Greetings!

Challenges are opportunities, inviting us to travel down fresh paths with new allies or renewed partnerships. These difficult times are a gift to us to stand together and raise our voices. We will not be quiet.

Lots on the calendar: we are preparing for our 36th Take Back the Night on April 27th and the 23rd Law Day Run against Domestic Violence on May 4th. We welcome all individuals and groups to join us, stand by us, and act with us to reclaim our lives and our communities. We recognize our strength and our united will to eliminate violence in our families and neighborhoods. Please put these dates on your calendar and speak out.

We ask you to join us in making this the world we want to live in.

Karen Ziegler
Director

What’s Happening this month?

Sexual Assault Awareness Month

Volunteer Appreciation Month
April

LAW DAY RUN
Thursday, May 4, 2017
Registration 4:30-6pm
5K Run/Walk 6:30pm
The Crossings
580 Albany Shaker Road, Colonie

36th Annual
Take Back The Night
Thursday, April 27, 2017
SUNY Albany
Page Hall, Downtown Campus
4:30pm - 8:30pm

The mission of the Crime Victim and Sexual Violence Center (CVSVC) is to provide direct and comprehensive services to all individuals affected by sexual assault and other crimes of personal violence. Utilizing therapy, advocacy, community mobilization, prevention education and bystander engagement, CVSVC seeks to change societal conditions that allow and perpetuate oppression.
The RAINN Survivor Series encourages those impacted by sexual violence to reach out for help through the National Sexual Assault Hotline, which saw a 10% increase in demand in the last year alone. In 2015, 157,157 people turned to the National Sexual Assault Hotline via telephone (800.656.HOPE) and secure online chat (online.rainn.org). As the personal accounts of the survivors in this campaign reveal, there is no timeline for healing. Half of Online Hotline visitors use the session to talk about an event that occurred within the last six months, while 30% discuss an event that occurred more than 5 years ago.

“It’s not like he wore a sign saying, ‘I’m a sexual predator.’ He was that cool uncle.”

Adam had always enjoyed spending time with his uncle, and would often look forward to sleepovers when they could have extended time together. On one of these occasions when he was 14, their normal activities turned abusive. He was confused by his uncle’s actions; nothing like this had happened before.

For the next four years, Adam continued to struggle, both with the physical abuse and the emotional pain it brought him. “I took steps to prevent the pain, but a part of me thought that was how he loved me.”

Perpetrators of child sexual abuse will often use grooming tactics, like gift-giving, spending alone time, and building age-inappropriate relationships with children and teens to keep them silent about the abuse. In Adam’s case, it was the chance to sneak cigarettes and attend expensive sporting events.

The abuse had serious effects on Adam’s life including weight gain, an inability to maintain relationships, and suicidal thoughts. The effects of sexual violence can be challenging to deal with, but with the right support they can be managed. They can be particularly challenging for men and boys who face unique challenges due to social norms about masculinity.

Adam also recalls questioning his own sexuality after the assaults. Many male survivors experience this uncertainty and doubt after sexual violence, especially if they experienced an erection or ejaculation during the assault. Physiological responses like an erection are involuntary, meaning the survivor has no control over them. These physical signs are not an invitation for unwanted sexual activity and in no way condone an assault.

Adam did not report the assault or tell anyone from his family. He feared that he wouldn’t be believed and that the truth would destroy his family. “I think there’s a stigma attached to it that, ‘Oh, you’re a man, you should have been able to fend him off.’”

Years later, Adam finally opened up to his girlfriend, who encouraged him to talk to his parents. “The ironic thing was that I opened up to my parents on October 8, 2010, ten years to the day of the last sexual attack. They supported me unconditionally and distanced themselves from him.”

Today, Adam is currently working as an archivist at the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America. He enjoys spending time with his girlfriend, going to sporting events, watching TV, reading and just enjoying life. It wasn’t easy to recover from the abuse, but Adam found that talking about what happened to a supportive network of friends and family helped him to heal. “The experience I have had in the recovering from the abuse is [that] he did not win. I have not allowed myself to be defined by the abuse.”

“Even for the longest time after my second rape, I hated leather jackets because he had a black leather jacket on, so that was something that triggered.”

After being disheartened by the lack of police response from the first two assaults, Samatha hesitated to report the third rape, which occurred on her college campus. Her boyfriend at the time ended up reporting to police. The perpetrator was arrested and tried, but ultimately he was not convicted.

In the years after trial, Samatha struggled with effects from surviving multiple sexual assaults. She began overeating. “I just thought if I made myself less attractive it wouldn’t happen again,” she remembers. Sexual violence can sometimes influence a survivor’s perception of the body and feelings of control. In some cases, these feelings can manifest into disordered eating patterns that may be harmful in the longer term.

In time, Samatha grew more comfortable talking about what happened, but she didn’t always find the support she was looking for. “Even when I did try to talk to someone they would say something like, ‘that’s amazing you survived.’ That’s nice. But that’s not dialogue.” It can be challenging for loved ones and friends to find the right words to say when someone they care about has been impacted by sexual violence.

“I finally did some research to find somebody who could actually help me. And that’s how I found RAINN.” Samatha first reached out to RAINN through the Online Hotline, a free, anonymous service available 24/7 to survivors of sexual assault and their loved ones. “Sometimes typing it is actually easier until you’re ready to talk about it. After that, I built up to calling [the National Sexual Assault Hotline] and talking about it out loud.”

Today, Samatha spends her time taking care of her smart, beautiful daughter and sharing her story at speaking opportunities around the Washington DC area. She feels that it’s important to share messages of hope - but that it’s also important to talk about the challenges that come along with pressing charges. By talking openly about these challenges, she hopes to influence and improve the way perpetrators are brought to justice through the criminal justice system.

“Being able to help another victim is so important. Whenever a survivor gets to a place where they feel comfortable, utilizing your edge on surviving can help those who might have just become a victim.”
CVSVVC would like to recognize and thank Barbara Lasch for her 20 years of service as a Hotline Supervisor. We have appreciated all your support over the years and wish you well Barbara!

What are the most notable changes in your 20 years?
When I first started, an ER visit could take 4-6 hours and it was important to know the steps which were required. Sometimes it would be necessary to explain the steps to the victim since the doctor or person doing the exam had never completed one. Albany Med had a special room for exams, also a machine that could take pictures of the cervix and any trauma that may have occurred. Then with the arrival of the SANE program, exams could take as little as 2 hours! The process was stream-lined and some of the steps were eliminated.

What made you want to volunteer with CVSCVC?
I was looking to something to do for my community. One night I saw an add on TV for court liaisons. I called the number the next day and was told that most of the court times were in Albany during the morning. But the rape crisis center had evening hours, I could do that from my home and there were occasional ER visits. Since my daughter was entering high school she was old enough that if I had an ER she could be left at night, it appeared to be a good fit.

What did you enjoy most about volunteering?
Being there to support a victim, their family and friends, helping them through the process. I feel that as an advocate you don’t have to say a lot but when you do it is really appreciated.

How do you practice self-care?
I am always aware of my surroundings, making mental notes of where I am, exits, who is in my immediate area.

TONI KLEINSON
Hotline Supervisor since 2014
Hotline Volunteer since 2013

What inspired you to want to volunteer with CVSCVC?
I understand too well what it’s like to not have a voice. I just wanted to be able to give the voiceless a voice. I had a friend who inspired me with her work, it lit a spark so here I am.

What keeps you volunteering with CVSCVC?
Honestly I’m not sure. After a couple of tough calls I’ve wanted to give up. Then I think of the clients and I want to continue on. So the clients keep me volunteering.

What do you do for SELF-CARE?
I read a lot. Being with my nieces is my salvation, they remind me that there is still good in the world.

THANK YOU for your hard work and dedication Toni!

CVSVVC would like to thank Peter, a very generous donor for providing hundreds of diapers, wipes and thermometers to “Our Healthy Babies” program. Thank you so much Peter! For more information on this program, please check out our website: http://www.albanycounty.com/Government/Departments/CrimeVictimandSexualViolenceCenter.aspx

ANNA WHITE
Hotline Volunteer since 2016

What inspired you to want to volunteer with CVSCVC?
I learned about the center in one of my classes (Human Rights during the Age of Genocide) and I knew that it was something that I wanted to be involved in. Almost everyone knows someone who has been affected by sexual violence and they shouldn’t have to face it by themselves.

What keeps you volunteering with CVSCVC?
I keep volunteering with the center because I love the people I work with and I enjoy helping people work through possibly one of the most difficult situations of their lives.

What do you do for SELF-CARE?
I really enjoy working out and writing for self-care, I find it really cathartic.

THANK YOU for your hard work and dedication Anna!

Our volunteers play an integral role in our programs at CVSCVC - particularly our hotline advocacy program. In 2016 alone, volunteers answered 234 hotline calls and provided counseling services to nearly 320 individuals. These services are vital to our community, and we wouldn’t be able to provide quite as many without the tireless efforts of our volunteers, who keep us going 24/7/365. Many of our volunteers are juggling work, school, families and other volunteer work on top of their commitment to CVSCVC. We commend them for their commitment and dedication to serving survivors!
Employee Spotlight

Joanne Gulum, Confidential Secretary

How long have you worked at CVSVC/County of Albany?
Since 2001. At the AC Jail, then Civil Service, and CVSVC since 2008.

What have you learned from your time with CVSVC?
I grew up in the 50’s and 60’s and so much has changed in how issues such as sexual abuse, domestic violence, victimization and gender issues are viewed legally, psychologically and in a community context. I have discovered that it’s never too late to change patterns of thinking and behaving, as I still had beliefs that were victim-blaming when I started working at CVSVC. It is NEVER a victim’s fault! The staff, volunteers and interns at CVSVC are people who really care, understand and work hard to educate everyone about the realities of victimization.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?
When someone tells us how much they appreciate our services, and how our support made a difference in dealing with trauma. To see people getting therapy at young ages. Working at CVSVC helped me continue my own path to wellness; as a victim of sexual abuse I was not able to speak my truth until I was in my late 30’s. There are so many brave people to celebrate.

What are your retirement plans?
Being a beach lover, I hope to be resettled in south Florida before next winter, enjoying year round sun and warmth, spending time with the many family and friends who live in Florida, and having more time to visit my daughter in Houston.

Kaitlin Wax, Volunteer Coordinator

How long have you worked at CVSVC?
It was just 4 years in November!

What is your primary career interest?
I love the anti-oppression, social change focus of our agency. I think it is so important and unique that we are able to focus not only on providing advocacy for victims and survivors but also discuss and address systemic violence and oppression on a daily basis. The fact that I might spend my morning in the ED as an advocate and my afternoon in the community educating and raising awareness is truly amazing and definitely my favorite part of the work that we do!

What is your biggest challenge on the job and how do you practice self-care?
I find that it’s challenging to set aside enough time and attention to practice self-care. Life gets busy, and sometimes self-care can be the first thing to take a back seat. I try to weave self-care into daily life – staying organized, practicing mindfulness and taking care of myself. And, the occasional self-care shopping trip!

What is the most rewarding part of your job?
For me, the most rewarding part of my job is that every single day I learn something new. Whether it’s from CVSVC staff and volunteers, students in schools, or the victims and survivors we work with, there is always something to learn about the work that we do and the world that we live in.

What do you do for fun?!
I like reading, crocheting and Zentangle. During the warmer months, I also like kayaking and being outside as much as possible! And, I’m constantly entertained by my 3 year old shepherd/pitbull mix, who is just the best of both worlds; he’s a huge snuggler, but he’s also probably the world’s #1 tennis ball fan.

CVSVC welcomes two new staff members...

Rachel Wilson
Prevention Educator

Alec Lewis
Crime Victim Therapist
(Child)