**DC VICTIM ASSISTANCE NETWORK (VAN)**

**MINUTES (DRAFT)**

*Friday, December 20, 2013*

**Leadership Council Present: Karma Cottman,** *DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence;*  **Tonya Turner**, *Office of the Attorney General*; **Daniel Rappaport**, *American University*; **Allison Jackson**, *Children’s National Medical Center*

**Leadership Council Absent: Michelle Palmer,** *Wendt Center for Loss and Healing***; Rachel Friedman,** *Men Can Stop Rape***; Gillian Chadwick,** *Ayuda*

**Members Present: Jenny Brody**, *DC Volunteer Lawyers Project*; **Brant Miller**, *DC Center for the LGBT Community*; **Nikki Charles**, *Network for Victim Recovery of DC*; **Andrea Rodriguez***, CARECEN*; **Natalia Otero**, *SAFE*; **Peg Hacskaylo**, *District Alliance for Safe Housing*; **Lorraine Chase**, *US Attorneys’ Office*; **Lauren Vaughan**, *My Sister’s Place*; **Allison Medina**, *The Women’s Center*; **Jessica Li,** *API DVRP*; **Sarah Wampol**, *Fair Girls*; **Laura Banks Reed**, *Crime Victims’ Compensation Program*; **Melinda Coles,** *DC Rape Crisis Center*; **Wemi Peters**, *Legal Aid Society of DC*; **Chinh Le**, *Legal Aid Society*; **Esther Urbano Thomas**, *Metropolitan Police Department Victim Services Branch;* **Helen Hall**, *Metropolitan Police Department Victim Services Branch;* **Janese Bechtol***, Office of the Attorney General;* **Liz Odungo***, DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence;* **Imoni Washington***, DC Bar Foundation;* **Melanie Becker***, The Women’s Center;* **Kristina Gilchrist***, Men Can Stop Rape;* **Eric Angel***; Legal Aid Society of DC;* **Desta Hailu***, Ethiopian Community Services and Development Council;* **Winifred Wilson***, House of Ruth*

**Members Absent**: **Heather DeVore**, *DC Forensic Nurse Examiners*; **Malik Washington**, *William Kellibrew Foundation;* **Anne Seymour**, *Anne Seymour Consulting*; **Carolina de los Rios**, *Polaris Project;* **Jackie King**, *Ramona’s Way*; **Lindsey Sebastian**, *APALRC*; **K. Rose Gordy**, *Safe Shores*; **Sasha Ponappa**, *Deaf Abused Women’s Network*; **Colleen Gallopin**, *Break the Cycle*; **Anne Wicks**, *DC Superior Court*

**Guests Present: Gitana Stewart-Ponder,** *Office of the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice*

**Staff Present: Melissa Hook, Cortney Fisher, Elizabeth Krauss**

**The meeting was convened by the VAN Leadership Council.**

**Review of Minutes**

* Minutes from October 2013 were reviewed and approved by a unanimous vote of the membership.

**VAN Committee Updates**

* The **Standards and Accountability Board** is the only committee established by the VAN Charter; a report was provided by the two co-chairs, **Nikki Charles and Natalia Otero.** The Standards and Accountability Board met twice. The Board has been collecting information on models in other states who have similar committees, and the Chairs have conference calls set up with Colorado and Arizona. The Board will have an in-person meeting to decide on a structure of the Board, determine standards that are attainable and able to be implemented, and set a structure for supporting member organizations with training and certification programs. The Board is looking at models for dispute resolution between members and public complaint processes as well. A proposed structure, set of standards, and goals will be presented at the February VAN meeting.
* The **Mental Health Services Committee** is chaired **by Michelle Palmer;** a report was provided by **Allison Medina in** Michelle Palmer’s absence. The Mental Health Committee meet in November to discuss issues related to mental health. The issues for consideration before the committee are**:**
  + What constitutes a victim? What if a person does not identify that they are a victim until they are in the middle of treatment?
  + How long are victims considered victims for the purpose of therapy?
  + How to work with CVC for crime victims who are not covered by OVS grant funding. CVC pays the full reimbursable rate, but is there a way for CVC to pay the difference between what insurance pays and the full rate?
  + There are not enough domestic violence and sexual assault support groups, and so there is an inability to refer individual clients to support groups. How do we build capacity for group therapy?
  + How do we increase the cultural capacity of therapists for human trafficking and other victimization issues?
  + How do we ensure that there is true capacity to provide therapeutic mental health services for all crime victims? There is a need to ensure “network adequacy” and ensure that the network has the expertise necessary to meet the needs of child and adult survivors.
  + How do we increase the language capacity of therapists?
  + Committee needs to determine the capacity that is available for all populations, i.e. boys and children, as well as cultural capacity and children?
  + Committee wants to work on the creation of a service provider hotline so that “other providers”, e.g. pediatricians, advocates, police officers, can access mental health care clinicians with trauma expertise to assist them immediately
  + Committee wants to work on standardizing the training of victim service professionals, in collaboration with the Standards and Accountability Committee, to ensure that appropriate mental health information in included in the accepted training of any victim service professional in the District.

The VAN requested the following issues be added to the Mental Health Committee’s agenda:

* Training for the victim service provider community about mental health laws, e.g. involuntary commitment
* Training for the victim service provider community, and capacity to serve, special populations, e.g. the elderly and victims with special needs.
* Training for the criminal justice community on children who are “abuse reactive” and begin to offend. Currently this population is screened out of traditional victim services.
* The **Mass Disaster and Emergency Response Committee** is chaired **by Anne Seymour with Allison Jackson** as the liaison to the Leadership Council. Cortney Fisher provided the report in Anne Seymour’s absence. The Mass Disaster and Emergency Response Committee has met once, following the final debriefing from the Navy Yard After Action meeting. The Office of Victim Services has been officially designated as the lead for the revision of the District’s Family Assistance and Reunification Center plan with regard to victim services. The Office of Victim Services has been working very closely with Kevin O’Brien, Director of Disaster Mental Health at the Department of Behavioral Health, and the Department of Human Services.

The VAN requested that the Mass Disaster and Emergency Response Committee also look into the role of victim services if the disaster is naturally-occurring as opposed to criminal. **Cortney Fisher** advised that in the currently District Family Assistance Center Plan, the Department of Human Services has the lead on any service provision occurs in response to a natural disaster. The Office of Victim Services has the lead when the disaster is a criminal, non-terrorist activity. However, OVS will discuss the role of victim services, as a support position, in terrorism-related disasters and naturally-occurring disasters.

* **The VAN representatives to the DV Hotline Task Force** are **Daniel Rappaport and Jessica Li. Daniel Rappaport and Jessica Li** jointly provided the update to the VAN of the Task Force progress. The DV Hotline Task Force has met twice. The role of the VAN representatives on the DV Hotline Task Force is to ensure that the hotline is relevant to the whole victim services community, culturally competent, and language accessible. Interns from American University surveyed hotlines around the country to develop a touchstone on issues such as staffing, training, hotline capacity, and hotline purpose. A preliminary report from the DV Hotline Task Force is due on January 30th to the Council. More information will be available at the February VAN meeting after the Task Force meets in January and presents the report to the Council.
* The **Policy and Legislative Committee** is chaired by Tonya Turner and Karma Cottman. Tonya Turner and Karma Cottman jointly provided the report. The Policy and Legislative Committee have been working on the Sexual Assault Victims’ Rights Amendment Act (SAVRAA) as a Committee. SAVRAA was a Bill introduced in response to the Human Rights Watch report and the review of the HRW report by Crowell and Moring. The Council hearing was held on December 12, 2013. There was a great turnout from the community. Many survivors testified at the hearing regarding their experiences in the criminal justice process. There was a discussion regarding advocate privilege, who is an advocate, when the advocate privilege should attach to an advocate, when a victim has a right to have an advocate present, and how long it takes to process a Physical Evidence Recovery Kit (PERK). The Policy and Legislative Committee has meetings scheduled in January 2014 to follow-up on issues that were raised at the hearing.

**Karma Cottman** explained that the Committee is looking for input from the VAN regarding the definition of an advocate, how training will be designed so that advocates are defined and privilege attaches, and the reality of what the sexual assault process is today vs. what the process looked like when the HRW report was being written.

Karma Cottman also advised that the Policy and Legislative Committee will be looking at ways in which the VAN can mediate disagreements and dissension among VAN members to ensure that all VAN members are coordinating one message in the public hearings.

* + **Melissa Hook** is interested in the Policy and Legislative Committee facilitating a discussion that will inform a Workgroup that is being formed by the Administration to discuss the complaint process for victims and case review. As it stands, the Administration is looking at three separate categories of review: case review (a process in which a multi-disciplinary team or committee would randomly review sexual assault cases), personnel complaints (complaints in which a victim has a problem with a particular employee of an agency or community-based organization), and system complaints (complaints in which a victim has a problem with the way that the organized system worked in their case). The Administration is interested in establishing procedures to facilitate a process for victims of all violent crimes in the District and would like the process to be informed by the VAN. While personnel issues have to remain with the agency or organization’s Human Resources Department, the system issues seem ripe for an external review board, such as the VAN or the Standards and Accountability Board of the VAN. Case review seems to be appropriate for SART review. However, ultimately the Administration would like to be informed by the victim services community as to who or what would be most trustworthy.
  + **Lorraine Chase** advised the Committee to review the policies of the Department of Justice Ombudsperson, which is an office that was established under the Crime Victims’ Rights Act to hear complaints from victims. Also requested clarification about why children weren’t included in the legislation.
    - **Tonya Turner** affirmed that children were purposely not included in the legislation due to the separate systems that function in response to children. Also noted that the reforms affecting children in the process would be included in an ongoing workgroup.
  + **Nikki Charles** spoke as a member of the SART, noting that the SART met yesterday (December 19, 2013) and had a vigorous discussion regarding the testimony and the hearing. Nikki Charles suggested that the SART (as a team) feels very excluded from the work of the VAN, the Administration, and any other coalition. The SART did not take a position, but in hindsight likely should have.
  + **Allison Jackson** advised the Committee and/or the Administration to review the policies and structure of the Safety Committee at Children’s National Medical Center. The Safety Committee conducts a “root cause analysis” of issues when they arise, seeking not to be punitive but to reform the system so that the same problems don’t arise again; the solutions are action-oriented and geared toward solving the problem. The “investigator” needs to be someone(s) who understands the system.

**Allison Jackson** also affirmed that this discussion is the reason that there is a Policy and Legislative Committee, and that this process is informing a process that will be used to introduce and advocate for many types of legislation. Legislation that is informed and written without including the “line” service providers is often flawed and problematic.

* Discussion of necessary components for complaints and case review. There needs to be a mechanism to get material and information that is not public from the agencies working on the case. Very often, there is much more to the case than the victim or the “reviewer” knows but the agency is unable or unwilling to provide the information. **Natalia Otero** affirmed that the Standards and Accountability Board is looking at systems and processes that include “compelling” information from agencies to best resolve the complaints of victims, and mechanisms to resolve disputes among member agencies. **Natalia Otero** notes that there are many different models available to look at and many of them are well-developed.

**Goal Setting 2014**

The VAN Leadership Council introduced the idea of goal setting for 2014. The Leadership Council wants to make sure that they are addressing the goals and objectives of the member agencies during their term and wants the VAN members to inform those goals. What would you consider a priority or important goal for the VAN to have during 2014? The VAN Leadership Council will report out at the next meeting about the goals and objectives for 2014. Members are invited to note the goals now or email them to **Cortney Fisher**.

The VAN requested that the following goals be considered in the open forum:

* Amendment of the Intrafamily Offenses Act (IFO) to limit the ability of “romantic rivals” to get protection under the IFO.
  + **Karma Cottman** affirmed that the DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence has been working on revising the IFO for 1 ½ years. The “romantic rivals” issue concerns the definition of romantic relationship and has complicated the revisions.
  + **Natalia Otero** noted that the “romantic rival” cases are disproportionately represented in homicide cases.
  + The complication often arises in LGBTQ relationships. Partners who are living together but who aren’t defining themselves as in a romantic relationship are now protected in the IFO. We don’t want to remove that protection.
* Implementation of support services for secondary and vicarious victims of trauma

**New Business**

* **Jenny Brody** spoke on behalf of the DC Volunteer Lawyers Project, My Sister’s Place, and DASH, introducing their new Domestic Violence Resource Clinic. The Clinic is held every Wednesday at St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church on 600 M Street, SW, which is one block from the Metro. My Sister’s Place will be facilitating support groups for survivors of domestic violence on Tuesdays, either at 11 am or 6:00 pm. All services at the Clinic are bilingual. The Clinic will offer housing, legal (custody, divorce, protection, and immigration), and mental health services. Cortney Fisher will be disseminating PDFs of the fliers via email.
* **Allison Medina** announced that Carol Loftur-Thun will be leaving the Women’s Center and they are currently searching for a new Executive Director

**The meeting was adjourned by the Leadership Council.**

***Next meeting scheduled for February 21, 2014 @ 10 am***

***Wilson Building, Room 527***