

# OVS Outreach

## Spring 2020

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### From the Director's Desk



When my staff and I first started brainstorming contents for this newsletter, the world was a different place. Social distancing had not yet made it into our vocabulary and our daily practices. We went to the office, met face-to-face and worked every day to help

ensure that victims of crime and their families received the services, support and financial assistance they need.

Now we – and the vast majority of you – work remotely, relying on email, the internet and online platforms such as FaceTime, Zoom, Skype and WebEx, etc. to stay connected, support each other, and most importantly, to continue serving the individuals who need our help.

As we adjust to this new normal, it has become clear that this pandemic is likely to have a disproportionate, negative impact on the most vulnerable victims: children who are sexually and physically abused, and individuals who are victims of domestic and sexual violence, and elder abuse. This makes the work we do even more essential and I want to assure you that my staff and I are here to support you during this unprecedented time.

We are sharing important guidance through advisory bulletins, the most recent of which is

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### Novel Coronavirus and OVS

In response to the public health emergency for the COVID-19 virus, New York State has directed all nonessential State employees to not report to work beginning **March 17, 2020**. While some non-essential staff shall work from home, to the extent practicable, grants unit staff will be available to assist their programs and programs should reach out to their staff as needed. Even with this directive, OVS will continue processing emergency awards and reimbursing your program, even if services are temporarily reduced, provided that your organization has the appropriate policies in place and all staff are treated equally. Please upload already developed policies in into the grantee document folder in the Grants Gateway or send an attachment in an email to your contract management specialist.

Additionally, for any expenses incurred due to cancellation of trainings/conferences, OVS will reimburse as we normally would, unless the program received a credit or was refunded those costs. Please do everything possible to mitigate potential expenses by cancelling as quickly as you can and/or obtaining credit for future travel.

OVS **strongly** encourages all programs to file claims through the portal. This allows for faster processing and, if the ability of OVS to process paper claims is delayed, staff will still be able to process electronic submissions so that victims' claims will not be affected.

If your program is going to be significantly reduced or closed because of the health emergency, you must let your contract management specialist know immediately. This will allow OVS to assist in redirecting victims to other programs for assistance.

Finally, The New York State Department of Health's Coronavirus website provides the most up-to-date information related to COVID-19. This website is available here: <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/coronavirus/>

On behalf of the New York State Office of Victim Services, thank you for your commitment to providing the highest quality services to innocent victims of crime in New York State. ■



Office of  
Victim Services

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## From the Director's Desk

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included in this issue of *OVS Outreach*. Please watch your email for future updates. Staff continue to process emergency awards and claims and contract managers and claims staff are available to answer any questions you may have.

OVS was able to quickly adapt its operations because it had a continuity of operations plan (COOP) in place to ensure essential services would continue in the event of exigent circumstances. Your program may have similar plans in place that have allowed you to adapt to providing services, regardless of the disruption. This is something for which we all must be prepared. To help ensure the sustainability of our funded programs, OVS will offer training and technical assistance that will provide agencies and nonprofits with assistance and guidance related to operating under difficult circumstances, including anticipated reductions in federal VOCA funding. Additional details about that training will be shared once it is finalized.

Before I close, I want to remind everyone that the week of April 19 is [National Crime Victims' Rights Week](#). In years past, this week has been marked with events aimed at bringing people together to raise awareness about the importance of giving victims of crime a voice, in the criminal justice system and in their communities. If you are planning virtual events via social media, tag us at [facebook.com/nyspublicsafety](https://www.facebook.com/nyspublicsafety) and/or @NYSPublicSafety on Twitter so we can follow your great work.

In closing, I want to extend my sincerest thanks to everyone on the front lines of this fight: first responders, medical and law enforcement professionals, and all of you, the victim assistance providers and advocates who assist individuals on what may be the darkest day of their lives.

Stay safe and please reach out if the Office of Victim Services can assist.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Cronin, Esq.

## OVS Launches NEW Resilience Webinar Series

We understand that programs are under unique forms of stress during this time, and OVS is here to support you. In response, OVS is launching a [Resilience Webinar Series](#) with the goal of helping you tackle some of the pressing issues you and your programs may be facing. Click the links below to register for each webinar or to access the webinar recording after the scheduled date.

Tuesday, April 14<sup>th</sup>  
11:00 am

[Managing and Supporting Staff Remotely](#)

Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup>  
10:00 am

[Caring for Yourself While Caring for Others: Self-Care and Stress Inoculation](#)

Thursday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>  
1:00 pm

[Managing Yourself Remotely](#)

Tuesday, April 28<sup>th</sup>  
10:00 am

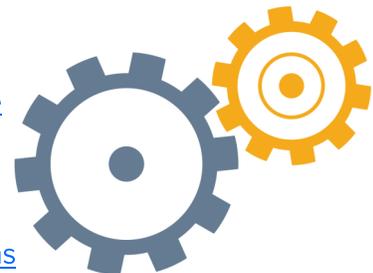
[Financial Sustainability for Victim Assistance Programs](#)

Tuesday, May 5  
1:00 pm

[Building and Managing Teams Remotely](#)

Wednesday, May 13<sup>th</sup>  
11:00 am

[Managing Performance Remotely](#)



Previously recorded webinars are also available on the [OVS Training YouTube Channel](#). ■

## Tips for COVID-19 Anxiety

With measures being taken around New York State and the world to stop the spread of Novel Coronavirus, the OVS understands that this is a time of increased stress and worry for you, your colleagues, and your families.

To help all of us recognize and address our stress, OVS has shared the New York State Office of Mental Health tips for [Managing Anxiety in an Anxiety-Provoking Situation](#) online. Highlighted below are a few of these tips:

- **Reduce Anxiety by Reducing Risk** - Ways to reduce risk include practicing good hygiene (e.g. sneezing and coughing into your elbow, sneezing into a tissue and immediately throwing the tissue away, wash hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, etc.). In addition, create a plan in case your regular routine is disrupted, such as setting up remote work and alternative childcare arrangements. Setting out a plan can help reduce anxiety by taking charge of the things you can control.
- **Manage Your Information Flow** – Getting regular, factual information is important. However, continuously scrolling through social media or constantly refreshing the news is likely to lead to increased anxiety. Pick a few trusted news outlets – such as the [state and local health authorities](#), [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), or [World Health Organization](#) – and commit to checking once or twice a day for updates.

- **Practice Good Self-Care** – This includes exercise, eating healthy foods, and sleeping an adequate amount at night. If possible, spend some time outside. Avoid staying up late to monitor the news.
- **Find Meaningful Tasks and Roles** – Find meaningful tasks and roles within your support network to channel your anxiety, such as coordinating deliveries of groceries to those unable to leave home, curating kids' activity ideas for parents working from home, or video calling or calling those who might feel socially isolated. Supporting others is beneficial to the supporter as well.
- **Savor Small Positive Moments and Amplify Positive Stories** – Try to cultivate a mental wellness practice, such as writing in a gratitude journal, or talking nightly with your family about moments during the day that were fun or enjoyable.

A cadre of mental health professionals are volunteering to staff an Emotional Support Line providing free and confidential support to individuals who are experiencing increased anxiety during the pandemic: 1-844-863-9314. Check out the [OMH website](#) for more information. In addition, the state Office of Addiction Services and Supports has a toll-free line and text option (877-846-7369 or 467369) for those struggling with addiction. ■

## OVS Staff See a Way to Help Others

OVS staff members often think of ways to assist people in their communities in creative and meaningful ways. They have collected personal items for children going into foster care, food for local food pantries, presents for children during the holidays, and gently used books through the state's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Book Drive.

OVS Contract Management Specialist Nancy Sniffen recognized a different need: people who need eyeglasses but cannot afford them. Nancy, together with Assistant to the Director Debra Harrington and OVS Administrative Assistant II Shaniqua Lloyd, collaborated with the [Lions Eye Bank](#) of Albany to collect gently used, but no longer needed, eyeglasses.

The month-long donation drive yielded more than 175 pairs of glasses, which the Lions Club will send to people in need across the world. Thank you, Nancy for your initiative! ■



*Contract Management Specialist Nancy Sniffen (L) and Administrative Assistant II Shaniqua Lloyd pose with donated glasses.*

## Wear Teal to Support the End of Military Sexual Trauma on April 23

The Syracuse VA Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program Coordinator and Military Sexual Trauma Coordinators are partnering to support Sexual Assault Awareness Month by encouraging veterans, their caregivers, families, and friends to wear teal on April 23, 2020.

Military sexual trauma (MST) refers to sexual assault or sexual harassment during military service. Although both women and men may suffer in silence for many years after an MST experience, research indicates that men are significantly less likely than women to reach out for help and may feel particularly alone. When screened by VA health care providers, about one in four women and one in 100 men report a history of MST.

Raising awareness about this topic promotes consent, reduces the risk of unwanted sexual activity and connects veterans to resources needed for recovery. Everyone is welcome to wear teal in solidarity and to support the end of sexual violence on April 23, 2020.

For more information, please contact the IPVAP Coordinator Erin Scott at 315-425-4400, ext. 54076 or MST Coordinators Susan Spara at 315-425-4400, ext. 51033, or Brittanie Mendez at 315-207-0120. ■

*Submitted by Erin Scott, LCSW*

*Program coordinator of the Syracuse VA Medical Center Intimate Partner Violence Assistance*

## OVS Staff Participate in Trauma-Informed Care Learning Collaborative

Staff from OVS and other state agencies have been involved in a statewide “Trauma-Informed Care Learning Collaborative,” the goal of which is to “integrate a trauma-informed approach into all aspects of State work.”

**What is a trauma-informed approach?** The approach “realizes the wide-spread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in client, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization.”

A trauma-informed service model is vital to OVS’ mission. It not only offers a lens through which Compensation staff provide empathetic services to clients, and Grants staff respond to the vital services provided by VAPs, but also how OVS staff work with each other and care for themselves. Upcoming trainings for OVS staff will focus on the science of trauma and its societal and health impacts and encourage staff to think about new ways of approaching their work, relationships and communities. Visit [this website](#) for an introduction to trauma and its impacts. ■

## Domestic Violence and OVS Benefits

Domestic violence, also referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV), domestic abuse or relationship abuse, is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship. Domestic violence can take many forms including physical, verbal, emotional, economic, religious, reproductive and sexual abuse.

While financial compensation is generally available to victims who have been injured as a result of a crime, victims of domestic violence who have not suffered physical injuries also may be eligible for assistance that can help victims and their families rebuild their lives. The benefits include: loss of earnings, essential personal property (for victims under 18, and over 60 years of age), security devices, transportation to court in connection with the prosecution of the crime, counseling and related transportation expenses, securing a crime scene, occupational or job training, moving expenses, the cost of residing at or utilizing services provided by shelters for battered spouses and children, and crime scene cleanup.

Recent amendments to state law now allow victims of the following crimes to apply for compensation:

- First- and second-degree harassment (PL 240.25, PL 240.26)
- Hate crimes (PL 485.05)
- First-, second-, and third-degree robbery (PL 160.15, subsections 2, 3 and 4; PL 160.10, subsections 1, 2b and 3; and PL 160.05)
- First- and second- degree dissemination of an unlawful surveillance image (PL 250.60 and PL 250.55)

OVS also may be able to assist adult victims who report abuse that happened to them as a child. The 2019 Child Victims Act gave these individuals a window of opportunity to report the crimes and seek civil action. ■

## Mobile Unit Allows Regional Child Advocacy Center to Improve Services to Children

Last summer, staff from the Regional Child Advocacy Center (CAC) of Fulton, Montgomery and Hamilton Counties drove away with a new mobile CAC, made possible due to the leadership and vision of OVS Executive Director Elizabeth Cronin, Esq. and state Office of Children and Family Services Commissioner Sheila Poole.

The mobile unit (pictured, right), equipped with an interviewing room, observation room, waiting room and restroom, gives our CAC the ability to bring our services, including forensic interviewing, to child victims and their non-offending family members across our three counties: a total of 2,751 square miles!

It also allows us to address lack of public transportation to the rural and remote area of our counties, limited resources for many of our families, and an expanding need. Because of this mobile unit, our CAC will continue to support and assist our most vulnerable population, our children. ■



*Submitted by Janine Dykeman*

*Executive director of the Mental Health Association in Fulton and Montgomery Counties, which operates the regional Child Advocacy Center and the mobile unit.*