

November 2007

Official Position Statement on Victims Assistance Grant Funding

Since their inception, Sexual Violence Programs in the state of New Jersey have been under-resourced and under-funded. Services for survivors and their loved ones have depended on a level of commitment and support from sponsoring organizations that can no longer be sustained. Ever increasing demands for services, coupled with decreasing funds for direct services have resulted in increasing staff/volunteer turnover and decreasing continuity of care for survivors and their loved ones.

Core survivor-centered services in each county must include the equitable distribution of Victims Assistance Grant funding between sexual violence, domestic violence, child abuse and victim witness services. Some counties have as many as nine victim witness staff whereas other state designated anti-violence agencies in other counties have no more than one full time person per agency funded by Victims Assistance Grant. Equitable distribution is imperative to ensure that the needs of victims of sexual violence are not sacrificed.

The Sexual Violence Programs in New Jersey are slowly but surely reaching a critical breaking point that threatens the availability of core services in each county. The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA) and all of its member programs go on record with the funding imperatives:

1. Core survivor-centered sexual violence services in each county must include:
 - 24 hour hotline capability,
 - 24 hour crisis response of a Confidential Sexual Violence Advocate,
 - Availability of individual and/or group counseling for survivors and significant others,
 - SART participation as a Confidential Sexual Violence Advocate,
 - Legal, medical, and/ or systems advocacy,
 - Outreach to survivors regardless of participation in the criminal justice system, and
 - Information and referral services.
2. A commitment that funding of other state mandates, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (S.A.N.E.), Victim Information Notification Everyday (V.I.N.E.), and Victim Witness Advocacy Units should not be done at the expense of funding vital crisis responses and counseling options for survivors of sexual violence and/or their loved ones.

For over 30 years, Sexual Violence Programs throughout our state have provided crucial services to survivors and their loved ones. NJCASA believes that the presence of a Confidential Sexual Violence Advocate is essential to an effective and compassionate response to a survivor of sexual assault. As N.J.S.A 2A: 84A – 22:13 recognizes the emotional and psychological trauma experienced by survivors and their families are often best responded to by trained Confidential Sexual Violence Advocates. Recent research notes that the immediate crisis intervention and accompaniments provided by trained advocates is critical in promoting the healing process for survivors of sexual violence.¹ The study conducted by Campbell reports that survivors are more likely to report to police, feel less re-traumatized by “systems” and were more likely to receive the necessary legal and medical services they deserve. New Jersey cannot afford to re-victimize this already vulnerable population.

¹ Campbell, Rebecca, February 2005. “What Really Happened?: A Validation Study of Rape Survivors' Help-Seeking Experiences With the Legal and Medical Systems” *Violence and Victims* 20:1(55-68)