

# NEW YORK STATE OFFICE FOR THE PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

OPDV Bulletin/Fall 2014

## IN THIS ISSUE

From the Executive Director .....	Cover
The OPDV Victim Resource Coordinator .....	Cover
Did You Know.....	Cover
The NYS Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline.....	Page 2
Q&A about the OPDV Victim Resource Coordinator.....	Page 3
Legislative Update .....	Page 4
High Risk Team Project .....	Page 4
New York State's Address Confidentiality Program .....	Page 4



October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month! What are you planning to turn purple this year? Check out our Toolkit for ideas: [http://www.opdv.ny.gov/public\\_awareness/campaigns/shinethelight/](http://www.opdv.ny.gov/public_awareness/campaigns/shinethelight/) During DVAM, send or tweet us photos and we'll post them on Facebook. [opdvpurple@opdv.ny.gov](mailto:opdvpurple@opdv.ny.gov) #ShinetheLight #DontDoNothing

## The OPDV Victim Resource Coordinator

The New York State Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence was created by Executive Order in 1989 by then-Governor Mario Cuomo, to replace what had formerly been known as the Governor's Commission on Domestic Violence. Established as an independent state agency within the Executive Department, OPDV was the first – and remains the only – executive level state agency in the nation dedicated to domestic violence prevention. Although OPDV's founding mission centered on domestic violence training, policy development, and legislative guidance, frequent calls from individuals seeking assistance with individual cases motivated OPDV to create the Victim Resource Coordinator position in 1999.

For more information about the OPDV Victim Resource Coordinator, [please see Page 3.](#)

### Did you know...

Of the 8,881 calls to the New York State Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline in 2013, 53% of callers heard about the Hotline from police, 13% from the media/internet, 13% from various print publications, 8% from community agencies, and 4% from medical professionals. (The remaining callers were referred by "Other" sources not specified.)

This information was provided by the NYS Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline (1-800-942-6906).

## From the Executive Director



I hope you all had a wonderful, productive summer. Now that the warmer months are winding down and the cooler months of back-to-school schedules and shorter days have arrived, many of us are preparing for several holidays and significant events. And for those of us who work in domestic violence prevention, we also recognize October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

We are pleased to dedicate the fall 2014 issue of the OPDV bulletin to domestic violence survivors and to the professionals who provide them with necessary services, resources, and support. Our feature article, "The New York State Domestic and Sexual Violence Hotline," by Robyn Wiktorski-Reynolds, provides a wealth of information about what callers can expect when they call the Hotline, either as a primary victim, or on behalf of a friend or loved one. In our Q&A, OPDV Victim Resource Coordinator Debra Darby discusses the roles and functions of her position, from assisting individual callers with specific needs and complicated cases, to the professional collaborations and partnerships she has formed with a variety of agencies, task forces, and systems.

Once again, I invite you to join our October "Shine the Light on Domestic Violence" campaign. This is our seventh year, and I challenge us all to build on the success of previous campaigns by turning even more of the state purple in 2014! For ideas and guidance, please refer to the toolkit on our website.

All of us at OPDV wish you the very best for the upcoming holiday season.

*Gwen Wright*

Gwen Wright  
Executive Director

# The New York State Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline

**Robyn Wiktorski-Reynolds, Advocate Program Coordinator at Crisis Services in Buffalo, New York.**

[The NYS Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline](#) ("The Hotline") is managed by [Crisis Services](#), a 24-hour crisis center with programs that address homelessness, mental health, lethality and trauma. In addition, Crisis Services oversees [The Advocate Program](#), a non-residential domestic violence service provider and [NYS Department of Health](#) (DOH)-designated rape crisis center for Buffalo and Erie County. Following are just a few of the many ways The Advocate Program strives to empower survivors of domestic/family/ sexual violence and elder abuse.

**Crisis Intervention:** The level of intervention is based on the type of crisis each caller is experiencing. An immediate crisis requires counseling, lethality screening, active listening, and planning for next steps, including referrals to follow-up agencies and professionals. Hotline staff assess immediate safety and determine what response the caller would find most helpful. Possible responses may involve the Hotline counselor:

- contacting law enforcement and remaining on the telephone while police respond,
- encouraging callers to hang up and contact law enforcement when appropriate,
- encouraging callers to seek medical attention, and/or
- providing callers with numbers to emergency domestic violence shelters.

Hotline Counselors also provide support, information and referral for food, financial assistance and housing needs.

**Counseling:** Most calls, especially from primary and secondary survivors<sup>1</sup>, involve some level of counseling, which can include emotional support and validation as well as information and referral.

**Safety Planning:** Hotline staff discuss various safety measures that make sense for each caller. After explaining the role of domestic violence service providers and rape crisis centers, Hotline staff routinely refer callers to local services for more individualized, longer term help.

**Information and Referral:** While every caller reaches out with specific needs, requests for information share some common themes:

- Domestic and Family Violence: dynamics of domestic/family violence; residential and non-residential services; Family Justice Centers; legal rights and options; immigration issues; child custody and support rights and options; and safety planning.
- Sexual Violence: Rape Crisis Programs; role of Child Advocacy Centers; important medical timeframes (such as forensic rape exam, emergency contraception, HIV post exposure prophylaxis); adult sexual assault versus child/adolescent sexual assault dynamics; common reactions to sexual violence and trauma and; criminal/civil legal options.
- Elder Abuse : Adult Protective Services; local senior service programs; elder abuse dynamics; caregiver stress versus elder abuse; Legal options and medical needs.
- Legal Issues: Family Courts; District Attorney's offices; law enforcement departments.
- Basic needs: public benefits, cash assistance; culturally specific programs; out of state programs/shelters.

The Hotline's language access plan is comprised of bi-lingual (Spanish) hotline counselors, utilization of [LanguageLine Solutions™](#) Deaf Relay and 711.

**Hotline Staff Training and Professional Development.** In addition to completing forty hours of training on the dynamics of domestic and sexual violence, all Hotline staff receive certified Rape Crisis Counselor training and maintain annual professional development and bi-weekly evaluation by their supervisors. New staff shadow current Hotline counselors for practical experience with resource gathering and use of program technology, such as an observation phone that allows trainees to listen to live calls. All staff and counselors take on-call shifts as part of the Hotline's 24-hour hospital response program, which is dispatched out to the ten local hospitals whenever a victim of domestic/family/ elder/sexual violence presents. This collaborative work at the local level enhances staff's skills in crisis intervention and understanding of the domestic violence programs and rape crisis centers to whom they refer callers statewide, allowing them to provide excellent service to callers from around the state, based on this firsthand knowledge.

Hotline staff understand that every call may be a survivor's first outreach, so it is imperative that the service is supportive, consistent, professional and holistic. The Hotline is, and will remain, a resource for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, based on the belief that every call has the potential to encourage survivors to reach out again and/ or follow through with their local resources. This statewide collaboration is a true safety net for survivors.

<sup>1</sup> A Primary Victim/Survivor is the primary target of abuse by a perpetrator, while a Secondary Victim/Survivor is a person who has a relationship with the primary victim (i.e., family members, loved ones, coworkers, new/current partner, concerned others, etc.).

## The Hotline's Core Services:

- Crisis intervention and counseling;
- Safety planning;
- Information and referral services;
- Contact information for local providers in domestic violence, sexual assault, elder abuse etc.;
- Problem solving with callers who have encountered a variety of barriers to help and safety;
- Information about survivors' rights and the dynamics of domestic violence;
- Safety planning at every opportunity, including a back-up plan if the Hotline referrals provided are not helpful.

## Q&A: OPDV Victim Resource Coordinator



*This Q&A was conducted with Debra Darby, Victim Resource Coordinator at OPDV*

### **Q: What is the Victim Resource Coordinator at OPDV?**

**A:** The Victim Resource Coordinator at OPDV, funded primarily by the [New York State Office of Victim Services](#) (OVS), functions as a state-level, domestic violence liaison between members of the public and the professional agencies and organizations designed to serve them.

### **Q: What does the Victim Resource Coordinator do?**

**A:** One of the primary roles of the position involves responding to calls and correspondence from victims and concerned others. One of my main goals involves assessing callers' immediate needs and referring them to local agencies that will provide specialized, in-person services and support. If a caller wishes not to be referred to a local agency, or has already attempted to get help from them, I attempt to identify other resources and options.

As a general rule, I inform callers about New York State's [crime victim compensation](#), and often assist callers in completing the application over the phone. I encourage the caller to mail the application to OVS as soon as possible, if it is safe to do so. If the caller is not able to complete or mail the application, I can assist them over the phone, though I generally recommend that they work with the local domestic violence service providers in their county for help with completion and mailing of the form.

### **Q: In addition to referral and crime victim compensation assistance, what other services might the Victim Resource Coordinator provide?**

**A:** In addition to phone counseling, advocacy, safety planning and information and referrals, I regularly follow up after initial contact, when callers indicate that it is safe for me to do so. Follow up can be via email, written correspondence ([delivered by mail to the safe address identified by the caller](#)), or by phone. On a case by case basis, I am also able to communicate directly with the various criminal justice and human services systems with whom victims interact, and I work to identify potential solutions to system-wide challenges that create gaps in victim services and offender accountability.

**The Crime Victim's Memorial**, located at the Empire State Plaza in Albany, is a place where family members can memorialize their loved ones lost to crime. In 1997, the Capital District Coalition for Crime Victims' Rights, Inc. created a brick walkway leading to the monument. Each brick is inscribed with the name of a crime victim.



Over the years, many of the bricks have become unreadable, and due to the large number of bricks now placed into the walkway, space has become limited. [The NYS Office of General Services](#) (OGS) has offered to assist the New York Crime Victims' Assistance Task Force in redesigning the memorial site, and the construction of a new memorial is already underway.

OGS has maintained the current site over the years and always takes such care in preparing it for the annual ceremony, so the Task Force feels confident that construction will be done in a way that respects the victims and their loved ones who have purchased bricks. To contribute to the renovation project, please visit the [website](#).

In addition to providing direct services, I also provide domestic violence training for professionals, attend local task force meetings, and collaborate with other state and local agencies in providing services to victims of domestic violence. Often, victims of domestic violence require waivers or exemptions from programs in order to maintain their safety, and I am able to work not only with those victims, but with the agencies themselves, to help victims receive services such as housing, medical care, child care, and employment assistance.

### **Q: What services are callers often unaware of?**

**A:** Survivors of domestic violence know that they want their abusers to stop abusing them, or that they want law enforcement to make an arrest, or that they want any number of outcomes that I can often talk through with them even though I can't directly provide those particular services. However, talking with callers and really listening to what they want, and why, gives me an opportunity to discuss some of the services I provide that they may not even know about. The four most common services that victims are generally unaware of when they call are:

- Assistance with crime victim compensation,
- Information about the Address Confidentiality Program (ACP),
- Information about time limitations regarding restitution prior to sentencing, so that restitution can be ordered as part of sentencing, and
- Information about eligibility and limitations for filing a civil suit.

For more information, please visit the ["What Help is Available"](#) page of the OPDV website.

## Legislative Update

Several bills were signed into law during the 2014 legislative session that will impact domestic violence victims. Two new laws will help hold offenders accountable. In response to a homicide that occurred when a victim was stalked by a former boyfriend using a GPS tracking device on her car, the State passed "Jackie's Law," expanding the crime of stalking to make it illegal to follow someone by tracking their location or movement with GPS or other tracking devices. This law takes effect October 21, 2014.

In May, the NYS Court of Appeals struck

down the section of aggravated harassment that was often charged in domestic violence cases, where an abuser would use telephone or mail communications to harass, annoy, threaten, or alarm the victim. The Court decided that the language was too vague and violated First Amendment free speech rights. To remedy this, a new law was passed with more specific language, criminalizing communications that threaten to cause physical or unlawful harm to the property of, the victim or a family/household member. The law also updated aggravated harassment to include the use of computers or any other electronic means of communication.

Most domestic violence victims choose Family Court to pursue an order of protection, so the growing number of court cases has become problematic, potentially threatening the safety of victims and causing difficulties for anyone seeking immediate assistance from Family Court. To address the critical need for more judges to handle all Family Court cases, a new law will add nine new Family Court judges in NYC by January 1, 2015, and a new judge will be added in each of sixteen counties upstate and on Long Island between January 1, 2015 and January 1, 2016.

Please visit [the Law page of the OPDV website](#) for updates on additional bills.

## High Risk Team Project

A growing trend in dealing with domestic violence cases is the high risk team model. This model was developed by the [Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center](#), a Massachusetts program that has seen positive results from these efforts. The Center has assisted other programs around the country to start such teams, and has become a national technical assistance provider.

This model aims to identify high risk cases as early as possible and to manage cases using a team approach that maximizes communication for a quicker

response. Cases are identified as high risk through lethality assessment and teams generally take only the most serious cases.

OPDV worked with the Center to pilot a high risk team in the City of Schenectady. The team is comprised of representatives from the local domestic violence program, police department, District Attorney's Office, Sheriff's Office and Probation department. The group has worked on this project for over a year and has recently started taking cases. Tools being used to monitor and manage cases include home visits by police, pre-trial supervision by Probation and frequent communication among team members.

In addition to the Schenectady project, there are other jurisdictions in New York State doing similar work, including sites participating in a federal demonstration project. As these and other projects within the state and around the country move forward, more evaluative information will become available, helping us learn more about the long term impact of this exciting model on high risk domestic violence cases.

## New York State's Address Confidentiality Program

This fall marks the second anniversary of [New York State's Address Confidentiality Program](#) (ACP). This valuable program is administered by the [New York State Department of State](#) (DOS) as part of an overall safety plan for victims of domestic violence who have left their abusive situation and relocated to an undisclosed location, including a domestic violence shelter.

The ACP provides participants with a free substitute mailing address via a post office box in Albany, New York, for the receipt of all their mail, except for packages and periodicals. The ACP also accepts any legal notices on behalf of a participant. Keeping a victim's actual address out of the public domain (internet) is crucial to

their safety. All state and local agencies, including courts, are required by law to accept the substitute address provided to the participant by the ACP.

The registration process is simple. [Application forms](#) are available on [the ACP website](#). In addition, application forms and assistance in completing the application may be obtained from Application Assistance Providers located throughout the state. A [list of providers](#) is provided on the ACP website. In addition, [ACP staff](#) is available to assist and to answer questions.

Upon registration, which is valid for four years and may be renewed, participants receive a welcome letter and an ID card containing their new mailing address and unique ID number. This is their new official address. Mail received at the PO Box is

picked up daily, sorted and forwarded to the participant's undisclosed address.

Participants should not be pressured into disclosing their actual address to any agency. For more information, please contact the ACP with any questions at (855) 350-4595.



**NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence** [www.opdv.ny.gov](http://www.opdv.ny.gov)

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