

Empower!

GIVING VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES A VOICE



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Message from Tyria Fields



Tyria Fields

Reflecting on 2016, it is with sincere sentiment that the members of the Victim Services Branch have served as symbols of hope, strength, and courage for victims of crime.

Hope is the optimism that things will improve. Strength — both mental and physical — enables one to make it through challenging times. And courage dares the way things are.

As we prepare for 2017, our services will continue to be ac-

companied by hope, strength, and courage as we empower victims of crime. Our commitment to survivors of crime is relentless and heartfelt.

From all of us at the Victims Services Branch, take care and Happy Holidays!

Ashley Rinaldi
Rayshunah Woods
Tracy Johnson
John Staley
Kayla Mungers
Barth Heger

Helen E. Hall
Chantres
Megan Reles
Melvin B. Fields

Upcoming Events and Activities



January

National Stalking Awareness Month

In January 2004, the National Center for Victims of Crime launched National Stalking Awareness Month (NSAM) to increase the public's understanding of the crime of stalking. NSAM emerged from the work of the Stalking Resource Center, a National Center program funded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice, to raise awareness about stalking and help develop and implement multidisciplinary responses to the crime. To learn more, visit www.victimsofcrime.org

National Human Trafficking Awareness Month

January is also National Human Trafficking Awareness month. Human trafficking is a form of modern day slavery and spans across all demographics and countries. To date, there have been 20.9 million human trafficking victims worldwide; making this a global issue. For more information and ways that you can help, go to <https://polarisproject.org> or call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 888-373-7888.

February

Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month

February is Teen Dating Violence (DV) Awareness Month. Teen DV Month (TDVAM) is a national effort to raise awareness about abuse in adolescent relationships and promote programs that prevent it.

Dating violence is more common than many people think. Help us spread awareness and stop dating abuse before it starts! For more information, visit www.loveisrespect.org.

March

International Women's Day

International Women's Day means different things to different people. For some it's a celebration, for others it's a call to action to accelerate gender parity, and for many it's an opportunity to align and promote relevant activity. Whatever your objective, International Women's Day is the perfect moment for gender-focused action. For 2017, we're asking you to #BeBoldForChange. Call on the masses or call on yourself to help forge a better work-

ing world — a more gender inclusive world. To take the pledge, visit www.internationalwomensday.com.

National Sexual Assault Awareness Month

During Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) survivors and advocates engage the greater community in prevention efforts. There's no better way to expand the scope of SAAM than by reaching out to a broader audience. Need help? Call 800-656-HOPE (4673) to be connected with a trained staff member from a sexual assault service provider in your area.

National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW)

April 2-8

The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) helps lead communities in their annual observances of National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW). The weeklong initiative promotes victims' rights and honors crime victims and those who advocate on their behalf. This year's theme — Strength. Resilience. Justice. — reflects this vision of the future. For more information on NCVRW, visit <https://ovc.ncjrs.gov/ncvrw>.

—Brittney Hegenauer/Ashley Rinaldi

Coping with the Holidays

Resources

National Center for Victims of Crime

2000 M Street NW, Suite 480
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 467-8700
Fax: (202) 467-8701
www.ncvc.org

The Wendt Center for Loss and Healing

202-624-0010
www.wendtcenter.org

Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, Inc. (TAPS)

(Resource for military families)
National Headquarters
910 17th Street, NW
Suite 800
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 588-TAPS (8277)
(202) 457-8277
800-959-TAPS (800-959-8277)
info@taps.org
www.taps.org

Holidays can be a very difficult and challenging time for families and friends who have lost a loved one to homicide. Holidays bring about a sharp reminder of what you have lost. You may be grieving for the way these events are forever altered. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional. Seeking the help needed from a professional counselor or mental health professional is a positive first step in managing grief during the holidays. The following suggestions may be helpful in managing the holiday season. Some things that may work for others might not work for you, so do what you are comfortable with.

Acknowledge your feelings. If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be

happy just because it's the holiday season.

Reach out. If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events. They can offer support and companionship. Volunteering your time to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships. Don't forget that others are hurting too. Be particularly mindful of the children in your family.

Be realistic. The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Don't be afraid to change traditions that make you sad. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones. Do expect to have pain... it is unavoidable. When those moments come, don't run from them; just let them happen and then move on.

Learn to say no. Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and

colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity. If it's not possible to say no when your boss asks you to work overtime, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time. Avoid doing things that you are uncomfortable with just because you think it is expected of you. Consider and suggest compromises.

Take a breather. Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Take a walk at night and stargaze. Listen to soothing music. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm. Just talking about your problems sometimes leads to new solutions. www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/.../art-20047544

—Helen Hall

VSF Holds Next-of-Kin Meeting During Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Resources

GET HELP TODAY at the 24/7 hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)

The Metropolitan Police Department's Victim Services Branch held a Next-of-Kin meeting during the week of October 3–7 at the Homicide Branch. Attendees included family members with open homicide cases from 2015–2016. Next of Kin meetings empower survivors to take an active role in the investigative process and provide them with individual support from a victim specialist. Families had the opportunity to meet with the detective investigating their loved one's case to address any concerns or questions.



Losing a loved one to homicide has far-reaching effects on families, friends, and the community as a whole. The Next of Kin Meetings provided a chance for members of the Family Liaison Specialists Unit to educate and empower survivors with information on

victims' rights, grief resources and other issues that impact victims of crime. Equipping survivors with resources and information will bring awareness to how domestic violence affects victims, families and society.

—Megan Riley

From Victim to Victim Advocate: A Letter to Victims

When asked if you remember your first day of kindergarten, it typically evokes a whirlwind of nostalgia, such as your incredibly cool cartoon-inspired lunchbox, or your favorite teacher's name. For me, the first day of school is a day that will forever be etched in my memory. My father dropped my two older brothers and me off at school. He kissed us goodbye. Neither of us knew that it would be the last kiss. Later on that day, he was murdered at work, leaving behind a wife and three children. When we experience tragedies of this magnitude, they become woven into the very fabric of our existence. We have to learn how to live again without that person. That learning process can be extremely painful and daunting however; it is a necessary road to travel. It is a journey that will require time, patience, and most importantly, support.

Many details surrounding my father's death are fleeting; but one that has always been at the forefront of those memories are the people that surrounded our family with support and strength. I didn't choose this line of work; it chose me. I decided that I was going to take my story and instead of allowing it to make me bitter, I was going to use it to make me better. And that's exactly what I did. I graduated with a Masters in Criminal Justice and Criminology and have devoted over a decade to serving victims. Being an advocate has showed me that there is something so healing about helping others.

"Pain is temporary. It may last for a minute, or an hour or a day, or even a year. But eventually, it will subside. And something else takes its place. If I quit, however, it will last forever" (Lance Armstrong, 1999). Only you can decide what you allow to take the place of that pain. I encourage you to fill that space with strength by not giving up, not giving up on the people that depend on you; most importantly not giving up on yourself. You deserve to live a meaningful purposeful life. Below is a list of things you can do to begin your journey to healing and restoration:

- » Simplify your life for a while. Make a list of the things you are responsible for in your life, such as taking care of the kids, buying groceries, teaching Sunday School, or going to work. Then look at your list and see which things are absolutely necessary. Is there anything you can put aside for a while? Are there things you can let go of completely?
- » Avoid using alcohol and drugs. These substances may temporarily block the pain, but they will keep you from healing. You have to experience your feelings and look clearly at your life in order to recover from loss.
- » Take care of your mind and body. Eat healthy food. Exercise regularly, even if it's only a long walk every day. Exercise will help lift depression and help you sleep better, too. Massage can also help release tension and comfort you.
- » Keep the phone number of a good friend nearby to call when you feel overwhelmed or have a panic attack.
- » Ask for help from family, friends, or professionals when you need it. There are professionals who are trained to help people recover from loss and cope with emotional pain.
- » Find small ways to help others, as it will help ease your own suffering.
- » Think about the things that give you hope.

For assistance locating additional resources to help you, a family member or friend, please contact MPD Victim Services Branch at (202) 724-4339.

—Ashley Rinaldi

(Note: Adapted from *Coping After A Homicide: A Guide for Family & Friends*, U.S. Department of Justice, 2004, Washington, DC: United States Attorney's Office)

A Look at the Tree of Remembrance from an Intern Perspective



During this semester, as an intern with the Metropolitan Police Department's Victim Services Branch/Family Liaison Specialists Unit, I was privileged to assist with the Department's Annual Tree of Remembrance Event. This event honors and celebrates the life of those lost to homicide in the District of Columbia. Planning an event of this magnitude can be a huge undertaking but with the support of staff, deadlines were always met.

Beginning with a date, the Branch created and sent invitations to over 700 families, inviting them to attend and sub-

mit photos of their loved ones. Many phone calls were made, encouraging families and taking reservations for the event. Ornaments were made with photos and names, which were given to families as a memento at the end of the event.

Each year, this event is a reminder for families that the Department joins with them in remembering their loved ones. It allows families to connect with other survivors, members of the Victim Services Branch, and the Department's

Command Staff. The event was held on December 3, 2016 at the Metropolitan 1st District Police Station, located at 101 M Street, SW.

As an intern, being a part of this program and working behind the scenes has been a rewarding experience. The Tree of Remembrance is more

than just honoring loved ones; it also creates a deeper bond with families, friends, the community, and the Metropolitan Police Department.

—Brittany Pogoda



Metropolitan Police Department
Victim Services Branch/Family Liaison Specialists Unit
101 M Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024