stable, and supportive environment. Providing support to the parents and guardians of grieving children is equally important since parents and guardians are simultaneously dealing with their own grief and trying to meet their children's needs. Advocates can help by offering education about grief, being compassionate listeners, and making referrals to community resources.

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Phishing - High Tech Victimization

■ By Thomas Nelson

For many years now, VOCA has recognized economic exploitation and fraud as a broad category of victimization. Until the online revolution, economic exploitation and fraud commonly involved an abusive partner maxing out a victim's credit cards or an elderly person being scammed out of their savings. Relative to the incidence of other types of victimization, like domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse, most VOCA-funded agencies in Michigan report little economic exploitation and fraud. For example, during the first four-year round of VOCA grant compliance review and needs assessments, only about 6% of all VOCA Grantees listed victims of economic exploitation and fraud as a population they served. It is entirely possible that economic exploitation and fraud, like many other victimization typologies, has been significantly under-reported. Phishing, however, has resulted in dramatic increases in victimization by economic exploitation and fraud.

By now, phishing has, unfortunately, nearly become a household word. A type of identity theft, phishing perpetrators use the Internet to lure unsuspecting victims into providing personal and financial information, which they use to bilk unsuspecting victims' bank and credit card accounts. According to a survey done on behalf of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), a shocking seven million people fell victim to phishers last year.

How Phishers Hook Their Victims

Phishers send bogus emails to would-be victims directing them to phony websites that look like the real thing—banks, online shopping sites, and so on. Those websites ask victims to fill out online forms with account numbers, passwords, social

security numbers, and other personal information to “confirm” their accounts with the entity. Then phishers typically turn around and use this information to withdraw the victim's funds from financial accounts or to make charges to the victim's credit card accounts. Perpetrators have even been known to take out second mortgages on unsuspecting victims' homes.

When phishers send email or create “pop-up messages” that request personal or financial information, victims are invited to reply or click on the hyperlink on the screen. According to the FTC, legitimate businesses will not ask for this information by email. Often, even a wary victim will sometimes inadvertently cut and paste the link in the message to inquire about the authenticity of the message, which can send him or her to the same end.

How To Help

Victims of phishing are likely to experience the kinds of emotional distress that manifest in victims of other kinds of economic exploitation and fraud. However, service providers should also prepare themselves to help phishing victims troubleshoot in order to minimize their financial losses as best they can. If not detected or addressed quickly, phishers may strike the same victim over and over again. Those who suspect they have been phished should review bank and credit card statements for any unauthorized charges as soon as they are received. (It is good practice to do this in any case.) Victims can also call their financial and credit institutions for account balances if they cannot find or have not received a statement in the mail.

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Phishing – High Tech Victimization continued...

If any account appears to have been tampered with, victims should contact the financial institution, credit card company, and/or business immediately.

The FTC (at <http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft>) provides some solid tips, links, and information sources for phishing victims and/or service providers attempting to help victims of identity theft.

- ◆ Victims should contact the fraud departments of any of the three major credit bureaus to place a fraud alert on their credit file. The fraud alert requests that creditors contact victims before opening any new accounts or making any changes to existing accounts. As soon as the credit bureau confirms a victim's fraud alert, the other two credit bureaus are automatically notified to place fraud alerts, and all three credit reports will be sent to victims free of charge.
- ◆ Victims should close all accounts that they believe have been tampered with or any new accounts that have been opened fraudulently in their names. The FTC has an online form called the ID Theft Affidavit that victims can use if disputing new unauthorized accounts.
- ◆ Victims should also file a police report. They should acquire a copy of the report and send it to their creditors and/or any others that may require proof that they have been phished.
- ◆ Victims should file a complaint with the FTC. Law enforcement agencies use the FTC's identity theft database in their investigations. By filing a complaint, the FTC can better understand new identity theft threats and, as a result, better assist victims.

Additional Protective Measures

Victims should update their anti-virus software and utilize a firewall to help protect them from future phishing attempts. Although no anti-virus software is foolproof, victims looking to avoid future access by phishers to sensitive information can use anti-virus software to help scan incoming messages for suspicious files. They should utilize anti-virus software that automatically updates itself to recognize newer phishing attempts as well as older ones. Also, a firewall can help block communications from unauthorized sources. If the victim has a broadband connection that is always on, such as high-speed cable or satellite Internet services, a firewall is essential. Victims should also investigate whether their operating software offers free updates that might make it more difficult for phishers to access the victim's email or Internet browser. Finally, victims should avoid opening an attachment or downloading any files from emails, regardless of where the email originated.

Thomas Nelson is a Senior Research Associate for the Crime Victim Services Technical Assistance Project at the Michigan Public Health Institute's Center for Collaborative Research in Health Outcomes and Policy. Tom has been working in the field of crime victim rights policy and services, both at the national and state level, for over 15 years.

Seventh Annual Council of Advocates Held

This year's Council of Advocates meeting was held on December 1, 2004, at the Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center in East Lansing. A collaborative effort between the Crime Victim Services Commission (CVSC) and the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI), the purpose of the annual Council of Advocates meeting is to provide an open forum for feedback to the CVSC and MPHI from statewide VOCA grantees. Additionally, the meeting provides important opportunities for networking and addressing potential modifications in VOCA grant administration.

VOCA-funded agency representatives from many parts of the state, including Battle Creek, Detroit, Saginaw, Muskegon, and Sault Ste. Marie, gathered in East Lansing for this one-day roundtable discussion. Participants represented a wide variety of victim service agencies including those serving victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse, as well as advocates from prosecutors' offices and hospitals.



CVSC Director Michael Fullwood and Program Specialist Leslie O'Reilly began the day with general opening remarks, followed by a question and answer session focusing on pre-submitted questions from members of the Council that lasted through the morning. During the afternoon, participants engaged in a dynamic exchange of ideas on topics related to the services provided to grantees through the CVSC and MPHI.

Topics addressed during the day included the current state of VOCA financial support, with

specific questions focused on the status of the Crime Victims Fund and the possibility of further funding reductions in the future. Participants also discussed services-related topics, such as the scope of VOCA's interest in funding more child advocacy programs and the extent to which VOCA could financially assist Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) programs in becoming nationally certified.

Additional discussion focused on program administration needs and suggestions to improve the services currently provided to VOCA grantees. Topics included the online application and grant reporting system, the new web-based version of the Michigan Advocate newsletter, and the upcoming changes to the VOCA grant compliance review and needs assessment process. Participants provided suggestions for future Michigan Advocate articles, improvements to the biannual Program Evaluation Trainings, and ideas for next year's Council of Advocates meeting.

The day's happenings were recorded precisely, both via audiotape and by hand in order to ensure accurate documentation of participants' comments and feedback. These data will be helpful in guiding the CVSC's priorities and VOCA grant administration to Michigan agencies. All VOCA-funded agencies will receive a copy of the Council of Advocates Meeting Summary in order to help advocates and agencies stay abreast of new developments and current issues. Additional copies may be obtained by contacting Jessica Austin at (517) 324-8380 or jaustin@mphi.org.

VOCA Grantees Making A Difference

“I knew there were people out there, somewhere, who wanted to help. I just needed to reach out and find them.”

Creating a Volunteer Managers League

■ By Jeanine Winkowski

OK, I've got the job. How exciting, a volunteer coordinator! Now what? Get out there and recruit, screen, and train. I had a silly notion that volunteers would flock to my door. All I would have to do is put out the call and they'd come. When that didn't happen, suddenly an overwhelming feeling of being stranded swept over me in this position I inherited. I was floundering and needed some help. I somehow had the feeling I wasn't alone in my panic. I knew there were people out there, somewhere, who wanted to help. I just needed to reach out and find them.

In May of 2000, I sent a letter to other coordinators inviting them to join me in creating a collaborative league in volunteer management. I outlined how we could work together in recruiting, screening, trouble-shooting, maintaining, and referring volunteers to each other. I also suggested that we meet on a regular basis to talk about issues and support each other. I placed a tear-off at the bottom of the letter so that interested parties could fill in their name, address, agency, e-mail, when they could meet, etc., and mail this information back to me. I sent the letter, in care of the Volunteer Coordinator, to every agency, organization, and business I could think of that might utilize volunteers. I went through the phone book, resource books, and referral sources, and I

asked many questions of others. I sent letters to volunteer coordinators at:

- ◆ Nursing homes
- ◆ Hospitals
- ◆ Senior care centers
- ◆ Animal shelters
- ◆ Churches
- ◆ Head Start
- ◆ Even Start
- ◆ Chamber of Commerce
- ◆ Hospice
- ◆ Theaters
- ◆ Adult day-care providers
- ◆ Schools
- ◆ Human services
- ◆ Family Independence Agency
- ◆ Community Mental Health
- ◆ Childcare providers
- ◆ Victim services

I was amazed by the response. Many said they couldn't wait to sit down together and talk. Others said they would like information, but couldn't make a meeting. I was thrilled! We set a meeting date and began our Volunteer Managers League.

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Creating a Volunteer Managers League continued...

Our first meeting was wonderful. It turned into more of a Volunteer Coordinator support group then a planning meeting. I remember trying to guide the group back to the makeshift agenda I had thrown together but with little success. We obviously needed to get a lot of things off our chests and talk about many mutual frustrations. I finally gave up and joined the support group. We talked for more than an hour, and we began to forge a strong commitment to each other and a shared goal of fostering strong volunteerism in our community.

We also established a structure for our work. We voted to have a chairperson and a secretary to take notes, take minutes, and organize the meetings. We decided to have a dedicated day and time for meeting, the first Monday of the month, for example, so that everyone would know to mark their calendars. A reminder notice, an agenda, and meeting minutes would be mailed prior to the next scheduled meeting. In order to inform those who weren't able to participate and to invite them to join, an explanation of what the vision of the Managers League was, a contact number, and meeting date notice was published in local newspapers.

One of our first projects was to gather information about each other and the programs we represented. We wrote half page descriptions of our agencies, groups, and businesses, including volunteer job descriptions and contact persons. We created a booklet from this information with the help of our local college. Students in the art department gathered the information, made copies, and put together the booklets. We called this little booklet *Making a Difference, The Scoop on Volunteering*. Our goal was to distribute this information throughout the community, hoping to reach as many potential volunteers as possible. This was also a needed resource to refer volunteers who may not have been a good match for one agency but perfect for another. After receiving permission, we delivered or mailed this booklet to hospital waiting rooms, Chamber of Commerce offices, clinics, churches, Community Mental

Health centers, newcomers' groups, senior centers, youth groups, civic groups, schools, and colleges.

Another early project was holding a volunteer fair during Volunteer Appreciation Week. We began planning at least six months prior to the event. The project continued to grow and become bigger then we thought it would. The director of the local historic theatre was a very active member of our league and donated the use of the building for the day. We set up individual booths with information, sign-up sheets for prospective volunteers, and free stuff from all members of the league. Volunteers from different agencies engaged in face painting, performed magic tricks, and held balloon games for the children. Local dance groups, musicians, and bands performed free of charge throughout the day, drawing even more visitors. Area newspapers and radio stations provided wonderful free publicity. The League also received many monetary donations—a surprise first fundraiser! We considered this one of our most successful attempts at volunteer recruitment.

Even though I am no longer a volunteer coordinator, the Managers League continues to work hard. They hold two major events every year. One main function is to applaud the volunteers in our community. A volunteer social is held every year during Volunteer Appreciation Week. All area volunteers are invited to the social and honored for their dedication to the community. The second project is *Make a Difference Day*. A dance and social for area senior citizens was held at a local church. Free bus service was provided for those who no longer drive or were living in nursing homes. Lunch was served and music was provided for those wishing to dance or just listen. The next *Make a Difference Day* was held to promote volunteerism in the community for children. A dance and booths with food and fun were provided for children throughout the area.

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Creating a Volunteer Managers League continued...

Collaboration gets things done, especially in reaching out to others in the community who may be facing the same hurdles. It's about tearing down walls and fences. Every community is unique and the first step to creating a united volunteer coordinators league can be accomplished by people saying, "Let's work together."

I am proud to say that there are no territorial wars going on in my community, because we are all working together for the same outcome—to make life better for everyone. You don't have to struggle and beat your head against a wall because you feel alone. It only takes one person with an idea and the will to reach out to others. I have made life-long friends. Someday, when I retire, I know where I can go to volunteer my extra time. I only have to look for a little booklet called *Making a Difference, The Scoop on Volunteering*.

If you would like more information on how to create a Volunteer Managers League, email any questions to jewink16@yahoo.com. For more information on volunteers visit these web sites:

- ◆ www.pointsoflight.org
- ◆ www.worldvolunteerweb.org
- ◆ www.e-volunteerism.com

For more information on *Make a Difference Day*, visit:

- ◆ www.makeadifferenceday.com

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Sexual Assault and Predatory Drugs

■ By Shari Murgittroyd

Introduction

Historically, alcohol has been the drug of choice for many perpetrators of rape and sexual assault in overpowering and controlling their victims. Because alcohol is a legal substance, it is relatively accessible to perpetrators. Alcohol can decrease inhibitions, impair judgment, and render a person physically vulnerable or immobile, creating an easier scenario for a sexual assault to occur. In recent years, a new generation of drugs used to perpetrate sexual assault has been on the rise. These drugs have become known as “date rape drugs” or “predatory drugs” because they are used to incapacitate individuals for the purpose of committing rape or other forms of sexual assault.

Date rape drugs can produce a loss of consciousness, especially when combined with alcoholic beverages. Victims may be unconscious during all or parts of the sexual assault and, upon regaining consciousness, may experience anterograde amnesia – the inability to recall events that occurred while under the influence of the drug (National Drug Intelligence Center, 2004). Due to the sedative properties of these drugs, victims often have no memory of the assault, only an awareness or sense that they were violated. According to Fitzgerald & Riley (2000),

Rape drugs make it relatively easy for rapists to gain control of their victims. Perpetrators do not have to overcome any form of resistance. They do not have to use physical force. They do not have to threaten to harm the victim to get compliance. Nor do they have to be concerned about a victim’s screams attracting attention. The drugs they administer immobilize and silence the victim.

Limited Reporting & Data

Because of the nature of drug-facilitated sexual assault, it is rather difficult to track such occurrences. Many drug-facilitated sexual assaults are not reported because victims are often reluctant to do so. Victims may experience a sense of embarrassment, experience guilt or perceived responsibility, or lack specific recall of the assault. There are no conclusive estimates as to the number of drug-facilitated sexual assaults that occur each year. However, nationwide law enforcement reporting indicates that the number of such assaults appears to be increasing (National Drug Intelligence Center, 2004).

Drugs Used in Sexual Assault

Many drugs can be used to facilitate a sexual assault. This article will briefly review four of the most commonly used drugs identified by the National Drug Intelligence Center—Rohypnol, Ketamine, GHB, and Soma.

Rohypnol is a powerful benzodiazepine (depressant)-up to 10 times stronger than Valium.

Ketamine is a dissociative anesthetic that has a combination of stimulant, depressant, hallucinogenic, and analgesic properties.

GHB is a powerful central nervous system depressant used illicitly for its euphoric and sedative effects.

Soma is a common trade name of the drug *carisoprodol*, a prescription muscle relaxant and central nervous system depressant.

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Sexual Assault and Predatory Drugs continued...

To gather more extensive data on a multitude of drugs, including popular street names, visit the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration website:

- ◆ www.usdoj.gov/dea/pubs/abuse/index.htm

Signs of Being Drugged

Sexual assault victims who believe drugs were surreptitiously given to them typically report remembering sensations of drunkenness that do not correspond with the amount of alcohol consumed, unexplained gaps in memory, altered levels of consciousness, and unexplainable signs of physical trauma (Fitzgerald & Riley, 2000).

The Rape Treatment Center at the UCLA Medical Center in Santa Monica described many similar patterns of suspected sexual assault facilitated by covert drugging reported by victims (Fitzgerald & Riley, 2000). Typically, victims were in what seemed like a comfortable social environment, such as a restaurant, party, or club. Victims often felt disoriented or sick after consuming a drink and the next thing they recalled was waking up hours later, sometimes in a different location. When they regained consciousness, some victims were unsure if they had been sexually assaulted. Others found signs that they had been: they were undressed or their underwear was missing; they had semen stains on their bodies and/or clothing; and/or they had vaginal or anal trauma, such as soreness and/or lacerations. All of these victims reported significant memory impairment. Most could not recall what was done to them, who participated, or how many people were present while they were unconscious. Some victims could recall brief, intermittent periods of awakening, during which they were aware of their surroundings but were unable to move or speak—they felt “paralyzed.”

Difficult Prosecution

According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, sexual assaults facilitated by predatory drugs can be difficult to prosecute or even recognize. Victims may not be aware that they ingested a drug at all; the drugs are odorless

when dissolved in water. Although they possess a slightly salty taste, they are indiscernible when dissolved in beverages such as sodas, juice, liquor, or beer.

Due to memory problems induced by these drugs, the victim may not be aware of the attack until 8-12 hours after it occurred. Memory impairment caused by the drugs also eliminates evidence about the attack. In addition, the drugs are metabolized quickly resulting in limited physical evidence to support the claim that drugs were used to facilitate a sexual assault.

Investigations of suspected drug-facilitated assaults often turn out to be inconclusive because many victims do not seek assistance until hours or days later, in part because the drugs have impaired recall, and in part because victims may not recognize the signs of sexual assault. By the time a victim reports a suspected assault, conclusive forensic evidence may have been lost. Rape drugs are more likely to be detected in the urine than in the blood. Therefore, when victims suspect a drug-facilitated rape and seek help immediately, it is imperative that a urine sample be collected as soon as possible (Fitzgerald & Riley 2000). This can be done prior to the commencement of the law enforcement interview and the forensic medical examination.

Law enforcement personnel, who are often the “first responders,” should be aware of the critical nature of urine specimens in these cases. If a victim must urinate before arriving at a medical care facility, the urine specimen should be saved in a clean container and brought to the medical facility. Standardized rape kits for evidence collection should be updated to include protocols and containers for the collection of urine specimens, as well as blood, in all cases in which drug facilitated rape is suspected.

Increased awareness and education on the dangers of predatory drugs, immediate reporting to law

Continued on next page

Sexual Assault and Predatory Drugs continued...

enforcement, and proper evidence collection can help improve prosecution rates for drug-facilitated sexual assaults.

Safety Precautions

Sexual assault program specialists and victim advocates can provide valuable information to community educators and outreach specialists in their community. The following information can be shared to help prevent the ingestion of predatory drugs and increase overall safety:

- ◆ Don't accept a drink from anyone you don't know well and trust.
- ◆ Drink from tamper-proof bottles and cans and insist on opening them yourself.
- ◆ Insist on pouring or watching while any drink is being mixed or prepared.
- ◆ Do not consume group drinks such as punch bowls.
- ◆ Keep an eye on your drink or open soda can.
- ◆ Do not trust others to watch your drink for you.
- ◆ If you think you've been drugged, do not be afraid to seek medical attention immediately.
- ◆ If someone passes out, and you suspect she or he may have been given drugs, call for medical attention immediately and explain your concerns.

Safety and prevention measures must also be made available in the unique environments in which predatory drugs may be administered. Education and community outreach efforts should focus on audiences such as bartenders, party hosts, cab drivers, and others who may be present in the locations where drug-facilitated rapes are frequently initiated or who might see the victim immediately prior to the assault (Fitzgerald & Riley, 2000). Perpetrators often appear to be the "rescuer" by helping escort intoxicated or unconscious women home. With greater community awareness, audiences such as those described above will be more aware of signs of drugging, be able to help identify suspicious

situations, and be able to alert law enforcement agencies.

Conclusion

Policy-makers at the federal level have responded to this issue ever since reports of drug-facilitated rape began surfacing. Steps were taken to improve the enforcement at the U.S.-Mexican border of the ban on the importation of flunitrazepam (Rohypnol). In addition, the Drug-Induced Rape Prevention and Punishment Act was enacted and includes harsh penalties for the distribution or possession of flunitrazepam and GHB. The Federal Office for Victims of Crime has provided training and technical assistance for a model program geared toward increasing the knowledge and improving the practice of sexual assault nurse examiners with respect to drug-facilitated sexual assaults.

According to the National Drug Intelligence Center, drugs used in sexual assault are typically dispersed in dance clubs, raves, and bars. However, they are increasingly being sold in schools, on college campuses, and at private parties. Some of these drugs can now be purchased through the Internet, while others, particularly prescription drugs, can often be found in homes. Increasing community awareness and prevention measures is a critical component of reducing the risk of drug-facilitated sexual assaults.

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Hearing-Impaired Victims: Resources for Improved Service

■ By Jessica Austin

Communication is the cornerstone of human interaction. Verbal and non-verbal cues alike give us insight into a person's intent, thoughts, and feelings. In the area of victim services, we converse with clients to obtain information about their situations and their expectations of us. When communication is compromised, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to effectively tend to the needs of those for whom we are providing services. When we assist clients who are deaf or hard of hearing, ensuring that we have the proper tools to communicate successfully is of paramount importance.

Federal and state laws extensively address the issue of accommodating individuals with disabilities, including hearing-impaired persons. The best known law dealing with this issue is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, which states in Title III, Section 302, "No individual shall be discriminated against on the basis of disability in the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of any place of public accommodation by any person who owns, leases (or leases to), or operates a place of public accommodation." Social service agencies are included in the definition of "public accommodation" set forth in Title III, Section 301 of the ADA.

The ADA also sets forth rules for the use of "auxiliary aids," meaning items or services that can be used to better assist hearing-impaired individuals in their communications. Such items may be essential to ensuring that hearing-impaired clients are receiving the same level of service and

access as other clients, and may include items such as written materials, interpreter services, and teletypewriters. However, a few exceptions may be applied to this rule. If the use of an auxiliary aid will cause excessive financial burden or if its use will change the basic nature of the business, the agency reserves the right to deny the use of such products and services. Be aware that hearing-impaired persons reserve the right to file a complaint.

Nevertheless, the agency must do everything within its power to continue to provide the same level of service and to ensure effective communication with all clients. For example, if a hearing-impaired client can communicate via written word, and a sign language interpreter would cause a great financial strain on the business, the written exchange is an acceptable substitute. However, in cases where the subject matter is complicated, such as in court proceedings, a qualified interpreter may be required. For guidance on a specific situation or for further clarification, please refer to the Great Lakes ADA Center at www.adagreatlakes.org.

One of the most widely used means of communication with deaf and hard of hearing persons is an interpreter. Interpreters generally use American Sign Language to translate the spoken word and its inflections into visual gestures that the hearing-impaired individual can understand. However, not every hearing-impaired person will prefer to use an interpreter. It is up to the individual to request one, except in situations involving

Continued on next page

Hearing Impaired Victims: Resources for Improved Service continued...

state or local government agencies. These agencies have the responsibility to notify hearing-impaired clients of their right to a certified interpreter. If the person chooses to employ the services of an interpreter, it is then up to the government agency to arrange for one. It is important to note that in no case may a public accommodation charge an individual for interpreter services.

A good starting point for finding information regarding interpreter services, as well as other resources to better serve the hearing-impaired population, is the Michigan Division on Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DODHH) within the Department of Labor and Economic Growth. Not only does the DODHH have an extensive interpreter directory, it also can provide technical assistance to businesses in the areas of compliance with the law and providing better accessibility to the hearing-impaired. The DODHH supplies interpreter services to state government agencies as well.

One business dedicated to interpreter referral, including 24-hour emergency services, is Sign Language Services of Michigan, found at www.signlanguageservicesofmichigan.com. Sign Language Services of Michigan employs over fifty state and nationally certified interpreters. They also conduct ADA compliance training.

Another source for finding qualified interpreters is the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), located at www.rid.org. RID's databases house, among other resources, interpreter referral agencies, individual interpreters, and interpreter workshops. Upon a quick search for interpreters in Michigan, 214 names were found.

There are many organizations dedicated to advancing communication options for the hearing-impaired community. For further information, please contact the Michigan Division on Deaf and Hard of Hearing at 517-334-8000.

Web Resources

Michigan DODHH:

http://www.michigan.gov/cis/0,1607,7-154-28077_28545---,00.html

ADA Title III Technical Assistance Manual:

<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/taman3.html>

e-Michigan Deaf and Hard of Hearing People:

<http://www.michdhh.org>

Great Lakes ADA:

<http://www.adagreatlakes.org>

Sign Language Services of Michigan:

<http://www.signlanguageservicesofmichigan.com>

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf:

<http://www.rid.org>

Jessica Austin serves as a Research Assistant for the Crime Victim Services Technical Assistance Project at the Michigan Public Health Institute's Center for Collaborative Research in Health Outcomes and Policy.

Technical Update



WWW.Walter's Words of Wisdom Navigating Michigan VOCA Online Resources

■ by Walter Pelowski

In each issue of The Michigan Advocate, Walter Pelowski of Agate Software, Inc., discusses technological developments impacting the VOCA online application and reporting systems.

As many of you know and can probably recite by heart by now, the CVSC website was designed for Internet Explorer (IE) and Netscape versions 4.0 and above. Those requirements were set over four years ago and are quite dated by this point. Quite honestly, if you're running either IE or Netscape right now and your browser is not at least at version 6.0, your browser is out of date. Thankfully, however, two links at the bottom of <http://sigmaweb.mdch.state.mi.us/> will show you how and where to update to the newest browser available. (Yeah, yeah, we've talked about all this before, but I humbly entreat you to keep reading.)

Sadly, even the latest versions of IE and Netscape have become old to us nerd-types. The Internet community both demands and deserves updates in browser technology so that the World Wide Web experience can continue to improve. IE 6.0, which is the latest release of Internet Explorer browser, is now nearly four years old. Ever since Microsoft conquered Netscape in the browser wars, there has been little innovation from Microsoft, at least where browser technology is concerned. In fact, in 2003 Microsoft announced that IE 6.0 was the last stand-alone Web browser that the company would ever develop. What does that mean to you, the user? It means that all future enhancements to

Web browser technology will be incorporated into the Operating System. In other words, in order to get a better Internet experience, your pals at Microsoft seem to be cajoling you into buying a new version of their operating system. However, hope is on the horizon. From the remnants of the Netscape code comes a new browser called Firefox: <http://www.mozilla.org/products/firefox/>. It is free like its predecessors, and, like the search engine Google, it is a return to simplicity. Firefox strips out a lot of the bloated, unnecessary code that made Netscape so unmanageable. The developers of Firefox wanted to make a browser that was both easy to use by the basic user and sophisticated enough for the uber-geek. Having used it for a couple of months now, I think they've succeeded.

So, what does this mean to you? Both myself and Miss Megan Savage (your new CVSC Online Grant System project manager—Megan, please take a bow) have been testing the site using Firefox and have determined that you can use Firefox to access the site as well. I encourage you to check out Firefox and see why it's the best browser currently available. More good news: as a result of Firefox taking away some of Microsoft's precious browser market-share, Microsoft has announced that it will release another stand-alone version of IE, namely IE 7.0. Although it seems that IE 7.0 will be mostly a security update, almost any

Continued on next page

Technical Update continued...

update is a good update at this point. So I encourage you to join me in embracing the benefits of competition by choosing to install the Firefox browser. It has a lot of nice features, including tabbed browsing, useful downloadable extensions, live bookmarks, and other enhancements that are currently far superior to that of Internet Explorer and Netscape. Of course, the day is on the horizon where Microsoft will crush Firefox like it did Netscape, but in the meantime, the browser wars are back on.

More Windows Updates

Since the last newsletter, there have been some Microsoft Windows Updates that may have affected you. If you are using a machine that runs Windows XP, you may want to visit <http://windowsupdate.microsoft.com> to get Windows XP Service Pack 2. (You may also reference my Michigan Advocate Fall 2003 article, which gives more information about what Windows Update is all about.) Service Pack 2 has some good security enhancements that will make your machine more secure. Microsoft has also decided to address some of the issues with adware and spyware on users' machines, which I addressed in my previous article. The tool that Microsoft is providing is called the "Malicious Software Removal Tool" and is available for users with Microsoft Windows XP, Windows 2000, and Windows Server 2003. You may download this tool from the Windows Update site or <http://www.microsoft.com/security/malwareremove/default.aspx>. Although the tool is destined to improve, Ad-aware and Spybot - Search and Destroy, both of which I mentioned in my last article, are still encouraged.

TIP for Searching

If you haven't already downloaded it, the Google Desktop Search tool is now out of beta and has had its first official release. This useful tool, developed by the creators of the world's best search engine, is very easy to use and is much better than a standard Windows search. So if

you're often searching your machine for documents, email messages, or other files or correspondence with certain pieces of text included, make your searching much easier by downloading GDS at <http://desktop.google.com/>.

Personal Note

Well, this was my last article as a single guy. I married the lovely lady you see in the picture below. How did I manage to sway such a wonderful woman to spend her life with me, you ask? (Don't feel guilty, everyone asks.) I offered her free computer help for life.



Walter Pelowski is the primary designer of the CVSC online grants system developed by Agate Software.

The Crime Victim Services Commission and the Michigan Public Health Institute would like to wish Walter and Melissa all the best as they begin their life together.