

Thirteenth Annual Council of Advocates Held

■ By Katie Parker

The Council of Advocates (COA) meeting is a day-long, roundtable discussion hosted annually by the Crime Victim Services Commission (CVSC) and coordinated by the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI). Each year, a small group of representatives from VOCA-funded agencies in Michigan meet to network and discuss current issues that crime victims and service providers face. Participants have the chance to provide open feedback to the CVSC and MPHI, and the CVSC is able to relay any new and pertinent information regarding VOCA grant administration to grantees.

This year, the COA meeting was held on Tuesday, February 1, 2011 at the Henry Center in Lansing, Michigan. Meeting participants traveled to Lansing from all over the state, including Holland, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Sault Ste. Marie, Ann Arbor, Mt. Clemens, and Battle Creek. The participants represented a wide variety of VOCA-funded agencies serving victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, homicide, drunk driving, and child abuse.

James McCurtis, Manager of the Crime Victim Services Commission, and Leslie O'Reilly, Program Specialist, began the meeting with introductions and opening remarks. Mr. McCurtis provided attendees with a short biography of himself and discussed some of the initiatives he plans to accomplish as the new CVSC manager. The group then moved into an open question and answer session. Topics of discussion included changes to Crime Victim Compensation during the past year, victims who are also offenders, questions raised by the Office for Victims of Crime, increasing awareness of crime victim

services, agency capacity building, and services for victims of human trafficking.

During the afternoon session, Ms. O'Reilly discussed the online VOCA application and reporting process. Participants were given the opportunity to provide continued feedback on the online system. Ongoing training on the system will be provided to users. Ms. O'Reilly also spoke about issues related to CVSC monitoring of VOCA grantees in Michigan.

Brief background information on the training needs assessment survey of victim services agencies in Michigan was provided to meeting attendees. This survey was designed and implemented by MPHI and distributed to agency directors, staff, and volunteers. The next phase will involve surveying select training providers throughout the state. Mary Zack Thompson and Katie Parker of MPHI provided preliminary results gathered from the surveys of agency directors, staff, and volunteers. The CVSC will use the responses to develop future workshops that meet the training needs of victim service providers in Michigan.

MPHI staff facilitated a discussion about *The Michigan Advocate* website that included an online demonstration. COA meeting attendees submitted article suggestions for upcoming editions of *The Michigan Advocate* newsletter. The latest edition of the newsletter and other resources can be found at the following link: www.michiganadvocate.org.

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At the conclusion of the COA meeting, MPHI staff announced the upcoming Program Evaluation for VOCA Grantees training dates. In response to participant feedback from the previous years, three trainings facilitated by Dr. Cris Sullivan from Michigan State University will again be offered in 2011. One general training session and two advanced training sessions will be provided. Additional information about these trainings, including dates, locations, RSVP forms, and hotel reservation information, can be found at www.michiganadvocate.org under the "CVSC Events" tab.

Discussion topics and updates provided by the CVSC and MPHI were summarized in a COA meeting report and will be posted to *The Michigan Advocate* website. If you would like additional information about the COA meeting, please contact Mary Zack Thompson from MPHI at (517) 324-8392 or mthompso@mphi.org.

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