

SATRC frontlines

FALL 2002

A NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED BY THE SEXUAL ASSAULT & TRAUMA RESOURCE CENTER OF RHODE ISLAND

INSIDE:

New Staff	2
On the Frontline	3
SATRC Receives Federal Grant	4
Under The Stars, By The Sea	4

Survivors Speak Out

Two women, strangers to each other, but each with common goals, meet in a survivors' forum, formed to offer comfort and counseling to the victims of clergy sexual abuse and their families. Two women, whose lives have been irrevocably altered by events that took place more than 20 years ago.

"I was 17 when the sexual abuse by my parish priest began," Phyllis Hutnak said. "It continued in many forms over the next 10 years. There were harassing phone calls, verbal abuse, emotional manipulation and blackmail. Even after I was married with children, I was afraid to tell."

"My son was about 12 or 13 when he was sexually abused by a priest," Elizabeth Leighton said. "A year or so later he was

hospitalized and diagnosed with schizophrenia. It wasn't until sometime later that Donald revealed the sexual abuse to a counselor. We were told at that time to let it go for Donald's sake, but I should have listened to my intuition."

■ Elizabeth Leighton

Sometime in the mid-1980s, the counselor, Donald's father, now deceased, and Donald filed a formal complaint with the police. After an investigation, the family

was told there wasn't enough proof to substantiate the allegation.

Dissatisfied with the police and diocese's response, Elizabeth met with her parish priest, who gave her the name of the diocesan investigator. But in the end, the church took the side of the priest.

Today, Donald is 36 and a patient at a mental health facility. Elizabeth is convinced his schizophrenia was triggered by the sexual abuse.

The years of sexual abuse and emotional turmoil have taken a physical and mental toll on Phyllis. She suffers from many physical illnesses and has sought professional help for her mental health.

As a devout Catholic, a priest, in her belief was as close to God as you can get.

"I felt obliged to cooperate with him," she said. "I was under the delusion that it was a love affair, but it was sexual abuse and it involved drugs and rape."



■ Phyllis Hutnak

About eight years ago, Phyllis worked up the courage to tell her husband. Then she told her children, her family and friends: "My husband was shocked, but he has stood by me and is my biggest supporter."

By the time she revealed the sexual abuse to her husband, the priest had been removed from the parish for sexual misconduct. It was then she learned that she had been one of many young girls who had fallen under his control.

Phyllis filed charges with the Attorney General's office and began her own investigation. Ultimately, the priest was convicted of sexual assault, but through a series of appeals and because of illness, he was released to a medical facility where he died.

Phyllis is one of the 36 Rhode Island plaintiffs recently awarded an historic \$13.5 million settlement from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Providence.

But during the long painful years pursuing the settlement, Phyllis and others often felt alone and isolated in their quest for justice. SATRC found a way to create a safe place where clergy abuse survivors could come together for support in the Survivors' Forum.

"The first meeting was difficult," Phyllis, who is now the forum facilitator, said. "It triggered painful memories, but it is a

continued on page 3

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FROM THIS DESK

Peg Langhammer

SATRC Executive Director



Recently, the roman catholic diocese of Providence reached a \$13.5 million settlement in 36 sexual-abuse lawsuits. The landmark agreement brings a measurement of closure to these 36 victims who have suffered years of abuse, followed by, for some, decades of secrets, silence and denials.

I am continually awed by the courage and perseverance this group has demonstrated while the legal process dragged on for many painful years. My sincere admiration and gratitude goes out to them. Their voices are helping educate our community, advocating change, making it possible that perhaps one day we may truly live in a society where sexual assault will not be tolerated.

For personal accounts of two very different women whose experiences, although unique, share common themes of intense and ongoing trauma, turn to page one.

We are proud to have provided these two women and many others with a safe place to share their pain and to help them in the healing process. The Sexual Assault & Trauma Resource Center is committed to

preventing sexual abuse and to supporting all victims on their challenging and complicated road to justice. Our mission will always be to help them find safety and healing along the way.

Sunshine and starry skies backdrop for two successful events

Under the able leadership of Co-Chairs Bob Vincent and Phil Rivers, our annual golf tournament was our best one to date. A glorious June day provided golfers with the ideal weather to play their best games. Their enthusiasm and contributions helped us raise \$20,000 for our Rhode Island Children's Advocacy Center. (For more about Bob and Phil, see facing page.)

We followed up that success with another grand and elegant event — Under The Stars, By The Sea. Held in August, on a perfect star-filled night, more than 200 friends and supporters danced the night away, helping to raise \$21,000, which will help support the adults and children who on a daily basis need the services SATRC provides.

Many thanks to Co-Chairs Roz Rustigian and Susan Buonanno for their tireless work in bringing this event to a successful conclusion.

Finally, we couldn't do the work we do without all of you. Thank you for your support and belief in our mission.

New staff joins SATRC

Colette Laffan, advocate coordinator, just completed her Masters of Science in Criminal Justice from Northeastern University.

Regina Broz, intake manager, was assistant director at the Child-At-Risk Hotline, Judge Baker Children's Center, Boston, Mass.

Gianna M. Boulet, law enforcement advocate, was guest advocate/case manager with Casa Myrna Vasquez, Inc., Dorchester, Mass.

Leigh Anne Boshold, law enforcement advocate, was an outreach and tracking case-worker at the KEY Program, Inc., Providence.

Bob Vincent, senior vice president of Corporate Communications at GTECH, and Phil Rivers, chairman of RDW Group Inc., assumed the massive task of chairing SATRC's annual golf tournament this year. Their efforts resulted in raising a record-breaking \$20,000 for the benefit of Rhode Island Children's Advocacy Center. Frontlines asked the two about their participation. Here is their response:



■ Bob Vincent and Phil Rivers

While you initially became involved with the agency because you know people here, what are the motivating forces that keep you coming back?

Bob Vincent: The mission of SATRC is a critical one. The subject of abuse is very disconcerting to many because it knows no social or demographic boundaries. Because of that dynamic, agencies that focus on abuse and treat it tend not to get as much mainstream support as traditional charities. It is a problem that many don't want to discuss and simply hope will go away. Obviously it won't and that's why I think it's important to help SATRC gain recognition and support.

Phil Rivers: This is an agency that does great work and the more one gets involved in it, the more positive your involvement becomes. I had a high confidence level to begin with, but the work that is done to help people facing

difficult times is incredible and of the utmost importance.

What is it about this agency or issue that makes it comfortable for you to ask others for support?

Bob Vincent: It is easy for me to ask for support because SATRC is part of the fundamental social services safety net in our area. The services provided by SATRC help people who have nowhere else to turn. Further, most of the circumstances the agency deals with are life threatening. Some are with children who for no fault of their own find themselves in the most horrific situations. That makes asking others for support pretty easy.

Phil Rivers: I have no hesitation asking others to support this organization because of the confidence I have in the leadership, staff and work being done. I urge everyone I talk with to dig into the agency and learn more for themselves.

Clearly, this last golf tournament, was the most successful one to date. How do you see it growing? What are your goals for next year?

Bob Vincent: The golf tournament was great fun. I think we created a sizeable core group of golfers that will likely come back next year. The goal then becomes to retain the sponsors we have and get more major corporate sponsors.

Phil Rivers: I thought the last golf event was terrific. It was well run and a lot of fun and financially successful. I hope we can do as well if not better next year.

SAVE THE DATE: SATRC Annual Golf Tournament 2003 — June 9 at Alpine Country Club. For more information, contact Grace Quintin at 421-4100, ext. 14

Survivors speak out

continued from page 1

good place. It helps folks get through a hard time in their lives."

For Elizabeth, the forum has given her an outlet for her grief:

"At first I felt uneasy. I felt like an outsider, because I wasn't a victim, but it was the victims themselves who put me at ease. I try to encourage them. I try to be there for them. With few exceptions, they have received little tender loving care. They have been made to feel like the perpetrators. I feel they are looking for some closure. I know that if that parish priest I went to many years ago had put his arms around me and said, 'I am heartbroken about what happened to your son and your family...' but it didn't happen. Instead I was shamed and told to pray for the accused priest and to think about his family."

Linda Ciolfi, SATRC director of program services, sees the agency's role as providing advocacy and support.

"We can help normalize the trauma. For too long there hasn't been a place where survivors could talk to each other. They no longer have to be isolated. We can be the conduit for all of that. We can provide resources for them, whether it be advocacy or therapy."

If you are a victim or know of a victim of clergy sexual assault, please call SATRC at 401-421-4100, ext. 30 for counseling and referral services, and to learn more about the Survivors' Forum.

UNITED WAY DONOR #5580

Planning to participate in the United Way, SECA or Combined Federal Campaigns this fall?

PLEASE CONSIDER DESIGNATING YOUR DONATION TO SATRC.

For more information email us at info@satrc.org or check our web site at www.satrc.org.

UNDER THE STARS, BY THE SEA.



■ Enjoying SATRC's smashing summer event are from left, Lisa Churchville, Serena Conley, State Sen. Elizabeth Roberts and Charles Sullivan. More than 200 attended the August festivities, helping to raise \$21,000 for the adults and children who need the services SATRC provides.

SATRC recipient of \$160,000 federal grant

The Sexual Assault & Trauma Resource Center recently received \$159,614 from the U.S. Department of Justice. SATRC and BOTEK Analysis Corporation will undertake a two-year study evaluating the criminal justice outcomes of the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) initiated by SATRC. The SART is a team approach to working with adult victims and survivors of sexual assault.

Since the 1960s, various rape law and service reforms designed to provide leverage in pursuing justice and accountability have been initiated, but there have been few rigorous studies of the effect of these services. According to the Rhode Island State Police, there were 416 reported forcible rapes in Rhode Island in 2001, up from 391 in 1999.

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