

Twelfth 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 are facing. 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 Thursday, January 21, 2010 at the Henry Center in Lansing, Michigan. Meeting participants traveled to Lansing from all over the state, including Alpena, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Sault Ste. Marie, Traverse City, Mt. Clemens, and Kalamazoo. The participants represented a wide variety of VOCA-funded agencies serving victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, homicide, drunk driving, and child abuse.

John Hubinger, Director of the Crime Victims and Emergency Medical Services Division, and Leslie O'Reilly, Program Specialist, began the meeting with introductions and opening remarks. The group then moved into an open question and answer session. Topics of discussion included Michigan legislative updates, the Sexual Assault Resource Analysis (SARA) Project at Michigan State University, the needs of domestic violence shelters in Michigan, the Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) fund, services for those with limited English proficiency, and tribal issues. The group also discussed VOCA-agency funds and budgets.

During the afternoon session, Ms. O'Reilly introduced staff from Agate Software, Inc. who provided a demonstration of the new version of the online grants management system. Participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback about this reporting process and to make suggestions for improvement of the online application. Training on the new online system will be provided to users.

The CVSC announced plans to conduct a training needs assessment of all victims' services agencies in Michigan. This survey will be designed and implemented by MPHI and distributed to training providers, agency directors, agency staff, and volunteers. The survey will be available electronically via an e-mail link. Paper copies of the survey will be provided to agencies as needed. The CVSC will use the responses to learn more about what training the service providers currently receive and what types of training they would like to see provided in the future.

MPHI staff facilitated a discussion about *The Michigan Advocate* website that included an online demonstration of the community events calendar and also highlighted the scrolling newsfeed added to the home page of the website. COA meeting attendees were asked to submit suggestions for articles for upcoming editions of *The Michigan Advocate* newsletter. The latest edition of the newsletter and other resources for crime victims' services providers is available at: 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 training participant feedback from the previous year, three trainings facilitated by Dr. Cris Sullivan from Michigan State University will again be offered in 2010, including one general training session and two advanced training sessions. 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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