

OVS Outreach

Spring 2023

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From the Director's Desk



As we enter April, we begin a season renowned for its sense of renewal. Spring is here, the weather has warmed, and we are looking forward to brighter days. It's also a busy month in the field of victim services as we commemorate National

Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW) from April 23 to April 29, Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and Child Abuse Prevention Month.

This year, the theme of NCVRW is *Survivor Voices: Elevate. Engage. Effect Change.* As the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) notes, this theme calls on communities to "amplify the voices of survivors and create environments where survivors have the confidence that they will be heard, believed and supported." To honor NCVRW, OVC will be sponsoring a candlelight vigil on Wednesday, April 26 at 7pm on the National Mall in Washington D.C. For more information, please visit the OVC website [here](#).



For Sexual Assault Awareness Month, OVS will highlight the ways in which sexual assault survivors can access assistance, protect their health, and have time to make informed decisions about how they wish to proceed. Not only does OVS pay for sexual assault evidence collection kits without any out-of-pocket costs to the victim of crime/survivor, but we also recently opened the State's Sexual

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NYS Victim Impact Survey

OVS is seeking to identify gaps in and barriers to victim services and we need your help!

In partnership with the Council of State Governments Justice Center, OVS is conducting a [New York State Victim Impact Survey](#) to learn directly from victims and survivors about today's most pressing short and long-term victim needs.

Individual responses are completely anonymous and are not shared with any other agencies, including law enforcement. Collective feedback will be used to help establish future victim services priorities to better serve victims of crime.

Please share this survey with your organizations, clients, and extended networks, including anyone who has:

- experienced harm, violence, or victimization firsthand,
- witnessed harm, violence, or victimization to someone else, or
- known someone in their community who has experienced harm, violence, or victimization ■

Click Here to Access the New York State Victim Impact Survey through April 19th!



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From the Director's Desk

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Offense Evidence Collection Kit (SOECK) Storage Facility. This is important because we know that 63% of sexual assaults are not reported to police, and a very small number of those lead to an arrest or conviction. The reasons for this vary, but many victims and survivors of crime are not ready to report the crime and need time to decide their next steps. Now, the State has a centralized location where kits are sent from medical providers and held for up to 20 years. Victims and survivors of crime have time to make decisions about whether to have the kits sent for testing or have them destroyed.

In addition to all we have going on, OVS has partnered with the Council of State Governments Justice Center to launch the Victim Impact Survey. This survey is intended to anonymously gather information about experiences of victims, survivors, and bystanders of harm and violence. The survey will be open until April 19, 2023. To share and/or take the survey, please visit ovs.ny.gov/survey.

Finally, OVS is excited to host its 2023 Conference *Resilience: Redefining Victim Services in an Age of Uncertainty*, from August 22-24, in Albany, New York. We are busy planning this incredible event and are grateful for the support of so many of you in making this an amazing experience. For the most up to date information, please bookmark and visit ovs.ny.gov/conference often!

As we look forward to the season ahead, I want to thank you for your continued commitment to providing the highest quality services to victims of crime across New York State.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Cronin, Esq.

Free TTARP Webinars: Register Today!

OVS reminds you to register for our upcoming free webinars presented in partnership with the CUNY Institute of State and Local Governance (ISLG).

Registration is open to all OVS-funded advocates and allied professionals, and all sessions run from 1–2:30 p.m. You must register for each training separately. Please click the links below to learn more and register!

Healing-Centered Documentation

Presented by Kenton P. Kirby, *CVK Consulting, LLC*

Wednesday, April 19, 2023

Enhancing Your Services: Planning for Accessibility

Presented by Sandra Harrell & Olga Trujillo, *Activating Change*

Wednesday, May 24, 2023

Managing Yourself & Up with a Trauma-Informed, DEI Lens

Presented by Rhokeisha Ford, *CUNY ISLG*

Wednesday, June 21, 2023

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Free TTARP Webinars: Register Today!

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TTARP provides **free, confidential and on-demand** targeted training and technical assistance to OVS-funded victim assistance programs through [the CUNY Institute for State & Local Governance](#). Services are provided across five key, customizable Purpose Areas:

- Trauma-Informed Organizations
- Organizational Sustainability
- Leadership and Supervision
- Engagement and Outreach
- Program Development

Click Here to learn more and
Submit a Request Today!



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FOR STATE & LOCAL
GOVERNANCE

Training and Technical Assistance Request Program (TTARP)

OVS – Advocating for the Rights of Survivors

Under Executive Law §623(10), it is part of OVS' legal responsibilities *"to advise and assist the governor in developing policies designed to recognize the legitimate rights, needs and interests of crime victims."* In fulfilling this responsibility, OVS participates in what is referred to as "proposing departmental bills." These are proposed changes to the law which can impact the operation of the agency or serve to benefit survivors of crime in general. This session, OVS has proposed, and Governor Hochul has advanced, two departmental bills to the New York State Legislature for their consideration.

Departmental #75 – Means to ensure that any DNA which is taken from a survivor of sexual assault is not stored or catalogued into any DNA index system, reasoning that sexual assault survivors should not be later prosecuted for an unrelated crime using their DNA which was given for the purpose of aiding law enforcement and the court system in bringing their attacker to justice. In San Francisco last year, the police used DNA from a sexual offense evidence kit, which had been uploaded to a DNA database, to link a sexual assault survivor to an unrelated crime more than 6 years later.

Allowing survivors' DNA to be catalogued and possibly used to prosecute them of other crimes tells sexual assault survivors that in turn they could be the ones treated like criminals. This would have a chilling effect, as sexual assault survivors might not be as comfortable coming forward to report these

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Advocating for Rights (cont'd)

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crimes. While current policy in New York State does not allow cataloguing of DNA from victims and survivors of crime, it is important that this be codified in law.

Departmental #76 – Is a measure that makes many improvements to New York's "Son of Sam Law" and the right(s) to collect restitution. It limits a beneficiary's ability to renounce all or part of their interest in an estate if the beneficiary is also subject to the provisions of Executive law §632-a (Son of Sam Law). This will protect the rights of survivors to proceed with civil actions against such funds. It makes changes to specify that any action brought upon a restitution order may be commenced within 20 years. It also amends the law to provide for the same 20-year period for actions brought under the "Son of Sam" Law. Finally, it would amend the law to direct that in addition to the Surrogate's Court, any officers of the court or attorneys involved in the estate proceeding must also notify OVS if they are aware that any legatee or beneficiary was or is a convicted person.

These important changes are meant to ensure that people cannot take steps to avoid their responsibilities under the Son of Sam Law. It is also an overall simplification in the interests for survivors of crime to collect the restitution due to them after a criminal conviction.

Once advanced to the Legislature, it is up to each House to introduce the proposals. Please share these with any of your Legislators who represent you or with whom you interact. Let us work together to have these proposals introduced as bills, passed by the Legislature and signed into law. ■

OVS Storage Facility Begins Accepting SOECK

In late fall 2022, OVS developed guidance for hospitals about recommended storage conditions for Sexual Offense Evidence Collection Kits (SOECK), drug facilitated sexual assault (DFSA) collections, and other items; how OVS will provide training materials to hospitals; the way in which hospitals should provide information to victims of crime during the onboarding process; and how they should ship items to the facility.

OVS developed a phase-in plan to determine the time necessary for the storage facility to receive, process, and store kits and their related items. This gives OVS the flexibility to adjust its intake process as needed to allow for smooth operation of the facility, which will only be able to accept a certain number of kits per day.

In January 2023, the OVS Storage Facility began accepting SOECK and related items. Currently the OVS Storage Facility staff are diligently assisting Phase 1 hospital and medical facility staff members to complete the onboarding processes and prepare for sending their items to the facility.

An overview and estimated timeline of the four phases is below:

- **January 2023:** Phase 1 began for the Capital Region, Mohawk Valley, and Western New York
- **May 1, 2023:** Phase 2 begins for Central New York, Long Island, and North Country
- **August 1, 2023:** Phase 3 begins for New York City
- **November 1, 2023:** Phase 4 begins for the Finger Lakes, Mid-Hudson Valley, and Southern Tier

Prior to the start of each phase, OVS will provide hospitals and medical facilities with all applicable training materials, including a Kit Inventory and Tracking System (KITS) User Manual and a series of short videos on how to use the system; information on how to request a KITS user role; and additional guidance on how to ship items to the facility.

If you are in Phase 1 and have not heard from us or started the training process, please reach out to soeck@ovs.ny.gov. ■

How to Be More Trauma-Informed in the Workplace

By Jacklynn Blanchard, Excelsior Fellow

OVS employs a trauma informed approach to all of our interactions with victims of crime, victim service providers and our co-workers. Trauma is experienced by all of us, including our co-workers. In fact, we may have experienced trauma ourselves, but rationalized the traumatic event or compartmentalized the memory as a coping strategy. Better familiarizing ourselves with the causes and side effects of trauma, as well as learning how to be more trauma informed, improves our interactions both in and outside of the workplace.

What is trauma?

A national study found that an [89.7%](#) of US adults had been exposed to at least one traumatic event in their lifetime. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) [defines trauma](#) as “an event, series of events, or set of circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.” Examples of traumatic events or circumstances include experiencing persistent racism, losing a loved one, or living through a near death experience. By accepting the breadth of trauma, and reflecting on our own experiences, empathizing with the victims of crime and others who we interact with in a professional capacity becomes easier. While their trauma might be different than our own, the pain is familiar.

It is important to recognize that trauma is common, and that recognition can be the first step to becoming more trauma informed. The CDC reports that over half of women and one in three men have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. Additionally, one in three women and one in four men report having experienced severe physical violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. In the past year, one in seven children in the United States have experienced child abuse or neglect, and one in four girls and one in 13 boys have experienced sexual abuse. These statistics are only based on reported cases and given that so many instances of violence or neglect go unreported, the real number of victims of crime is likely much higher.

How do you identify the signs of trauma?

An individual’s experiences of trauma and their responses to it are unique. Trauma impacts how the person sees themselves. They may feel helpless, worthless, or mistrustful of others. They may view the world as dangerous and feel unsafe. Unfortunately, victims of crime may inadvertently be re-traumatized if a trauma-informed approach is not applied to interactions with them. Examples of [triggers](#) for re-traumatization may include the victim of crime feeling threatened or attacked, shamed, vulnerable or scared, feeling a loss of control, or experiencing a sudden and unexpected change. Victims of crime who have had previous adverse experiences with the criminal justice system may feel additional stress if they are forced to interact with law enforcement or testify in court. Victims of crime experiencing traumatization may demonstrate symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) like negative changes to their mood, intrusive thoughts, avoidant behavior, and trouble sleeping.

Victims of crime may behave aggressively or erratically and that is normal. Trauma and stress affect everyone differently and experiencing a traumatic event can cause personality changes. Judging and categorizing victims of crime by stereotypes can cause further harm. It is also important to remember that your experience with the victim of crime is in the wake of a traumatic event and does not tell you their full story.

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How to Be More Trauma-Informed (cont'd)

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Tips for being more trauma informed:

- Be patient and ask [trauma sensitive](#) questions like, “What have you been through?” rather than, “What is wrong with you?”
- Validate the victim of crime’s experience by utilizing empathetic statements like, “I can see that was really challenging for you.” Doing this can help to build trust and diffuse a tense dynamic.
- Be mindful of your nonverbal communication. Remember that the victim of crime is not just responding to your words but also your tone, your gestures, and your facial expressions.
- Be an attentive listener. Research has found that people identify others’ emotions more accurately when they listen rather than just relying on facial cues.
- Prioritize honesty and transparency in your interactions with victims of crime. Answer their questions in a calm and direct manner.
- You can’t pour from an empty cup. Take care of your emotional health so that it is easier to stay calm and regulated in high stress situations. Victim services is difficult work and can be very triggering. Check in with yourself. If you are feeling triggered, pause and practice deep breathing. Centering yourself can help both you and the victim of crime to stay calm. ■

Reminder to Save the Date!

A reminder that the 2023 OVS Conference will take place August 22 – 24 in Albany, NY.

Registration will open summer 2023. Stay up to date on news, including event agenda, ticket prices, and more, at ovs.ny.gov/conference. ■



Resilience:

Redefining Victim Services in an Age of Uncertainty

2023 Conference • August 22 – 24 • Albany, NY

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e-newsletter