

THE VICTIMS' VOICE

Quarterly Newsletter

SPRING 2011

A MESSAGE FROM THE STATE VICTIM ADVOCATE



Michelle S. Cruz, Esq.
CT State Victim Advocate

AN UPDATE ON THE OVA

The Victims' Voice which had been dormant for the past six months due in part to staff changes, is back in print due largely to the recent hire of Vanessa DeLeon, as our Office Assistant. Although we are finally fully operational again, we at the OVA are anxiously awaiting the news of a finalized budget so we may learn the fate of the OVA. This has been a difficult time for many across the state and nation. In reflection, the OVA has set as next fiscal years goal, to work on raising donations for the agency to expand the work we do and to ensure victims' voices are heard across the state.

We hope to capitalize on events like the one of July of 2010, when the OVA held our first annual Speakers' Bureau at the Department of Public Safety's Forensic Science Laboratory located in Meriden, CT. The event was geared towards crime victim survivors and their families with the goal of offering education about the criminal justice system and train those interested in becoming OVA community speakers. The training consisted of the "Nuts & Bolts" of crime victims' rights in Connecticut's criminal justice system, resources available for crime victims, and steps on how to advocate for yourself and other crime victims who are engaged in the criminal justice system.

The OVA would like to thank all attendees for their feedback and for those who are interested in assisting crime victims to enhance public awareness of resources available to crime victims in Connecticut. Additionally, the OVA would like to express gratitude to Director Ken Zercie and the DPS Forensic Science Laboratory for providing a venue for this event and for providing the attendees with a tour of the laboratory. Thank you all for making our first training a success!

Plans are in the works for the 2nd Annual Speakers Bureau to be held Friday July 22, 2011! Please visit the OVA website at www.ct.gov/ova or contact the office for more details on how to register.



Visit our new and improved website at:

www.ct.gov/ova

Leave feedback!

*We want to hear from you!
How has the OVA been able to assist you in your time of need?*

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DCF SURVIVAL TIPS...

ADAPTED FROM THE DCF SURVIVAL MEMO BY THE LAW OFFICES OF MICHAEL H. AGRANOFF

There are many instances where a crime victim may become involved with the Connecticut Department of Children & Families, otherwise known as DCF. You may be involved with DCF because your child has been the victim of a crime or you, yourself, have been a victim of a crime. It is difficult enough to navigate the world of the criminal justice system and then being involved with DCF can be equally frightening. What do you do when DCF appears un-expectedly on your door step. Below are some tips to help you during these difficult times.

- **Do not sign anything before you read and understand what you are signing.** This rule has NO EXCEPTIONS! Do not listen to comments such as "It's just routine.", this document might very well may be routine for DCF, however this is not routine for you. You may wish to consult an attorney for your protection.
- **Do not argue with DCF or service providers:** No matter what...do not argue with DCF or service providers. Understanding that the DCF worker has a job is important as well as understanding that although this feels personal, its not. If you have an attorney, let your attorney resolve the conflict on your behalf. If you don't, ask to speak with a supervisor or the DCF liaison. Remember, as a crime victim and individual involved with DCF, it is normal to be emotional and upset.
- **Do not make agreements before taking time to review and understand the agreements:** Ask for everything in writing. Often, there are disagreements on what you agree to do and it is left to their word against your word and usually DCF wins those arguments. If you have an attorney, have him or her read any significant agreements, prior to you agreeing to anything.
- **Advocate for yourself and do not take legal advice from non-lawyers:** The law often has too many interrelated terms for lay persons to understand. It is in your best interest to ask as many questions as you need to, to better understand what is happening and what will occur. You may want to consult an attorney to assist you.
- **Do not discuss your case with others:** It is common for people to try to convince others that you are right. Unfortunately, anything you say is simply hearsay, and the smallest negative comment or activity will come back to haunt you.



*Survivors of Homicide
1st Annual Golf Tournament*
July 9, 2011
Tee off Time: 9:00 AM
Grassmere Country Club Enfield, CT
12:00 PM Social Hour
1:00 Lunch/ Speakers/ Raffle/Cash Bar

If Interested Contact:
email: golftournament@survivorsofhomicide.com
or call Art Jensen @ 860-292-1020



**2nd Annual Speakers
Bureau**
Friday July 22, 2011
Meriden, CT
Register Today!

MAGGIE'S MISSION

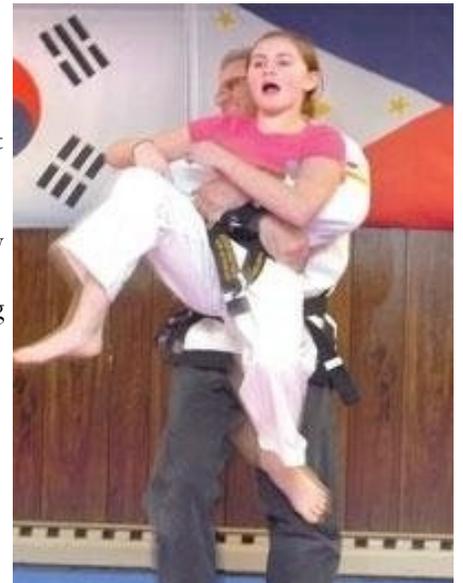


My name is Maggie, and I am the founder of Maggie's Mission. I am 12 years old and will be entering 8th grade in the fall. I live in CT with my mom, dad, and dog. I love to play soccer and play for my town travel team and I am in a premier league called CFC. I also love musical theatre and basketball. I am currently Junior Miss Naugatuck Valley and I am involved in the Miss America Organization. In my spare time, I love to read. One of my biggest accomplishments is achieving black belt in the art of Tang Soo Do.

On March 7th, 2006, a tragedy struck my family. My aunt, Kathy Hardy, was murdered when her Branford home was set on fire. After the devastation my mother got involved in Survivors of Homicide and other victims' rights groups. She then brought me to be fingerprinted and photographed by the Molly Bish Life "Guard" Team. On my way home from the event, I was reading a pamphlet given to me at the session. It had inside safety tips, statistics, and other things. However the thing that caught my eye was the list of organizations on the back. The list consisted of KlaasKids, Melanie Ilene Rieger Conference Against Violence, Joyfulchild, and other groups. I noticed that something all of these organizations have in common is that they were all started by family members of children and young adults who have been abducted and murdered. That is when I came up with "Maggie's Mission: Don't Be Too Late." For the first couple of months, I just had the website, but then I had the opportunity to go teach a self defense seminar and get my organization out in the community.

Since that first seminar, I have taught many seminars throughout CT, as well as, appeared in the news many times. I have been featured in FOX 61 News reports a couple of time. I had the great pleasure of being on CT Style and Better CT. I have also had articles in the New Haven Register and the Republican American's Tuesday Women. I was featured in a web story the New Haven Register did on my aunt's case. Last year, I was asked to do two breakout sessions at the 14th Annual Melanie Ilene Rieger Conference Against Violence, this was such an amazing experience and I hope that I am able to do it again in the future. Not only did I get so many people to know about Maggie's Mission, but I met some of the most inspirational people, I will ever meet. People such as, Marc Klaas, Marilyn Gambrell, Chip and Lisa St.Claire, and of course I got to spend time with Sam and Wanda Rieger.

My seminars usually run about an hour, however if I need to, I can make them longer or shorter. My partner Kevin Smith and I do not only teach self-defense, we teach self awareness as well. The first 20-30 minutes of each seminar are spent with me and the kids sitting in a circle on the floor, as I teach them about how to prevent a kidnapping. This includes telling them different safety tips, like I will yell "FIRE, HELP ME!" when attacked because the word fire draws more attention. The one thing I want every kids to take from my seminar is that they ALWAYS fight back, no matter what. Next, we all get up and start with the self-defense portion. I show them how to get away from wrist grabs, bear hugs, and other ways an attacker will try to grab you. This is what the kids really enjoy, and this is why they remember what I teach, because they have fun. Kevin is our "bad guy" and every workshop he puts on all the pads, so the kids can actually practice kicking and punching him. I am very passionate about my work with Maggie's Mission and I know I will continue to do it for as long as I can.



Article submitted by: Maggie Luddy of Maggie's Mission

SENSITIVITY 101

On a sunny day sunglasses are needed to protect our eyes, however the glasses need to be removed to see clearly in dark places. Almost six years ago, I was wearing a t-shirt which read, "Life is good" and my glasses were in place. I felt bad when I heard stories of tragedies befalling families. Somehow I thought my family had a cushion of protection. I was blinded to the reality of crime - guilty as charged. Today I know - no one is exempt from crime infiltrating their lives. In order to correct the problems in society we need to remove our rose colored glasses and open our eyes; we need to look, listen and take action.

My family as I knew it- Dad, Mom, Billy and Paula- came to a sudden halt almost six years ago when my son, Billy, was violently torn away through what I believe now to be an act of violence. The horror of hearing that my son had gone missing led us to the police department, believing that we would find assistance there. We did not know nor expect that the police would lack the necessary training to assist us, telling us to return, and suggesting our son was on a vacation, drinking beer. We left the police department, fumbling about like fish out of water.

Today, I struggle with a new identity - the mother of a son gone missing. Since that first horrific day, on August 24, 2004, I have daily interactions with law enforcement. I can share with you that I have been on the receiving end of hurtful comments by law enforcement officers and often wonder, why this repeatedly occurs. I honestly believe that many of these offensive comments are for the most part unintentional and a direct result of today's law enforcement officer's lack of training regarding how to interact with a crime victim and their family members. And yet, the smallest gesture could take steps to healing a broken heart.

No one is perfect, I understand that, and when a child, whether adult or a minor, goes missing, law enforcement becomes a lifeline for families. The interactions with law enforcement have the potential to harm or comfort. The purpose of a law enforcement officer, from my vantage point, is to protect and serve the community to which they are affiliated. During my journey to bring Billy home, I and my family have had to endure comments and judgments that have left us broken, including: **"No Body- No Case"; "He is probably in Europe drinking beer and he will be home when he is ready"; "It is five o'clock and I don't get paid after five"; "You care about your son, but no one else does."**

I hesitated to write this, but if I can help one other parent or family member not suffer, it's worth it to me. As the years ticked by, I have learned a lot about human nature. What emerged, enlightened me and woke me to reality has been, if my voice can change the interactions with one law enforcement officer and a victim or their family, that it is worthy my speaking.

I am not alone in these experiences. Two close friends were vacationing when they received a phone call from a detective who said, "Come home your daughter has been murdered". Reeling from the news, their long trip home was a nightmare compacted by the insensitive words of the Officer. I will share several other remarks by law enforcement and authorities that have been shared with me and other crime victims over the past few years.

- ◆ "It's a waste of time putting up fliers."
- ◆ "When you find him he's going to run away again." (but, there was no history of running away)
- ◆ "99% of them walk back in a couple of days."
- ◆ "Be prepared he went off to commit suicide."
- ◆ When no body was found the comment "Oh, he just went off to start a new life."
- ◆ "There are no signs of foul play." (This makes it sound like an excuse to not investigate and it's hurtful to families who are very fearful that something has happened).
- ◆ "He is probably in Mexico having margaritas with his friends."
- ◆ "He could have been abducted by aliens, I guess"
- ◆ "He's an adult. It's not a crime for him/ he has the right to walk away from his life."

My life has changed. I now advocate every day for crime victims, missing persons and their families. My heart is crushed when I learn of another family joining the ranks of crime victims, desperately looking for help and guidance, pleading to find their loved one. Everyday gone is a day wasted. That is why I have advocated for a statewide/nationwide database to assist in the location of missing persons. Since my son went missing, we have successfully changed the law, and a family no longer must wait 24 hours to report a missing person - although I still hear families who have not been informed of this new law. THERE IS NO TIME TO GRIEVE! How do I impress upon society! Day in and day out we have become detectives ourselves.

*Author: Janice Smolinski
www.justice4billy.com*

Please note: *The OVA is not suggesting that every law enforcement agency or representative is insensitive to the needs of crime victims, however this is the factual occurrence of this familie's experience.*

SAVE THE DATE



May 14: Interval House's Annual "Heart & Soul" Gala. 6pm, The Society Room, Hartford. For more info call 860-246-9149, Ext. 313.

May 14-15th: Trade Secrets Two-Day Charity event. Rare plant and garden antiques will be sold to benefit the Women's Support Services of the Northwest Corner. More info can be found at <http://www.tradesecretsct.com>

May 20th: Self-Worth, Health Relationships & Good Decision Making. Hartford Public High School from 8:30AM-2:30PM

Brunettes Hair Studio
presents
Hair To Dye For
A MAKE & FASHION SHOW TO BENEFIT THE FIGHT AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
JULY 31ST - 6PM
AT
THE SOCIETY ROOM OF HARTFORD
\$75. per plate
A PORTION OF THE PROCEEDS FROM THIS EVENT WILL GO TO INTERVAL HOUSE

If you are interested in attending please contact Brunettes Hair Studio at 860-263-0794.



PETIT FAMILY FOUNDATION

Annual Golf Tournament

Monday, June 20, 2011

Please visit:

www.petitfamilyfoundation.org
for more information on how to register!



*The 15th Annual
Melanie Ilene Rieger Memorial Conference*
June 22-23, 2011
Central CT State University
"The Many Faces of Survivors"
www.melanieriegerconference.com

OVA Advisory Committee Meetings

June 26, August 16 & December 20, 2011

9:30 am -11:30 pm

Hartford Legislative Office Building, Room 1C



**Tiana Angelique Notice 2nd Annual
Foundation Golf Tournament**



Get ready to hit the links and join the Tiana Angelique Notice Foundation at the *Pine Ridge Country club in North Oxford, MA* on *Friday, September 9, 2011*. This annual event will be held to benefit the Tiana Angelique Notice Foundation. This scramble format tournament will tee off at 9:00 a.m. with a full shotgun start with dinner and awards to follow play. The price for each golfer is \$125 to include green fees, cart, tournament windbreaker and dinner.

To register, please visit:
www.tiananoticefoundation.org

CONNECTICUT COLD CASE**\$50,000 Reward**

Alexandra Ducsay

In May 2006, Alexandra Ducsay, a 26-year-old aspiring singer and actress was found murdered in her home in Milford, CT.

It has been 4 years, and this ongoing investigation needs the assistance of the public.

ANYONE

with information about this crime should please contact the Milford Police Department immediately at (203) 877-1465.

UPDATE
CASE SOLVED

An arrest has been made on this 16 year-old cold case!
Thanks to the dedicated members of the new:
New London County State's Attorney's Cold Case Unit.

Connecticut Cold Case

On July 9, 1993, Bertha Reynolds, was found murdered in her home, located at
84 Laurel Hill Ave., Norwich, CT.



Bertha Reynolds

The New London County State's Attorney's Cold Case Unit is seeking the help of the public in obtaining information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person and or persons responsible for the death of Bertha Reynolds.

If you have information relative to this investigation, please contact the Cold Case toll free tip line.

Connecticut Cold Case Unit:

1-866-623-8058

Or

Cold.Case@po.state.ct.us



SPRING/SUMMER SAFETY TIPS



Now that Spring has finally arrived, many of our family activates will be taken outdoors. It is always a good idea to freshen up on safety issues at the beginning of each seasons.

Car Rides

- ◆ All passengers should wear a seat belt and/or an age-and size appropriate car safety seat or booster seat.
- ◆ Your child should ride in a rear facing safety seat with a harness until the child reaches the age, weight and height requirements for the booster seat. Your child's shoulders should be above the top harness slots, or their ears have reached the top of the seat when they are ready for the booster seat. Most police departments have car seat safety programs to provide assistance if needed.
- ◆ Your child should ride in a belt-positioning booster seat until the vehicle's seat belt fits properly (usually when the child reaches about 4'9" in height and is between 8 to 12 years of age).
- ◆ When your child asks, and he or she will, "Why do I have to wear the seatbelt if we are just going around the block?, let them know many accidents happen close to home, and safety is important.
- ◆ Be a good role model by wearing your own seatbelt.
- ◆ All children under 13 years of age should ride in the rear seat of vehicles.
- ◆ Follow the law, don't text or take calls while driving.

Bike Safety

- ◆ Always wear a bike helmet, no matter how short or long the ride and wear bright color clothing to increase visibility.
- ◆ Ride on the right, in the same direction as traffic.
- ◆ Use appropriate hand signals and know the "rules of the road". Respect traffic lights and stop signs.

Walking

- ◆ Make sure your child's walk to any location is a safe route with well-trained adult crossing guards at every intersection when available.
- ◆ Be realistic about your child's pedestrian skills. Because small children are impulsive and less cautious around traffic, carefully consider whether or not your child is ready to walk to school without adult supervision.
- ◆ Wear bright colored clothing to make your child more visible to drivers.
- ◆ If you are able use the "buddy system" (have your child walk with a friend, so they are not alone).
- ◆ If you discover your child is nervous or afraid about walking home or alone, talk with your child, find out what is making him or her feel uncomfortable. Consider walking with your child a few times and if the fear continues, find another solution.

Sport Safety:

Here are some of the basics you want to make sure are in place for your child while playing sports.

- Ask the recreation agency if all individuals, coaches and volunteers alike, have had a criminal background check and how often. Many times individuals will volunteer for activates with sports teams, taking on positions such as team manager or snack volunteer, avoid the normal channels of screening.
- Most sexual assaults of minor children occur during one-adult/one child scenarios. Inquire what activities your child will be partaking in and how many individuals will be involved. If you learn your child will be involved in one child/one adult activities, either arrange for you or your partner to be present or discontinue the event.
- Trust your gut instinct. If a situation makes you or your child uncomfortable, discontinue the activity. For instance if your child does not want to participate in swim lessons because the instructors make her or him uncomfortable, allow the child to discontinue the lessons. Although there may not be anything wrong with the instructors, by allowing your child to set boundaries and comfort levels at an early age, you empower your child to be safe and develop and trust his or her gut instinct as well.
- Teach or remind your child about inappropriate touching. Check in with your child by asking if anyone touched them in a way that made them feel bad or uncomfortable.
- Does the coach have first aid training and an emergency action plan? Is there a first-aid kit always on hand?
- Does the coach have your emergency contact information? Do you have contact information for the coach?
- Is there available water and hydration at all games & practices?
- Is there a scheduled warm-up and cool down at games and practices?
- Does your child receive guidelines and recommendations about proper safety equipment? Is safety equipment required for play?
- Is sportsmanship, and fair play a core value of the program and the coach?

THE OFFICE OF THE VICTIM ADVOCATE**WHAT'S NEW AT THE OVA?**

Visit us @ www.ct.gov/ova

2nd Annual Speakers Bureau:

To be held Friday July 22, 2011

The goal of the "Speakers Bureau" is to educate and train crime victims, their friends and supporters, to learn how to advocate for themselves and, if they choose, to educate their local communities about crime victims' rights and to learn about the services of the OVA. The "Speakers Bureau" will consist of a "Nuts & Bolts" training of crime victims' rights in our state and the criminal justice system, resources available in our state, how to advocate for crime victims during their journey through the criminal justice system and, most importantly, how to combat vicarious trauma which is often associated with assisting crime victims in their process. The commitment for the training would be a half day training. Some individuals may seek to attend the "Speakers' Bureau" and then simply place fliers or handouts within their local communities and yet others may choose to become more active involved by getting involved in the certification program mentioned below. The level of involvement is yours.

Speakers Certification Program, Speakers Wanted:

Date TBD

A Victims' Rights Certification Program which will entail a series of courses and seminars available to the members of the Speakers Bureau who are interested in expanding their advocacy to the community. Once you have received certification, members of the "Speakers' Certification Program" will be notified of upcoming speaking engagements at senior centers, schools, town hall meetings, etc. on a volunteer basis. The more we can educate the community about the existence of the OVA and the Rights of Crime Victims, the more we can impact change! This would consist of attending the Speakers Bureau and yearly refresher training. For those of you who desire a deeper involvement in the crime victims' rights movement, there will be opportunities to become engaged in your respective communities. In the end, we hope to have numerous individuals throughout the state available to talk about crime victims' rights and resources, and also, perhaps, be a contact in their communities for the unfortunate new crime victim, learning how to navigate the criminal justice system.

*To express an interest in any of the above mentioned events please email
Vanessa Deleon at Vanessa.M.Deleon@ct.gov or contact the office at (860) 550-6632.*