



Featured in this issue: Child Witnessing of Domestic Violence

TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Executive Director... Cover
NYS Crime Victims' Annual Brick Dedication Ceremony... Cover
Breaking the Silence: My Journey from Secrecy to Survival... Page 2
Q&A: What Childhood Adversity Can Teach Us... Page 3
Voter Registration Confidentiality... Page 4
Two New Forem Fellowship Grants Awarded... Page 4
Supportive Housing... Page 4



From the Executive Director

Now that the winter weather seems to be behind us, I hope you are enjoying the warmer, brighter days of spring.

This issue focuses on children who witness domestic violence. Abusers will often argue that, since they have never physically harmed their child(ren), they have never abused them. We know, however, that exposure to domestic violence through the witnessing of one parent's ongoing abuse of the other, is harmful to the child. But there is hope for these children if we are able to connect them to the systems and services available to support them and strengthen their resilience.

In our feature article, Nicole Sharpe, a member of the state's Domestic Violence Advisory Council, writes openly and powerfully about her experience living in the foster care system after her father killed her mother when Nicole was a child. Our Q&A with Dr. Heather Larkin discusses child resilience following trauma, with particular emphasis on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). I am so grateful that these individuals are sharing their experience and expertise with us.

In closing, I want to remind everyone that New York State will join the nation in recognizing April 8 through 14 as National Crime Victims' Rights Week. This year's theme is "Expand the Circle: Reach all Victims." Visit the New York State Office of Victim Services website to learn more about how the agency can assist victims and survivors of crime and their families. I also encourage you to attend the annual Crime Victims' Memorial Brick Dedication Ceremony, scheduled for 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. on Friday, June 8, at the memorial on the Empire State Plaza in Albany.

I wish you a wonderful spring.

Handwritten signature of the Executive Director



Save the Date: Friday, June 8, 2018

New York State Crime Victims' Memorial Annual Brick Dedication Ceremony

The annual Brick Dedication Ceremony is scheduled for 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. on Friday, June 8, at the memorial on the Empire State Plaza in Albany. The ceremony, which is organized by members of the New York Crime Victims' Assistance Task Force, honors victims and survivors of crime.

For information about purchasing a brick, or to determine financially-based scholarship eligibility to defray the costs of a brick purchase, email Sharon King at OPDV, or call (518) 457-4100.

1-800-942-6906
NYS Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline

Confidential • 24 HRS/7 DAYS
English & español, multi-language Accessibility
711: Deaf or Hard of Hearing
In NYC: 311 or 1-800-621-HOPE (4673)
TDD: 1-800-810-7444

National Crime Victims' Rights Week is April 8-14

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Teen Dating Abuse Awareness Month 2018

This year, OPDV launched the Teen Dating Abuse is #NotJustPhysical social media advertising campaign, as a reminder that dating abuse, especially among teens, often doesn't involve physical violence or injuries. Controlling and hurtful words are red flags in a dating relationship and can leave emotional scars. OPDV also created a toolkit which features graphics to share on social media, posters and other items to help spread the word and start a conversation about teen dating abuse. Find more information and resources here.

Did You Know...

In New York State in 2016, 5,486 children received non-residential domestic violence services, 5,767 children were served by residential domestic violence programs and 449 children entered transitional housing for survivors of domestic violence.

Source: 2016 Domestic Violence Dashboard

# Breaking the Silence: My Journey from Secrecy to Survival

Nicole Sharpe, [author](#), advocate, and founder of the [Heather Hurley Foundation](#)

## Beautiful Facade

They called me a Ward of the Court. A statistic, blowing in the wind. This became my name when my father murdered my mom, orphaning my two siblings and me. Before that horrific night, I was Nicole, an intelligent, funny girl who loved to read maps and globes, experiment with her chemistry set and write fictional stories. To the outside world, my life was great. My family lived in a large house in a beautiful Brooklyn neighborhood lined with holly trees. In the winter, my father would drive us around to gawk at over-the-top Christmas light displays. He would take me fishing in Sheepshead Bay in the spring. In the summer, we would take family vacations out of the state and out of the country. In the fall, we would drive through scenic routes to witness the leaves transform from green to gold and red before they rested again for the winter. By the time I was 8 years old I had already experienced the childhood dream of visiting both Disneyland and Disney World. One of my third grade friends once told me, "I wish I had your life." Little did she know that I was housing a secret silence within my bones.

## The Secret Silence

I might have been great in English, Science and History, but I was an expert in the subject of Domestic Violence. My earliest childhood memory is violent. I was about 4 or 5 years old when I first witnessed rape. I didn't know what it was at the time, but I knew I felt sad as my mom tried to fight off my father. The scratches she left on his back are still etched in my memory. My father would create a reason to hurt my mom regularly. If she didn't prepare his food to his liking, she would be beaten. If she was a little late returning home from work, she would be beaten. If she talked back to him when he called her derogatory names, she would be beaten. When my mom framed her General Equivalency Diploma and mounted it on the wall, she was beaten. Sometimes, my father would pretend to hug her - it was actually a headlock - in front of me while jabbing her in her ribs, as if I couldn't figure out what he was doing. My mother made me swear not to tell a soul about the violence, so I stayed silent. I walked on explosive eggshells in my own home, which is supposed to be a place of security and rest. I felt like a soldier in a minefield. I never knew exactly when an assault would occur, but I knew it was imminent. Any step I took could cause an explosion, so I stayed quiet at home. As time went on, I became more and more introverted.

## Defense Mechanism

At the age of 5 or 6, I began to write fictional stories, penning myself as the protagonist. This was my alternate world: I had control. Whenever a fight would begin at home, I would slink back to my bedroom and write the violence out of existence. On that horrific Friday night, my father picked a fight with my mom, as usual. After a little while, my mom went to the basement to do laundry as if nothing had happened. This time, however, my father took a gun out of a closet and followed her to the basement, where he brutally beat her and shot her to death. No fictional story could take me away. That night, I adopted the new name, Ward of the Court, which is what I was called by police, district attorneys, a judge and Administration for Children's Services (ACS) workers.

"I might have been great in English, Science and History but I was an expert in the subject of Domestic Violence."

## Breaking the Silence

The desire to prevent my mother's life from disappearing into non-existence swelled in me. I worked on shattering my dysfunctional upbringing of silence and developed a voice of purpose. I became an advocate for domestic violence awareness. I wrote my memoir, [The End of November-Growing Up With Domestic Violence](#) to help adult and child survivors. I was happily surprised to learn that my memoir is currently being studied by male inmates in a New York State prison rehabilitation program.

When I first started advocacy work where I was employed, I was permitted to set up tables with literature on domestic violence. A movement started, complete with annual shows, awareness-raising activities and lasting partnerships. I have been invited by several institutions to speak about my experiences, including New York University's Intimate Partner Violence Colloquium and the Administration for Children's Services Domestic Violence Awareness Month Symposium. My annual community-led domestic violence awareness event - [Purple Power](#) - is in its seventh year. Additionally, my dream of establishing a non-profit organization in honor of my mom is finally coming to fruition. The [Heather Hurley Foundation for the Prevention of Domestic Violence](#) will oversee a teen dating violence awareness initiative called [Bloom365](#). This model, founded by the advocate Donna Bartos, has proven success in Arizona middle and high schools. It is my goal to have this preventative curriculum instituted in New York City schools and beyond, because I believe prevention is better than cure.

I am delighted to sit on the [New York State Domestic Violence Advisory Council](#) and [Fatality Review Team](#). Advocacy work has helped me in my healing process as I focus on repairing a community enveloped in secret silence. Domestic violence is too predominant to be taboo. Breaking my silence and speaking out has helped others break their silence, and I want this to be a ripple effect that will eventually eradicate the social disease of domestic violence.

# Q&A: What Childhood Adversity Can Teach Us

This Q&A was conducted with [Heather Larkin, PhD](#), Associate Professor, School of Social Welfare, University at Albany (SUNY)

## Q What are Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and their consequences?

**A** In 1995, the Division of Violence Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), partnered with Kaiser Permanente to conduct a landmark ACE study of more than 17,000 participants.

The study identified traumatic childhood events that contribute to the wide range of health problems throughout a person's lifespan and created an ACE score that correlated to health risk behaviors and serious health problems later in life. Individuals with an ACE score of four or higher generally had multiple and co-occurring adverse health consequences.

## Q What was most compelling about the study?

**A** I was impressed that it identified multiple categories of abuse, neglect and household dysfunction, and examined the interrelationships among the categories. The scoring system also was straightforward and easy to understand, which is always helpful when explaining the costs of health problems in later life to policy makers.

Often, individuals with serious health problems fall between the cracks of a fragmented service delivery system; ACE scores laid the foundation for a more coordinated, integrated approach to treatment and provided us with a shared language to acknowledge people's trauma.

## Q What is trauma? Is it self-defined?

**A** To some extent, whether something is traumatic is subjectively based on a person's assessment of their ability to handle the experience. One reason accumulated early adversities can so powerfully affect people is because they occur at such early developmental stages, when children lack the capacity to understand and respond to them. At the same time, there are professionals who are skilled in determining whether someone has experienced a traumatic event, and/or has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

There is a difference between noting observable adverse events versus whether those adverse events end up being a trauma for someone. Both are relevant however, in identifying how to best respond to each individual's needs and challenges to foster their resilience.

## Q Is resilience a fixed characteristic, or is it somewhat fluid and flexible?

**A** While prevention of ACEs and their consequences is always the goal, we can absolutely enhance people's capacities for resilience, because it is not a fixed characteristic that lies within an individual. Resilience develops as a result of healthy relationships and community connections. Even though there exists an indisputable correlation between high ACE scores and later in life health problems and early death, a high ACE score need not be seen as a death sentence.

There are opportunities across the lifespan to foster people's resilience and appreciate their strengths after they've survived trauma. For example, [Senior Hope](#) works with older adults who are struggling with chemical dependency in the later stages of their lives. Since introducing ACE research, Senior Hope has had great success helping these older adults in their healing and recovery.

## Q How can ACEs support a trauma-informed framework for responding to domestic violence?

**A** Domestic violence providers were leaders in trauma-informed services - long before we had widespread knowledge about ACEs - because they have always addressed trauma across the lifespan. Some trauma-informed agencies developed their approach as a result of ACEs, while others were already trauma-informed but knew nothing about ACEs and weren't specifically tying in resilience knowledge.

Since there is this array of what it means to be trauma-informed, it begs some broader questions: How do we help leaders determine what will work in their programs and communities? How do we help them examine their



policies and procedures, or think about how they might redesign systems? How do we support them in building a healthier culture that offers a restorative context within which services are delivered?

Some people would call this approach trauma-informed. Others might call it ACEs-informed. Others may just see it as their way of doing business.

## Q How do we build on what we've learned to develop more ACEs-informed services and resources?

**A** We really need to consider how to support leaders and leadership development. Just as we think about self-care for providers, leaders can change policies and procedures. There is a gap in leadership support and in thinking about service delivery to leaders, yet it is critical to support leaders and to help leaders support one another.

As we break down silos, we need to create ways for leaders to engage in mutual support opportunities and work together on issues instead of competing for funds. We also need policy makers to think about how to establish policies and funding streams in ways that foster collaborative and integrated work that includes leadership development and support at all levels, not only for those we serve, but for those providing the services as well.

For more information about ACEs and ACEs-informed programs and policies, please visit [www.aceresponse.org](http://www.aceresponse.org).

# Voter Registration Confidentiality

Voting is one of our most fundamental and precious rights. But voter registration information is public, which may deter some victims of domestic violence from registering to vote.

In 2010, New York first extended protections to victims of domestic

violence who sought to register in 2010, allowing them to seek an order from the Supreme Court requiring counties to keep those victims' voter registration records confidential. Last year, that law was amended to allow victims to seek this relief in County Court or Family Court

as well, which significantly expanded the ability to apply for this protection.

These protections are clearly noted on the state's Voter Registration website. Visit [www.ny.gov/services/register-vote](http://www.ny.gov/services/register-vote) for more information.

## Two New Forem Fellowship Grants Awarded

OPDV recently awarded Ursula Forem Domestic Violence Program Employment Fellowship grants to Family of Woodstock in Ulster County and Unity House of Troy (Rensselaer County). Each agency will receive up to \$75,000 for two years to hire a graduate student or recent college graduate to enhance services they provide.

Now in its fourth year, the fellowship is named in memory of an Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence employee killed in a vehicle crash on her way home from work in 2001. OPDV created the fellowship to expand the capacity of community-based domestic violence services that address victims' long-term needs, including economic stability, safe permanent housing, health and well-being and employment.

The Family of Woodstock Fellow will be trained to provide a broad base of services to program clients and the Unity House Fellow will focus on teen dating violence outreach and prevention.



OPDV Executive Director Gwen Wright had a busy first quarter, speaking on behalf of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and participating in public events promoting OPDV's public awareness efforts.

She presented Governor Cuomo's State of the State budget address to minority, LGBTQ and gender non-conforming groups in the Capital Region; participated in several key events, including the announcement of the Governor's Women's Opportunity and Rights Agenda for 2018; release of the report on the Status of New York Women and Girls; the Roundtable on Understanding the Needs of Black Criminalized Women Survivors; and the New York State Association of Counties' Women's Leadership Council.

Ms. Wright also highlighted OPDV's "Teen Dating Abuse is #NotJustPhysical" social media advertising campaign at media events in the Capital Region and on Long Island. Many thanks to the East Greenbush Central School District and Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone for their partnership and support of the campaign. Visit [www.ny.gov/datingabuse](http://www.ny.gov/datingabuse) to learn more.



## Supportive Housing

Last fall, Governor Cuomo announced the second round of conditional awards under the [Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative](#) (ESSHI), part of his five-year Homelessness Action Plan to construct 100,000 affordable and 6,000 supportive housing units across the state.

ESSHI provided 169 conditional awards to not-for-profit organizations in 47 counties to support individuals and families who are chronically homeless and vulnerable populations who are experiencing homelessness, including victims of domestic violence; veterans with disabilities; frail seniors; young adults with a history of

foster care or incarceration; individuals living with HIV/AIDS; and individuals with serious mental illness and/or substance use disorders. In addition to housing, ESSHI aims to provide supportive services such as employment training; counseling and crisis intervention; educational and legal support, independent living skills training, benefits advocacy and health care assistance.

The state [Office of Mental Health](#) serves as the lead procurement agency for the initiative, under the guidance of an interagency workgroup comprised of seven additional state agencies: the [Office](#)

[of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services](#), [Office of Children and Family Services](#), [Department of Health, Homes and Community Renewal](#), [Office for People with Developmental Disabilities](#), [Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance](#), and [OPDV](#), which ensures that the needs of victims of domestic violence are considered throughout the process.

The 2018 Request for Proposals will be posted to the OPDV home page. Bookmark [www.opdv.ny.gov](http://www.opdv.ny.gov) and watch for more information.

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

Please send any comments or content ideas to: [opdvbulletin@opdv.ny.gov](mailto:opdvbulletin@opdv.ny.gov)

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