

Empower!

GIVING VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES A VOICE



A Publication of the Metropolitan Police Department's Victim Services Branch

Spring 2020 | Volume 12, Issue 1

Message from Tyria Fields



Tyria Fields

Spring is ushering new beginnings and opportunities. And right now, we are all adjusting to new normals and ways of doing our daily activities. This is especially true for the Metropolitan Police Department and the Victim Services Branch. COVID-19 has altered the way we support victims of crime. In effort to practice social distancing and maintain the safety to the public, we have gone remote. That is, our

victim advocacy is being done with minimal contact with the public. While this new normal is quite different from our routine practice, we have managed to find new ways of engagement. Specifically, we are using teleconferencing to connect with service providers, victims of crime and other members of the Victim Services Branch. The current pandemic has forced us to change how we work. It definitely has not changed the level of commit-

ment and access to our work. We understand that now more than ever, survivors of crime need advocacy, education and information. They have questions that need answers and they need a consistent supportive voice as they navigate the criminal justice system. The Victim Services Branch stands with you during this time of uncertainty with a steady hand. We are here to help.

Upcoming Events and Activities

April

Sexual Assault Awareness Month

The Metropolitan Police Department Victim Services Branch will stand in solidarity on Denim Day, Wednesday, April 29, 2020. Join Us!

Denim Day has become a symbolic protest against erroneous and destructive attitudes about sexual assault. Victim Services Branch Team urges and encourage everyone to make a social statement, by wearing jeans on this day as a visible means of protest against the misconceptions that surround sexual assault. For more information on Denim Day, visit www.denimdayinfo.org.

National Crime Victims' Rights Week

April 19-25, 2020

Every April, OVC helps lead communities throughout the country in their annual observances of NCVRW, which will be observed in 2020 from April 19 to 25. This year's theme is "Seek Justice | Ensure Victims' Rights | Inspire Hope." The weeklong initiative promotes victims' rights and honors crime victims and those who

advocate on their behalf. Download 2020 NCVRW resources now. Various materials are available in English and Spanish. <https://ovc.ncjrs.gov/ncvrw>

June

Camp Forget-Me-Not/Camp Erin DC June 26-28

Since 1999, the Wendt Center for Loss and Healing has been hosting Camp Forget-Me-Not/Camp Erin DC for grieving children and teenagers (ages 7-17) who have experienced the death of a loved one. Camp will be held Friday afternoon June 26-28, 2020 at Arlington Echo Educational Center in Millersville, MD. It is a fantastic opportunity for young people from DC, MD, and VA to meet other grieving kids, explore their own grief in a safe supportive environment, and have a really fun time. All campers are matched with an adult "buddy" for the weekend. All buddies are trained and screened volunteers.

Any questions please contact 202-624-0010 x150 or the camp email is camp@wendtcenter.org

July

The Capital Guardian Youth Challenge Academy

currently has Open Enrollment for the July 2020 Class #55. CGYCA is the District's premier residential program that focuses on providing a second chance for disengaged, at-risk youth of Washington, DC. The academy is structured on eight Core Components which are Life Coping Skills, Job Skills, Responsible Citizenship, Health & Hygiene, Physical Education, Leadership, Followership, Service to Community and Academic Excellence. Earn a high school diploma from the District of Columbia through GED preparation.

For more information contact, Capital Guardian Youth Challenge Academy 2001 East Capitol St, SE

202-730-1579

www.cgyca.org/Pre-application.html

2020 Census

Spread the word and help shape your community — respond online, by phone, or by mail.

<https://2020census.gov/en.html>

844-330-2020

Submitted by Ludemar Carrion

Sexual Assault Awareness Month Emphasizes Consent Through ‘I Ask’ Campaign

Resources

For more information, contact VSB Supervisor Tramaine Newsome at (202) 727-6007.

We hope this Spring 2020 edition of Empower finds you well in spite of the current COVID-19 pandemic that has changed the way many DC government agencies normally operate. The Victim Services Branch of the Metropolitan Police Department is still working hard for the community via phone, email, mail and video conferencing. We understand the fear and uncertainty that the current pandemic has caused around the world especially to vulnerable populations such as victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. Therefore, we wanted to share some resources for the current COVID-19 Response that readers may find helpful at this time: www.nsvrc.org/blogs/resources-for-covid-19-response

Furthermore, we want to take this opportunity to share information about the annual Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) campaign which is “I ASK”. While only two words, it’s a powerful statement:

“I ASK is the statement by which we will uplift the importance of consent and transform it from being prescriptive to empowering. Beyond Asking. Consent is about more than just asking — it is about listening to and accepting the answer without pressuring someone to change their mind.” (National

Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2018)

The #MeToo movement has confirmed what those of us doing anti-sexual violence work have known for years — that sexual violence is prevalent, it can happen to anyone, and the impact on survivors is long-lasting. For the general public, however, this information has been a wake-up call that has left many wondering what can be done to prevent another #MeToo story.

The good news is that we can prevent sexual violence — and together, we will. One way that everyone can get involved is by always respecting the personal and emotional boundaries of those around them. We can ensure that others’ boundaries aren’t crossed by asking for consent. While No Means No or Yes Means Yes messaging has been sharing the importance of consent for more than a decade, there is still a pressing need to not only normalize these conversations — but to also empower people to have them.

At its heart, Sexual Assault Awareness Month is about more than awareness — our ultimate goal is prevention. Since consent is a clear, concrete ex-

Sexual contact without consent is sexual assault. This fact remains true regardless of how you perceive the judgement, character, or motivations of the victim.



ample of what it takes to end sexual harassment, abuse and assault, it only made sense that this year’s theme center on empowering all of us to put consent into practice. The campaign will champion the power of asking — whether it be asking to hold someone’s hand, for permission to share personal information with others, or if a partner is interested in sex. I Ask is the statement by which individuals will demonstrate that asking for consent is a healthy, normal, and necessary part of everyday interactions, and it will set an example for their partners, friends, and loved ones.

And yet, many in our community do not know or understand the term Consent. Before reading further, do you know what Consent looks like? If not, the following can help Empower you and others in your community!

—Beyshinah Woods



National Crime Vicims’ Rights Week ‘Seeks Justice, Ensures Rights, Inspires Hope’

Resources

You can stay informed by joining our Official MPD Victim Services Branch Community Group. MPDC has created a confidential Google Group to enhance support for survivors/victims and improve communication with MPD and the community. This Group provides information on events and supportive services thought out the community. If you would like to join, send an email to Official MPD Victim Services Branch Community Group at official-mpd-vsrb@googlegroups.com

National Crime Victims’ Rights Week (NCVVRW) will be held April 19–25, 2020. This year’s theme is Seek Justice | Ensure Victims’ Rights | Inspire Hope. The weeklong initiative promotes victims’ rights and honors crime victims and those who advocate on their behalf. Metropolitan Police Department Victim Services Branch Specialists work with both primary and secondary victims of crime to EMPOWER! you to SEEK JUSTICE through the process of navigating the criminal justice system. The choice to participate in seeking justice through the courts will be yours. Whether you decide to move forward in this direction or not, we will still provide you services.

Ultimately, each person defines what they see as justice. We are here to do our best to help you find it. Sometimes there are situations where a case is unable to move forward. A crucial element in this process is knowing that you are being treated with respect and given due process. Know that you are important to us and that we care.

Victim Services Branch Specialists work to ENSURE VICTIMS’ RIGHTS by working with victims and survivors to explain their rights, refer them to appropriate agencies and provide a supportive environment. Under District of Columbia Law (23 DC Code Section 1901 et seq.), crime victims have the following rights:

- » Be treated with fairness and with respect for the victims’ dignity and privacy
- » Be reasonably protected

- » from the accused offender
- » Right to be notified of court proceedings
- » Be present at all court proceedings related to the offense including sentencing and release or parole hearings
- » Right to confer with an attorney for the prosecution in the case
- » Right to receive an order of restitution from the person convicted
- » Right to receive information about the conviction, sentencing, imprisonment, detention, and release of the offender
- » Right to be notified of any available victim advocate or other appropriate person to develop a safety plan and appropriate services

Just as in every state, Washington, DC has a Crime Victims Compensation Program that can provide substantial financial assistance to crime victims and their families. While no amount of money can erase the trauma and grief victims suffer, this aid can be crucial in the aftermath of crime. By paying for care that helps restore victims’ physical and mental health, and by replacing lost income for victims who cannot work and for families who lose a breadwinner, compensation programs are assisting victims in direct ways. Victim Services Branch Specialists will guide you through the Crime Victims Compensation Program process and the requirements to qualify.

Our Victim Specialists INSPIRE HOPE on each contact they make, with their calm, caring and compassionate ap-

proach. Our Victim Services Team has learned the art of self-care, something ever more important in these trying times of the pandemic for all of us. This is how we can best ultimately serve you, our community. We need to be at our best with a store of reserve. We assist victims in remembering to take care of themselves as well, especially now.

We create events to support and inspire survivors such as Next Of Kin (NOK) Meetings, Grief Healing workshops, Denim Day, and Paint with MPD. We provide outreach designed to address what people are struggling with to empower them to seek help. For instance, our trainings on stalking during Stalking Awareness Month proved vital to some audience members who were in that situation. We lifted up teens who had experienced the death of a loved one to give them a break from it all and created new cherished memories honoring their loss through art.

The victims we work with inspire us. There is a resiliency, a deep kindness and a drive that grows within so many survivors to make meaning where they can, honor their loved ones, reclaim their lives and support each other along the way.

Due to COVID 19 precautions, many Victims’ Rights Week events have changed. Check the link to see what is on the calendar: <https://ovc.ncjrs.gov/ovccalendar/default.asp>

—Sharon Daugherty

Help NAMI Celebrate Mental Health Awareness Month Throughout May

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. This year's theme for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is "Why Care?" According to NAMI, this campaign is an opportunity to share the importance of care in relationship with others. Care concerning the mental health treatment and services toward others. Care regarding the support and education to millions of people, families, caregivers, and loved ones affected by mental illness. Care brings awareness to broken systems preventing individuals from receiving adequate treatment. Care has the power to make a life-changing impact on those affected by mental health conditions.

When we care, we contribute to the health and well-being of those around us. Individuals experiencing mental health issues can feel alienated and alone. Care is being inclusive, asking questions, and listening without judgment. Care also ensures that people remain connected with the appropriate mental health professionals.

The Metropolitan Police Department's Victim Services Branch (VSB) is committed to the care of survivors and secondary victims of violent crime by being a resource to mental health and grief services. VSB continues to provide supportive services through individual and community advocacy with events such as Wellness Workshops and other victim-related events that empower survivors and victims as they continue to heal from trauma.

For more information and immediate Assistance contact:

- » MPD-Victim Services Branch: <https://mpdc.dc.gov/page/victim-services-branch>
- » DC Department of Behavioral Health Access Helpline: **888-793-4357** or visit <https://dbh.dc.gov>
- » The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) information Helpline: **800-950-6264** or visit <https://www.nami.org>
- » Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's National Helpline, **1-800-662-HELP** (4357), (also known as the Treatment Referral Routing Service) or visit www.samhsa.gov

—Marlene Castro



Why
Care

1 in 5 adults will experience mental illness this year.
Show how you care about mental health.

Denim Day: Still Make A Statement, Still Stand Strong

Resources

Fortunately, the District of Columbia has a vast array of community resources available to assist victims such as free sexual assault medical exams (SANE), temporary safe housing, and counseling resources. While many of the services available do require that a police report be filed, there are programs that provide services to self-reporting victims.

Should you or someone you know need assistance locating resources, contact MPD's Victim Services Branch at **202-727-6007** or the DC Victim Hotline at **1-844-4HELPDC**.

Denim Day is a global campaign that is held annually. It originated in Italy in 1992, after the Italian Supreme Court overturned a rape conviction due to the justices concluding that the victim must have helped the suspect take her pants off because, the jeans she was wearing were too tight. The next day, the women in the Italian Parliament all came to work wearing denim in solidarity with the victim. Denim Day asks us all to take a symbolic stance of solidarity with sexual assault victims and survivors everywhere by wearing denim on Denim Day. This year, Denim Day is Wednesday, April 29th, 2020.

In past years, Metropolitan Police Department's (MPD) Victim Services Branch (VSB) has taken great pride in hosting an annual Denim Day event that provided an opportunity for advocates, local service providers, and MPD members to come together to make a statement that we are all dedicated to supporting victims and survivors and educating our community by way of informational panels, music, and various genres of entertainment and education.



During this time of transition, we are currently facing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been mandated to avoid large gatherings and practice social-distancing for the well-being of us all. Although we will not come together physically, we will come together in solidarity and not allow the spirit of Denim Day to lie dormant this year. We encourage each one of you to virtually share your stories, pictures, or even inspirational messages to survivors on your

social media platforms. Using popularized hashtags such as #denimday, #mpddenimday, #IAsk, or #30DaysOfSAAM, victims and survivors abroad can be encouraged by your support. Even though our method may change this year, our message stays the same. We will still make a statement; we will still stand strong.

While we observe Denim Day in April, Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) is dedicated to supporting victims and survivors of sexual assault 365 days of the year. MPD's Victim Specialists provide supportive services and referrals to victims and survivors by linking them with wrap-around services that are crucial during the initial period after victimization has occurred.

—Ashley Rinaldi



Modified Approach to Next-of-Kin Meeting During Coronavirus Restrictions

Resources

If you have any questions regarding the Next-of-Kin Meetings or would like to speak with a Victim Specialist, please call **202-645-6363**.

With the recent developments and restrictions surrounding the Coronavirus (COVID-19), the Family Liaison Specialists Unit is conducting a modified Next-of-Kin Meeting. Family members with open homicide cases from 2016 through 2018 are invited to schedule a phone appointment with the detective investigating their loved one's case. In the future, face to face meetings will be rescheduled as needed. The goal of the Next-of-Kin meetings is to empower survivors to take an active role in the investigative process while providing them with individual support from a victim specialist.

Each year, April's Next-of-Kin Meeting is held in obser-

vance of National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW). This year's NCVRW theme promotes "seeking justice, ensuring victims' rights are upheld, and inspiring hope." Losing a loved one to homicide has far-reaching effects on families, friends, and the community. Victim Specialists are reaching out to all families participating in this Next-of-kin meeting to inspire hope and address the various needs of secondary victims of homicide during this CO-



VID-19 pandemic. As families navigate their healing journey, they are encouraged to continue to seek justice by maintaining communication with the assigned detective. The Metropolitan Police Department remains committed to ensure that victims' rights are upheld as we provide supportive services and information on available resources during this global crisis.

Megan Riley



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