

# OVS Outreach

## Summer 2023

IN THIS ISSUE: [OVS Advisory Council](#) • [OVS Appeals](#) • [Buffalo United Resiliency Center](#)

### From the Director's Desk



Welcome to Summer 2023! OVS is gearing up for our biennial conference, which will occur in Albany from Tuesday, August 22 through Thursday, August 24. We developed this year's theme, **Resilience: Redefining Victim Services in an Age**

**of Uncertainty**, since emerging from the devastation of the pandemic and because, as advocates, you face uncertainty about funding, morale, burnout, sustainability, and staffing. We often think about building resilience among victims and survivors of crime – how we can provide support and services for them – but resiliency applies to you, too. Our aim is to convene advocates and providers from across the state to hear from speakers that have unique information and experience. We also want you to talk with each other about your challenges, how you find resiliency and how we communicate that to the people we serve. We have nearly 50 experts from across the country presenting, and we are planning to have some fun, too. While the conference is sold out, you can join the wait list by visiting [ovs.ny.gov/conference](https://ovs.ny.gov/conference) and learn about more ways you and your colleagues can engage with this event!

(Continued on [page 2](#))

### 2023 OVS Conference

The 2023 OVS Conference is fast approaching and although it's officially sold out, there are other ways you can engage with OVS, expert panelists, and other victim assistance professionals.

#### Join the Event Waitlist

In the event of cancellations, tickets will be released to individuals on the waitlist on a first-come, first-served basis.

[Join the Event Waitlist](#)

#### Share What Resilience Means to You

Whether you're joining us in person or not, OVS wants to hear about what resilience and advocacy mean to you. Submit your photo and response by **Wednesday, July 19**, and you may be featured in a slideshow of advocates from across New York State.

[Advocate Testimonials](#)

#### Exhibitor Opportunities

To be considered as an event exhibitor at the conference, fill out the interest survey by **Friday, July 21**.

[Exhibitor Interest Form](#)

#### FREE Virtual Sessions

Unable to attend in person? OVS will host a virtual session at 1 p.m. on each of the following Wednesdays next month: **August 2, 9, and 16**. ■

[FREE Virtual Sessions](#)



Office of  
Victim Services

OVS.NY.GOV / 1-800-247-8035

facebook

twitter

YouTube

## From the Director's Desk

(Continued from [page 1](#))

I also encourage you to complete our advocate testimonial survey and share the reason why you do the work you do. We plan to share these stories by featuring them in a slideshow at the Conference. [Complete the survey by Wednesday, July 19 and you may be featured.](#)

Resilience is not just a buzz word: It's what we hope for all of us despite the difficulties and challenges we face. How do we bounce back from adversity? How do victims and survivors do the same? How can we continue to hold onto hope as we heal? We are inspired daily by the stories of survivors and their families and by all of you, who are doing more with less while staying true to your mission.

I want to thank you for your continued commitment to providing the highest quality services to victims of crime across New York State. See you in August!

Sincerely,

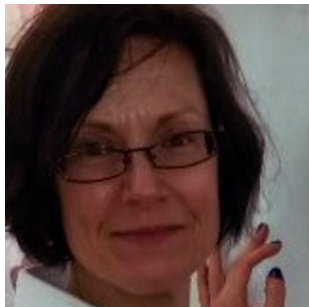


Elizabeth Cronin, Esq.

## A New Vision for the OVS Advisory Council

OVS recently worked with a consultant through its [Training and Technical Assistance Request Program \(TTARP\)](#) – which is available to assist its funded programs – to redevelop the structure, mission, vision and goals of its Advisory Council. For the first time, the Advisory Council has two co-presidents under its newly implemented shared leadership model.

**Karen Ziegler**, Director of the Albany County Crime Victim and Sexual Violence Center, and **Will Rivera**, Crisis Intervention Director with the Violence Intervention Program at Opportunities for Otsego, have been serving as Co-Presidents since late last year. The Council will annually elect, or choose to reelect, Co-Presidents.



*Karen Ziegler*



*Will Rivera*

(Continued on [page 3](#))

## A New Vision (cont'd)

(Continued from [page 2](#))

Under this shared leadership model and in partnership with OVS' Community Engagement Liaison Lauren Szczesny, Karen and Will have elevated the Council by:

- recruiting, interviewing, and selecting new Advisory Council members, including a new Gun Violence Survivor member, to serve three-year terms;
- implementing a mentorship program within the Council for new members to learn more about OVS and the field of victim services, and provide other programmatic assistance;
- developing new Council guidance, roles, responsibilities, and subcommittees;
- developing an OVS Policies and Procedures Review working group; and
- contributing to the development and review of OVS' Victims of Crime Needs Assessment and Gap Analysis Victim and Stakeholder surveys

[Learn More About the Advisory Council and its Role](#)

## Farewell to Kathy Davidson



OVS recently bid farewell to one of its longest-tenured employees, Kathy Davidson, who served as Senior Manager of the Albany Investigations Units, part of the agency's Compensation Division. Kathy began her career at OVS in 1998 in an entry level position and received several promotions before obtaining the job from which she retired. Throughout her tenure, Kathy successfully trained numerous staff and instilled in them an appreciation for the gravity of our work, leaving a legacy of hard-working and committed staff. Along with participating in agency workgroups, Kathy served on the state's Committee for the Coordination of Police Services to Elderly Persons, and earlier this year, CASA of New York State presented her with the 2023 Heart for New York's Children Award for her work expanding OVS's policy to accept neglect petitions when evaluating compensation claims. Kathy's work ethic and dedication to serving those in need truly embodied the OVS mission to provide compensation in a compassionate manner and to advocate for victims of crime. She will be missed by her OVS colleagues and staff from our funded programs who worked with her. We wish her a healthy, happy, and long retirement! ■

## Buffalo United Resiliency Center

Since the racially motivated mass shooting at the Tops supermarket in Buffalo on May 14, 2022, OVS has been working with state and federal partners to establish a resiliency center to assist individuals, families and the community affected by this horrific crime. This spring, the [Buffalo Urban League](#) received \$2.5 million in state funding to operate the [Buffalo United Resiliency Center](#) through February 2025. The Buffalo Urban League is one of six affiliates of the national organization that operate in New York State.

Secured by Governor Kathy Hochul and administered by OVS, the funding complements funding that the federal [Antiterrorism and Emergency Assistance Program](#) is providing to the [Community Health Center of Buffalo](#). The Resiliency Center is a traditional victim assistance program but will focus its services on the broader community affected by the Tops shootings. It will facilitate wellness, restorative practices, empowerment workshops, group/healing circles, advocacy/accompaniment during criminal/civil proceedings, financial support for short-term needs (food, transportation, etc.), recreational activities that promote community wellness, and non-traditional activities for healing.

Resiliency Center staff also will provide mental health counseling and emotional support, referrals and connections for Buffalo residents directly and indirectly affected by the attack. Like many of OVS-funded programs, the Resiliency Center has faced challenges filling vacancies. It is currently in the various stages of hiring and once fully staffed, the Resiliency Center will have a program director, three case managers and a therapist/counselor. At its main location at 1140 Jefferson Ave., Suite A, the Resiliency Center has a rotating schedule of local agencies, including [Buffalo HOPE](#) and the Community Health Center of Buffalo, providing services and resources for individuals and families.

In addition to establishing the Center, OVS and the Buffalo Urban League are working with the Buffalo United Steering Committee, which consists of various organizations from the Buffalo area. The Steering Committee has hosted listening sessions with community members to assess the services they have received, any gaps in services, feelings they continue to experience as a result of the crime, and their vision for a thriving community. These listening sessions have provided crucial feedback for the Resiliency Center and OVS as we continue to provide needed services to Buffalo's East Side. We are committed to supporting the Center as it strengthens partnerships, shares resources, and focuses on the community's needs. ■



## OVS Appeals – Giving Survivors Guidance and Realistic Expectations with the Process

OVS does everything it can to make decisions in favor of victims and survivors of crime, but in some instances, the agency's ability to assist individuals is limited by state and federal law. During an investigation, OVS staff collect and examine information and apply those facts to the laws under which the agency operates. Individuals who have not been deemed eligible for assistance, however, have an option to appeal a decision by making a request in writing for an administrative review. The request must be signed, addressed to the OVS Director and submitted within 30 days of the decision date. If not filed within that timeframe, the law says that the decision is the final determination of the agency.

When a timely appeal is filed, an Investigations supervisor performs a review and decides whether the claim can be reopened or should be sent to the Legal Unit for appeal. If the Legal Unit receives the request, it conducts a review and makes a decision on whether the claim was denied based upon a question of law. If the answer is yes, OVS informs the individual that the appeal will consist of a review of the information already in the claim file and whatever other information the individual would like to provide in writing. There is no hearing. For example, an individual's claim seeks reimbursement for \$500 in cash, but OVS already reimbursed \$100 in cash, the maximum allowed by the law.

If the question on appeal is one of fact – for example, whether or not the individual's injuries related to the crime – OVS will schedule an informal virtual hearing at which the individual may present any evidence, witnesses, or argument relevant to the claim. An appeal can be decided by a panel of up to three senior OVS staff, such as Investigations Unit supervisors, a deputy director, and/or attorneys from the Legal Unit. Since the process is informal, an attorney is not necessary, but the individual may bring one to the hearing. The goal is to have a discussion between OVS staff and the individual: what they are hoping for, what information OVS may need to assist them in that way, and what limitations OVS has under the law.

The purpose of any appeal (on the papers or a hearing) is to give the individual an opportunity to show that OVS has made an incorrect decision. The appeal is for further information gathering; it is not for OVS to justify its decision or be questioned, but the panel may offer insight or clarifications to the individual or their representative. If the information collected or learned during the appeal is sufficient and the law under which OVS operates allows for a decision in favor of the individual, OVS can reverse or modify the decision.

After an appeal, the panel may request the re-investigation of an issue or issues and a member of the Investigations staff is assigned to handle that process. This new information is then considered by the panel before it makes a decision to either affirm or reverse or modify the original determination. The decisions also can include modifications in the affirmation or reversal that further clarify OVS' position. If the determination is made to reverse or modify, the determination will detail what expenses can be paid at the time of the decision. OVS also will notify an individual in the decision letter if more documentation is needed to pay an expense in a reversed/modified decision; those payments will be considered after OVS receives the additional documents.

The appeal decision is the final determination of OVS. If an individual disagrees with this final determination, they may pursue a court proceeding pursuant to Article 78 of the state's Civil Practice Law and Rules within four months of the final determination. They can bring this proceeding on their own or seek the assistance of an attorney. At this point in the process, the individual is a potential litigant and OVS staff cannot communicate or engage further with them about the decision and/or claim. ■

## Spotlight: OVS SOECK Storage Facility Staff

Earlier this year, OVS began operating [a state facility to store sexual offense evidence collection kits \(SOECK\)](#) that have not been released to law enforcement custody. State law requires these unreported kits to be stored for 20 years from the date of collection. Secure storage gives individuals who have been sexually assaulted the ability to get medical care, consent to forensic evidence collection and time to decide if they want to file a police report.

The following OVS staff work at the facility and ensure it operates effectively and efficiently:



**Tammy Althiser** has been with OVS since 2017, first as a Contract Management Specialist 1 in the Grants Unit and now as an Administrative Specialist 2 in the Administrative Services Unit. In this role, she assists in the development of OVS contracts, reviews and approves purchasing transactions, and provides support to the staff at the facility.

**Fun Fact:** Tammy enjoys being on or near water, in a kayak or visiting the beach or lake. Karlee, the dog she adopted during the pandemic, helps her to exercise through regular long walks and play time.



**Stacie Arnhold** joined OVS in December 2022 as a Project Assistant. In that role, she processes kits and other items shipped to the facility and handles data entry.

**Fun Fact:** Stacie likes things in threes: She has three children, three dogs and three guinea pigs.



**Thomas Cantarella** joined OVS in December 2022 as the Facility Manager. Tom oversees the day-to-day operations of the facility and the daily intake of kits and other items.

**Fun Fact:** A long-suffering Mets and Jets fan, Tom stays active as much as possible with yardwork, walking, and any time spent with family: cooking, camping, BBQs, grilling and smoking all types of food. He loves every minute he can relax with his dog Suki.

*(Continued on [page 7](#))*

## SOECK Storage Facility Staff (cont'd)

(Continued from [page 6](#))



**Cristin Connor** joined OVS in 2021 as an Associate Budgeting Analyst and now serves as the Administrative Services Unit Chief, overseeing all agency administrative functions, financial management, and the storage facility.

**Fun Fact:** Cristin has been doing CrossFit since 2019 and finds lifting heavy things and flipping tires to be a fun way to start off her day.



**Samantha Karp Weir** is the Project Coordinator and joined OVS in December 2022. Her responsibilities include coordinating with hospitals, victims of crime, and law enforcement agencies while overseeing the daily intake of kits and other items and documenting the chain of custody. Samantha also assists the Facility Manager with day-to-day operations of all systems.

**Fun Fact:** Samantha is a mom to a daughter who is entering her final year of earning her bachelor's degree and twin sons who are starting first grade. They enjoy spending spring through fall outdoors as much as possible and hibernating in the winter.



**Jill Millington** joined OVS in November 2022 as an Office Assistant 2. In that role, she processes kits and other items shipped to the facility, greets visitors and handles data entry.

**Fun Fact:** Jill has three kids who are 15, 14, and 11. She spends as much time with them as possible and loves to boat on Lake George, swim, and do basically anything outside.

---

# OVS Outreach

e-newsletter