



**Mission:** *To promote a community-wide response to sexual violence by coordinating a multi-disciplinary team that will ensure victims receive comprehensive, compassionate care*

## **Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) General Meeting Minutes**

### **Thursday, April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

#### **Call to Order:**

Nicole Bishop, Director, Palm Beach County Victim Services & Certified Rape Crisis Center (PBCVS)

#### **Welcome/Introductions of Members and Guests:**

Nicole Bishop welcomed all who were in attendance at the meeting and facilitated introductions.

#### **Review/Approval of Minutes:** Minutes for the March 25<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved without any changes.

Nicole informed SART members that April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month and Victim's Rights Week. She said that in light of COVID, many events were held virtually. Nicole thanked everyone who planned events for their creativity and she also thanked the SART members who attended and supported each of the event that was held.

#### **On-Going Business:**

##### SANE Report: Carol Messam-Gordon, PBCVS Program Coordinator

Carol Messam-Gordon reported on the Sexual Assault Responses for March 2021. SANEs responded to 23 calls and conducted 20 forensic exams. In the total call-outs, there were 4 non-reporting victims. 14 exams were completed at the Butterfly House and 6 were completed at a local Palm Beach County Hospital ER. Carol also informed SART members that the SANE team had a Chart Review in March where 24 charts were reviewed. Carol also congratulated the SANEs for the phenomenal work they continuously do with victims.

Nicole informed SART members that Victim Services recently installed a new recording system both at the Butterfly House and at the SART center. Carol also informed SART members that this new system; IRecord, is also used at the Child Protection Team and other Rape Crisis Centers throughout the State. Carol encouraged law enforcement to utilize this new recording system when conducting Law Enforcement interviews with victims.

##### Child Protection Team Report: Alison Hitchcock, Executive Director, Child Protection Team

Alison provided the child abuse and child sexual abuse CPT case statistics for March 2021.

#### **March 2021**

- 1033 Abuse Reports Screened
- 131 Cases Opened
- 198 Services Provided
- 14 Sexual Abuse Forensic Medical Exams were completed

- 6 Sexual Assault Kits were completed

Laboratory Testing Updates: Julie Sikorsky, Forensic Laboratory Manager, PBSO

Julie updated SART members on the rape kit backlog, the timeframe for processing sexual assault kits, the number of kits tested and the numbers remaining. Julie's team is still reviewing Pre SB 636 cases.

- Crime Lab sent to SID for review:
  - 958 cases without SAKs to SID for additional review (older cases)
    - SID has completed the review of 746 cases, 212 remaining (**down 17 cases**)
    - Classified as:
      - Does not need analysis (no physical evidence, etc.)
      - To be outsourced for DNA analysis
      - Additional research needed for possible evidence (forwarded to review list)
  - Current cases without a DNA request after *monthly* evidence vault query:
    - 3 Post SB 636 cases without a SAK
    - 5 Post SB 636 cases with a SAK
- Total SA cases reviewed (pre & post SB 636): **10,697 (up 51 cases)**
  - 9,551 analyzed or do not need analysis (**up 48 cases**)
  - 248 identified to be outsourced (**up 23 cases**) (**62 outsourced, 185 awaiting**)
  - 36 identified to be processed in-house with *Rapid DNA analysis* (**up 2 cases**)
  - 62 requested to be processed in-house (screening/DNA) *analysis (same)*
  - 10 Other pending (**same**)
  - 790 cases pending additional review for possible SA evidence for DNA analysis (**up 17 cases**)
    - 484 are from PBSO or merged agencies
    - 306 are from non-PBSO agencies (PBSO will need to reach out for these agencies to do research)
- Pre SB636 Cases
  - Outsourced: 1679
  - Profiles entered into CODIS: 849 profiles from 799 cases (**up 4 profiles and 4 cases**)
    - From evidence: 735 (**up 3 cases**)
    - Suspect samples: 113(**up 1 case**)
  - CODIS hits (across all agencies): 318 (**up 3 cases**)
  - 13 arrests made: 9=PBSO, 4=WPBPD (**no changes**)

SART Case Staffing's: Carol Messam-Gordon, PBCVS Program Coordinator

Carol updated SART members on the sexual assault case staffing held on April 9<sup>th</sup>. Five cases were staffed. In attendance were Advocates, Coordinators, Team supervisors, and SANEs. Carol provided two case summaries:

**Case 1:** 35 year old female reported that she was working as an escort and posted an Ad for a date. A male suspect responded to the ad and agreed to meet the victim at the hotel where she was staying. Upon arrival, the victim requested that the suspect pay her upfront. Victim informed the suspect that he could pay using a money app and attempted to show him how to use the app. The suspect requested them to undress and lay on the bed while she showed him how to use the app. While on the bed, the suspect began to touch the victim sexually and she asked him to put a condom on before touching her and to pay her. The suspect refused and attempted to sexually assault the

victim. She began to scream and fought with the suspect. The victim's friend heard the commotion and entered the room. The victim's friend ended up stabbing and killing the suspect. At this time advocate will continue to assist the victim with any counseling/therapy needs. Case is pending.

**Case 2:** A 22-year-old female reported being sexually assaulted by her Step-Uncle. The victim stated that she was having a hard time dealing with a recent breakup and her Step-Uncle came over to hang out with her and brought alcohol. The victim stated she was intoxicated and fell asleep and woke up with her Step-Uncle sexually assaulting her. The victim reported the incident to law enforcement and a controlled call was conducted by law enforcement. During the controlled call, suspect admitted that he sexually assaulted the victim. Suspect also admitted to sexually assaulting the victim in an interview with Law Enforcement. The victim contacted her assigned advocate to let her know that she was very upset that the case was down filed to a lesser offense and defendant was not charged with a sexual battery. The victim stated that she was very confused and upset. Victim Services SA Program Coordinator staffed case with the SVU Chief and discussed having a process in place where there is better coordination with victim and VS staff prior to any case disposition. Victim advocate will continue providing support to this victim.

### **Committee Reports:**

#### *Community Action Network: Carol Messam-Gordon, PBCVS Program Coordinator*

Carol informed SART members that due to SAAM there was no CAN meeting for April. The next CAN meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 26<sup>th</sup> at 9am.

#### *Training Committee: Kristen Ferguson, PBCVS Project Coordinator*

Kristen informed SART members that the Training Committee meeting was held on Tuesday, April 27<sup>th</sup>. During that meeting, they discussed the current SART Point card and previous point cards. The committee discussed what information would be important to have on the point cards. During the month of May, Kristen will be reaching out to multiple agencies to find out what is important to them when providing information to victims of sexual assault. The next training committee meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, from 2:00pm-3:00pm. Kristen encouraged SART members to participate in the training committee.

Kristen also encouraged SART members to register for the upcoming Language Access Training:

- Language Access Considerations for **Advocates**: April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021 from 12pm-4pm  
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LACA2021>

#### *Legislative Committee: PBC Legislative Delegation & Abby Ross, Legislative Aide for Sen Berman*

Abby informed SART members that SB 1044; Privacy to Victims was delayed due additional information and research that is needed. A workshop will be conducted in the summer to for additional discussion prior to submittal. Abby encouraged SART members to reach out to her if they have any questions.

Jack Anderson; Legislative Assistant to Representative Emily Slosberg informed SART members that Representative Slosberg was successful in passing a Senate Bill which requires Florida Department of Law Enforcement to utilize a State-wide Rape Tracking Kit Data Base. This bill will go into effect January 2023.

## **SART Member of the Year**

Nicole Bishop announced the SART Member of the Year for 2020 after reading the nominations of the candidates. This year SART members voted between 3 nominees for the 2020 SART Member of the Year. These 3 SART members were nominated by their peers as someone who embodies the SART mission: "To promote a community-wide response to sexual violence by coordinating a multi-disciplinary team that will ensure victims receive comprehensive, compassionate care"

The SART member of the year represents a member who participates in SART meetings, promotes SART's multidisciplinary team approach to case response and works with the community to ensure that all victims receive comprehensive, compassionate care. Nicole thanked all of the nominees for being present for this virtual reveal and for going above and beyond in advocating for victims of sexual violence in our community.

The SART Member of the Year for 2020 was announced as PBSO Human Trafficking Victim Advocate, Stacey Longhini.

The nominations in full can be seen below:

Nominee: **Helen Carasa, Victim Advocate, Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse**

Nominator's Agency: Aids to Victims of Domestic Abuse

Nomination Justification Narratives

Helen Carasa joined AVDA in September 2019 as a Victim Advocate dedicated to collaborating with the Palm Beach County Sexual Assault Response Team to ensure the voices and needs of survivors of intimate partner violence sexual assault (IPVSA) and stalking remained central to the community-wide response. Helen updated and recorded the IPVSA section of the SART Training Certification and has trained social service professionals in domestic violence, IPVSA, and stalking. Utilizing the updated Anti-Stalking Toolkit, Helen trained child welfare providers on stalking and cyberstalking to increase their understanding of how stalking is used by perpetrators of domestic violence to control and monitor their partners, even after separation, including through their children's phones and social media.

Helen also facilitates parent workshops in Spanish on the dynamics of intimate partner violence, services available in the community, and safety resources, to promote healthy relationships and prevent further abuse in the homes of our Palm Beach County residents. Helen regularly provides radio segments in Spanish on domestic violence, IPVSA, and stalking to reach the LatinX community on WDJA Universo 1420AM. She has built solid working relationships with culturally-specific organizations to ensure all victims of domestic violence, IPVSA, and stalking have access to safety and support services. Helen has invited these organizations to join her on the radio to deepen the LatinX community's knowledge of available supportive services. As a result of Helen's commitment to a community-wide response, AVDA is receiving a wider array of referrals and requests for services.

Helen is committed to providing trauma-informed supportive services to survivors of domestic

violence, IPVSA, and stalking. She provides for their basic needs in a timely manner to avoid additional traumas for survivors such as homelessness, hunger, and poverty. Helen travels throughout Palm Beach County, to reduce transportation barriers in accessing services and follows-up with victims referred to AVDA through the Sexual Assault Response Team. Helen's advocacy with survivors includes financial literacy and budgeting support; identifying safe, affordable housing options; and financial assistance for survivor's rent deposits, furniture, and household items, car payments, car insurance, and other emergency financial needs. Helen facilitates a weekly support group for Spanish-speaking survivors. She has maintained this group even through the challenges of engaging survivors and providing services safely and confidentially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Nominee:** Stacey Longhini, Victim Advocate, Palm Beach County Sheriff's/HT

**Nominator's Agency:** Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office/HT

**Nomination Justification Narrative:**

Stacey Longhini is vital to the Human Trafficking Task Force Detectives, bridging the gap between law enforcement and victim services. Stacey's dedicated attention to the survivor's needs allows the detectives to focus their energy on the criminal investigations.

Over the past year, Stacey played a pivotal role in improving and expanding upon the Tattoo Removal Services offered to survivors. The old program required survivors to travel to Miami for removal which was time-consuming and inconvenient. Collaborating with other programs and partners Stacey was able to secure a facility in Palm Beach County that was willing to meet the needs of our survivors. Stacey's tireless efforts not only helped to build a new partnership in our community but it helped to better serve the needs of our survivors.

In the past year alone, Stacey has worked as the advocate for 60+ human trafficking survivors. These are victims who are very often in need of immediate crisis intervention, emotional support, physical evaluation, emergency shelter/placement, and innumerable other crucial services at all hours of the day and night. She maintains contact with, and serves as the point of contact for, each survivor, very often fielding calls from victims, counselors, and other representatives at all hours of the day including nights, weekends, and holidays.

The unique dynamic Stacey maintains with each survivor means she works tirelessly every day to advocate for their lifelong success, ensuring that their needs are met with respect in a victim-centered approach. She remains devoted to their accomplishments long after the criminal investigation, tending to their support, graduations, and other significant milestone achievements. She represents SART with the utmost loyalty and professionalism and sets the standard for victim advocates across the board.

**Nominee:** Patty Mika, Medical Professional, Palm Beach County Victim Service

**Nominator's Agency:** Palm Beach County Victim Services

**Nomination Justification Narrative:**

Patty Mika is one of the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners with Palm Beach County Victim Services & Certified Rape Crisis Center. Patty has been a SANE since 2016. Patty attends the SART Meetings, Sexual Assault Staffing's and participates in SANE monthly chart/case reviews. Patty has helped to train many new SANE's that have come aboard since the implementation of the SANE Program, as she was part of the first SANE Team. Having SANE's available to conduct the Forensic Exams has greatly improved the quality of evidence collected & thus leads to more cases being prosecuted by the SAO. Patty has taken training to educate herself to be a more productive SANE and become an expert witness so that more sexual assault cases may lead to convictions of perpetrators. Patty is a member of the IAFN (International Association of Forensic Nurses) Florida Chapter.

Patty Mika exemplifies what being a part of a Comprehensive Team (SART) means: Advocates, Law Enforcement, Medical Professionals, and Victims all hold her in high regard and have nothing but positive things to say about her professionalism, her caring attitude, and tenacious work ethics. Patty has worked many cases back to back to assure that victims do not have to wait to get their exams done, she works as a team to make sure that the victim's needs are first and foremost. She approaches every SA Case with a Start By Believing frame of mind; which sets the tone for the victim moving forward in the forensic exam, which can be very traumatic for a victim of sexual assault. Many advocates and detectives have commended her patience and caring ways with sexual assault victims. She will go out of her way to help with the victim being comfortable and getting the best quality of service. She is not afraid to stand up to medical professionals, in a respectful manner to make sure that the victims' rights are adhered to and the victim gets the medical care they need.

Recently there was a case where the doctor at the ER and the mother of the adult victim were being demanding and rude to the advocate and the SANE (Patty) – Patty explained to all parties that the victim has rights and she would not violate the rights of the victim. Patty and the advocate remained professional throughout the interaction.

There was a SA victim who was very tired and had been through a lot but really needed to get the prophylaxis medications. Patty went over the emergency room, while the victim was completing an interview with law enforcement and talked with medical personnel to assist the victim in being seen quicker so that the victim was able to get the medications and didn't just leave due to being so tired of waiting.

When out working SA cases with advocates the SA Program Coordinator and SART Supervisor will often get a text from Patty to commend various team members on the work they did. It is nice to hear when advocates and law enforcement do great work on such demanding cases.

Patty is a true SART Team Player and is worthy of being SART Member of the Year.

**Member field discussion:** Nicole opened the floor to members to discuss successful collaborations or provide updates.

**Next meeting date: Law Enforcement SART Meeting:** May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021: 2pm-3pm  
**General Member SART Meeting:** June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021: 2pm-3pm

**Thank you!**