

# OVS Outreach

## Fall 2022

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### From the Director's Desk



In September, OVS held its biennial Seeking Solutions Summit, and I am pleased to say we were able to gather in person once again. We focused on *Restorative Justice: A Survivor-Centric Approach* to consider not only what Restorative

Justice is, but how the field is expanding and what to expect going forward. Our incredible planning committee put together an impressive and comprehensive list of speakers, who not only shared their experience with restorative practices, but offered insight into how we can continue to innovate the field.

Restorative justice practices are rooted in indigenous traditions and cultures and have been adopted as an alternative practice that allows for collaboration and healing, moving away from a system of retribution and punishment. The practice emphasizes accountability and conflict resolution, recognizing that crime affects far more than the individual victim and can involve the entire community. To have maximum impact, restorative justice must also place an emphasis on supporting survivors and providing necessary resources. You can see how such a practice could tie so closely together with the vital work we do here at OVS.

A highlight of this year's summit was our keynote speaker, Chaplain Clementina Chéry from the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute in Dorchester, Massachusetts. Chaplain Chéry gave an impassioned and inspirational presentation about the murder of her son and her ongoing commitment to her community by establishing an

### TTARP is Returning!

OVS is pleased to announce the return of the Training and Technical Assistance Request Program (TTARP).



TTARP provides **free** on-demand targeted training and technical assistance to OVS-funded Victim Assistance Programs (VAPs) through our designated training partners at CUNY Institute for State & Local Governance (ISLG).

The program officially launches on **Tuesday, October 31**, when you will be able to view the TTARP Catalog of Services and begin submitting official requests for review.

Join us on **Wednesday, November 9, 2022** from 1 - 2:30 p.m. for a launch webinar with ISLG outlining the program and how it works, with a complimentary training on Developing Meaningful Survivor Engagement Models. **Registration is free - click the button below to learn more and reserve your spot today!** ■

[Click Here to Register for the TTARP Launch Webinar!](#)



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institute which provides support to survivors of homicide, as well as healing, training, and resources.

I want to thank the teams that made this year's summit one for the books. Thank you for your continued commitment to providing the highest quality services to victims of crime across New York State. I am proud to be part of such an incredible team.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Cronin, Esq.

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## SOECK Storage Facility Updates

Part II of Chapter 56 of the Laws of 2021, named OVS as the agency responsible for the storage of certain sexual offense evidence collection kits (SOECK), drug facilitated sexual assault (DFSA) kits, and associated items for a twenty-year period from the date of collection. OVS has established a secure storage facility, located in Washington County, which will receive and store items that are collected at the over 200 hospitals and medical facilities throughout New York State. Previously, the items collected by a medical facility were stored for as little as 30 days, based on storage availability and policies at each facility.

Since the passage of this law in 2021, OVS has been working to set up the new storage facility. We have conducted renovations of a state-owned facility to develop a secure, temperature controlled, long-term storage facility. OVS held several outreach sessions with various stakeholders to receive feedback on facility operations and coordination with medical facilities.

A tracking system was developed that will allow OVS to maintain the chain of custody for each item, provide notifications to survivors, and retrieve items when requested to be returned to the survivor or released to law enforcement. Training materials are currently being developed for both hospitals and survivors and will be shared when available. Procedures will be in place to provide diligent efforts to notify the survivor prior to the expiration of the twenty-year storage period, maintain the integrity of the items in OVS custody, and ensure that survivors' rights are protected.

Additional updates will be provided as OVS continues our work on this important initiative. ■

## 2022 RFA Update

October is officially the start of the new contract term for our Victim and Witness Assistance grant program, which funds services to victims of crime and their families across New York State. Since the 2022 Request for Applications (RFA) awards were announced earlier this summer, OVS staff have been working diligently with the Victim Assistance Programs (VAPs) that received funding to finalize budget information and work toward contract execution.

The RFA received a strong response from the community, with applications requesting more than \$493 million in funding. While only \$373 million in resources was available, this shows the necessity and importance of the program. The available funding included an annual \$14.4 million in State support that was provided in the FY 2023 Enacted State Budget to keep the overall level of funding for victim assistance stable.

Final awards were made to support 239 contracts. The awards total \$373 million and cover the period 10/01/2022 through 09/30/2025. These awards include 19 organizations that were not funded in our last RFA cycle and are listed below:

Bronx Legal Services	Harlem Hospital Center for Victim Support	Soul Saving Station for Every Nation of Saratoga Springs
Central Family Life Center	Kings Against Violence Initiative (KAVI)	Tioga County Department of Social Services
Circulo de la Hispanidad	Livingston County Sheriff's Office	Upper Hudson Planned Parenthood
Dominican Women's Development Center	Nassau County Office of Crime Victim Advocate	Westchester Jewish Community Services
Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyer's Project	The New York Foundling	Yonkers Community Action Program
Fulton County District Attorney's Office	NYC Civilian Complaint Review Board	
Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS)	Shalom Task Force	

OVS also tracks the provision of service in certain priority categories. The breakout of funding for the 2022 RFA awards is shown below:

Priority Category	Dollar Value (3 year)	Percentage
Domestic Violence	\$176.0 million	47%
Underserved	\$86.2 million	23%
Child Abuse	\$61.8 million	17%
Sexual Assault	\$49.2 million	13%

We look forward to working with all the funded programs over the next three years. If you have questions related to your award, please reach out to your assigned Contract Management Specialist or [ovsgrants@ovs.ny.gov](mailto:ovsgrants@ovs.ny.gov). ■

# OVS Brings Advocates Together for Biennial Summit

OVS hosted more than 130 advocates from across the state at its biennial **Seeking Solutions Summit, Restorative Justice: A Survivor-Centric Approach** on September 19 and 20 at the Marriott Albany.

Attendees heard from experts in the field about ways restorative practices may be implemented into their own program and community. Special highlights included a panel discussion about where the field is headed, breakout sessions by Common Justice, Families for Safe Streets, Buffalo SNUG, and the Director of Employment & Training in Warren County, and a powerful keynote by Chaplain Clementina Chéry, who detailed her work to promote healing after the murder of her son.

We were so happy to be back in person for this important event; to see and network with advocates and learn more from these experts and one another. ■



*Chaplain Clementina Chéry (left) and OVS Director Elizabeth Cronin.*



*From left to right: Chana Widawski, Robin Middleman Filepp, and Hillary Packer.*



*From left to right: Jessica Peñaranda, Cesaré Robinson, Peju Oyeyemi, and RJ Maccani from Common Justice.*



*From left to right: La'Tryse Anderson, Dina Thompson, Lindsay Acker, and Willie Griffin.*



*Liza Ochsendorf, Director of Employment and Training, Warren County.*



# Integrating Restorative Justice into the Criminal Justice System

*Submitted by Adam Mansky, advisor to Westchester District Attorney Miriam Rocah and a senior research scholar at NYU Marron Institute of Urban Management.*

For some time, people have been talking about restorative justice as a way to resolve disputes and crimes, while minimizing the harms that the criminal justice system all-too-often exacts on survivors, communities, and defendants. But until a few years ago, other than in a few rare instances, restorative justice hadn't actually been used for criminal cases in New York.

Recently, however, some of New York City's prosecutors have begun piloting restorative justice conferencing with a range of cases. Westchester County District Attorney Miriam Rocah has spearheaded a Restorative Justice Task Force assembling prosecutors from her office, victim advocates, community leaders, clergy, social service agencies, and defense attorneys, to explore developing a pilot modeled on existing programs across the country led by restorative justice practitioners. One principle absolutely central to the Task Force's conversations: Restorative practice in criminal justice must anchor its focus on the victims of harm, whether they are individual survivors, communities, or both.

What could all this mean in practice? How does restorative justice actually work? Well, let's consider a case study of how restorative justice could help repair the harm caused by crime:

Asked to leave a restaurant for aggressive behavior, a drunk customer angrily shoves a server, causing her to fall and break her wrist. Police arrive, and the person is charged with felony assault. The victim is injured, can't work for several weeks, and experiences trauma. Speaking with the victim, the prosecutor offers to seek maximal punishment, including a conviction and prison. The survivor says that she doesn't want to ruin the defendant's life, but wants to explain the harm he caused her and to know that he won't behave this way again to her or others. The prosecutor works with a victim advocate who presents an option to the victim of a restorative justice conference, and the victim agrees. The defendant also agrees, welcoming the opportunity to demonstrate accountability and repair the harm as much as possible. The judge presiding over the case holds the case open, pending the restorative justice process.

A trained, experienced restorative justice facilitator from a local organization meets, first, with the survivor to understand what she needs to heal and move forward after the crime; and later with the defendant to ensure he is willing and appropriate to participate in a restorative justice process.

After individual pre-conference meetings with all potential participants, the facilitator then brings the parties together for the restorative justice conference. The focus of the conferences is the acceptance of responsibility by the person who caused the harm, how that person can repair the harm to the survivor and to the community, and in the process, how he also can be restored to the community.

During these sessions, the survivor, her supporters, and the person who caused the harm and his supporters, are asked questions to help them explore what happened and its effects on everyone involved. The survivor shares how the other party hurt and traumatized her, and after listening, the other person expresses remorse and regret. The group discusses ideas for repairing the harm and reconnecting with the community. The parties create a written agreement, with a timetable for completion, that includes community service, an agreed amount of restitution for the survivor's out-of-pocket costs, and therapy for the perpetrator of the harm to address issues with alcohol misuse. The facilitator and the victim advocate connect the survivor with therapy for her trauma.

The prosecutor and judge resolve the case with an adjournment in contemplation of dismissal – rather than a felony or a misdemeanor – and no incarceration or criminal conviction. The community-based organization monitors compliance with the restorative justice agreement, and the case is closed to the satisfaction of the survivor. ■

## OVS Legal Unit Staffing Changes

The Legal Unit has undergone some staffing changes recently and is excited to introduce our new members and take the opportunity of re-introduce some familiar faces. The Legal Unit is involved in many aspects of OVS' operations, and these positions perform crucial functions. It has proven an exciting opportunity to rebuild and reimagine the Legal Unit with new members. We thought it would benefit everybody to know what each member of the Legal Unit does:

**John Watson** is Agency Counsel with over 20 years of state service, more than 15 of those with OVS. He is responsible for overseeing and managing the work of the Legal Unit and providing legal counsel to the agency – from the Director, Deputies, and Executives to all other staff. John works closely with Director Cronin and the Deputy Directors on creating the vision and guiding the direction of the Office as it approaches 60 years of operation. He regularly consults with the Governor's Office, negotiating and advocating for legislation and regulatory changes on behalf of the Office, and advising on issues such as mass violence and other instances of victimization. John also consults with professionals serving victims of crime on the National level. John's entire legal career has been in state service; before his appointment to the Crime Victims Board/OVS, he was Counsel to the Lieutenant Governor and to members of the State Senate.

**Shelby Foster**, Associate Attorney, has been with OVS for over 10 years. She is responsible for overseeing the work of our Senior Attorney and Legal Assistant. Shelby is the Legal Unit subject-matter expert on sexual assault, forensic rape exams (FREs), human trafficking, and domestic violence. Shelby provides trainings statewide to medical providers on FREs and to attorneys on restitution. She represents the Office on inter-agency taskforces/groups related to human trafficking and college sexual assault prevention/response. Shelby is one of OVS senior-level staff who hear and determine administrative appeals. With new Legal Unit staff comes the opportunity to reassign duties and Shelby will be the Legal Unit's point person on Compensation – assisting OVS staff and developing new proposals with Counsel to seek efficiencies and improved responses to our claimants under our enacting statute. She also assists Counsel and the Director on many ad-hoc projects, assignments, and meetings. Shelby began her state career before OVS with the Department of Financial Services, and before that provided legal counsel to a major financial and estate planning company.

**Antonia Minutoli**, Attorney II, is the Legal Unit's newest attorney. She is responsible for overseeing OVS' role in the state's Son of Sam law, which allows certain victims the opportunity to bring lawsuits against those who did them harm. In this role, she coordinates OVS' efforts with the New York State Attorney General's Office (AG) to freeze the funds of convicted persons. Antonia is also responsible for overseeing the Office's administrative appeal process – from managing intake to issuing the final determinations of the agency. To do so, she advises the senior-level staff on both the facts of a claim and the relevant law as they prepare for their review. As the compliment to Shelby being the point person on Compensation, Antonia will be the point person for the Grants Unit, assisting OVS staff on contractual and other issues. She will also work to develop new proposals with Counsel to benefit victims of crime generally – beyond the compensation to victims of crime provided for in Article 22. She also coordinates with the AG to represent the agency when lawsuits are brought against OVS. Before her arrival at OVS, Antonia practiced family law with an Albany firm.

**Stephanie Parrotte**, Legal Assistant II, is the most recent addition to the Legal Unit. She is responsible for overseeing the work of our Administrative Assistant I. Stephanie is primarily responsible for the day-to-day collection and tracking of restitution, subrogation and over payments for the Office.

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## OVS Legal Unit Staffing Changes

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She also assists Counsel in making lien reduction/waiver determinations for claimants who request them. Before her arrival to OVS, Stephanie was a legal assistant for over five years with the New York State Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs.

**Shaun Carlson**, Administrative Assistant I, has been with the Office since April. Besides her valuable administrative support to the Legal Unit, she is primarily responsible for answering the Legal Unit's phone line and email and managing the Office's file copy requests. OVS is Shaun's second state job. Before coming to the Office, she was with the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision for five years as an Office Assistant.

**Eamonn Trainor** has left for a legal position at another agency and **Bonnie Speanburg** retired this spring. ■

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## OVS Advisory Council Call for Nominations due October 28

OVS is seeking candidates for appointment to its Advisory Council.

The Advisory Council assists in the formulation of policies, provides recommendations to OVS, and shares information to improve the delivery of services to individuals affected by victimization. Additionally, the Council advises OVS in establishing Statewide goals and objectives for advancing innovative solutions in the field of victim services.

OVS requests assistance in extending invitations to potential new members to fill the following four vacancies. It is OVS' goal that the Council be reflective of the diversity of the State and its people.

- **Five (5) General Membership Vacancies:** Members must have a demonstrated active interest in or obtained professional knowledge in the field of victim services. Members must also maintain active membership in one of the five regional crime victim service providers' coalitions.
- **NEW ROLE! One (1) Gun Violence Survivor Vacancy:** Gun Violence Survivor member should elevate the voice and experience of those impacted by gun violence as it relates to the mission of OVS and role of the Council. The nominee may be a survivor or a surviving family member of a victim of gun violence.

Members are appointed for one three-year term and are expected to attend and participate in quarterly meetings for the duration of their term. Currently, all meetings are held virtually until otherwise safe to return in person. Some Council business may occur outside of quarterly meetings. Current Council Members meet once a month to carry out and discuss ongoing council business.

Anyone interested in seeking appointment to the Advisory Council must complete the 2022 Advisory Council Nomination Survey before **Friday, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022**. **In order to be considered, all instructions must be followed, including submission of applicable attachments and supporting materials.** OVS may elect to interview prospective members. If you have any questions, please contact Lauren Szczesny, Community Engagement Liaison at [lauren.szczesny@ovs.ny.gov](mailto:lauren.szczesny@ovs.ny.gov). ■

[Click Here to Access the Advisory Council Nomination Survey!](#)