

The CONNSACS Connection

- Connecticut's Leading Voice to End Sexual Violence - Spring 2011 -



The **CONNSACS Connection** is a quarterly publication of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, the statewide coalition of Connecticut's nine sexual assault crisis services programs. CONNSACS works to end sexual violence through victim assistance, community education, and public policy advocacy. Our mission is to provide high-quality, culturally competent services to victims of sexual violence.

Learn more about us at: www.connsacs.org

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The Gail Burns-Smith Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner Program

In 2009, the Connecticut General Assembly passed legislation that charged the Office of Victim Services (OVS) with developing and implementing a Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners (SAFE) program. The program is named after the late Gail Burns-Smith, CONNSACS' first executive director and a tireless advocate for victims of sexual violence. The SAFE program makes an on-call roster of sexual assault forensic examiners available to participating hospitals, making it possible for adult and adolescent victims of sexual violence to receive prompt, knowledgeable medical attention and evidence collection following an assault. The program will also ensure that sexual assault crisis advocates are called every time that a victim presents at a hospital.

Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners are healthcare providers who are specially trained to provide medical care and collect forensic evidence following a sexual assault. Because of their specialized training, SAFEs are able to guide victims through the invasive evidence collection process in a sensitive and efficient manner. Having SAFEs available to hospitals on an on-call basis can significantly reduce the amount of time that a victim spends in the emergency room, improve the quality of evidence that is collected, and reduce the level of trauma that victims experience during the exam. When SAFEs are involved in the evidence collection process, there is a markedly higher rate of criminal convictions when sexual assault cases go to trial.

Research also indicates that having a victim advocate present during evidence collection increases the likelihood that the victim will pursue legal action against their offender and makes it more likely that the victim will receive follow-up services and counseling. By mandating that an advocate is called at the same time as the on-call SAFE, the program further ensures that victims will receive the highest standard of care when they seek services at a participating hospital.

The Gail Burns-Smith SAFE Program launched on a part-time basis in three pilot hospitals in December of 2010: Manchester Memorial Hospital, Saint Francis Hospital (Hartford), and Windham. By early February, Hartford Hospital, Middlesex Hospital, and The Hospital of Central Connecticut (New Britain) joined on as pilot hospitals, and the program went from part-time to 24/7 on April 4th.



Legislative Update

The Connecticut General Assembly is more than halfway through the 2011 legislative session, and CONNSACS is pleased to report that several of our priority bills have made it out of committee and are moving on to the full House and Senate. Here is a brief summary of where our legislative initiatives stand:

SB 847 - *An Act Concerning Sexual Violence on College Campuses*. This legislation would require colleges and universities to take various steps to improve the response to campus sexual assault, including making improvements to disciplinary proceedings and mandating primary prevention training. SB 847 was unanimously voted out of the Higher Education Committee and Judiciary Committee. It is now on the Senate calendar awaiting a vote.

SB 918 - *An Act Concerning the Sexual Assault of Persons Whose Ability to Communicate Lack of Consent is Substantially Impaired*. Two recent appellate court decisions have pointed out flaws in Connecticut's statutes related to sexual assault and disability. Current law only provides protections to individuals who have such severe disabilities that they are unconscious or completely unable to communicate their lack of consent in any way. SB 918 will amend existing statutes to protect individuals whose ability to communicate is "substantially impaired because of a mental or physical condition." SB 918 passed out of the Judiciary Committee on April 14th and is now awaiting a vote on the Senate calendar.

SB 913 - *An Act Mandating Employers Provide Paid Sick Leave to Employees*. SB 913 would require employers with more than fifty employees in Connecticut to provide paid sick leave. In addition to allowing workers to take paid time

Connecticut (New Britain) joined on as pilot hospitals, and the program went from part-time to 24/7 on April 4th.

CONNSACS was instrumental in advocating for the program's creation, and we are thrilled with its early success. As the program evolves and grows, CONNSACS looks forward to working with OVS to guarantee that victims of sexual violence receive the high standard of care they deserve.



Megan Reback (left) receives the 2011 Gail Burns-Smith Award from CONNSACS' Resource and Projects Coordinator (and 2009 GBS Award winner) Mia Freedendfeld at the CONNSACS annual meeting.

Dare to Dream Scholarship Winners

The Gail-Burns Smith "Dare to Dream" Fund was established in 2004 upon the retirement of the former Executive Director of CONNSACS, Gail Burns-Smith, after 22 years of service dedicated to ending and preventing sexual violence in the state of Connecticut. The Fund relies on contributions from supporters and donors who wish to honor Gail's dedication to this cause. This annual award is granted to an individual whose work or study in the field of sexual violence most exemplifies Gail's commitment to public awareness, education, prevention, advocacy, and public policy change.

This year, CONNSACS is thrilled to honor three individuals with the "Dare to Dream" award: Kareem Ayodeji, honorable mention; Emily Pizzale, second place; and Megan Reback, the 2011 Gail Burns-Smith award winner.

Kareem Ayodeji has been involved with sexual violence prevention since he organized a neighborhood sexual violence prevention program in high school. He was part of a Seattle Children's Hospital program that specialized in youth sexual assault prevention, and he coordinated a training on recognizing and responding to sexual abuse for a summer camp where he worked. In the future, Kareem hopes to obtain his Juris Doctor degree and would like to work with non-profit and government agencies to improve sexual violence prevention efforts. He also hopes to work in legislative advocacy and one day become a legislator himself so that he can advocate for public policy related to sexual violence prevention.

Emily Pizzale is a junior at the University of Connecticut majoring in Psychology and double minoring in Women's Studies and Criminal Justice. Through her work at the UConn Women's Center, she has helped organize and run the "Students United for Reproductive Rights" and events

more than fifty employees in Connecticut to provide paid sick leave. In addition to allowing workers to take paid time off for illness or injury, workers could also use paid sick leave to recover and receive services following a sexual assault. This bill was successfully voted out of the Labor and Judiciary Committees and now awaits another vote in the Appropriations Committee.

HB 6599 - An Act Concerning Discrimination. HB 6599 would ensure that gender identity and expression are included in Connecticut's anti-discrimination statutes. Connecticut law currently prohibits discrimination in housing, employment, credit, education, and public accommodations on the basis of race, religion, national, sex, disability, and other protected categories. This legislation was successfully voted out of the Judiciary Committee and is on the House calendar.

HB 6633 - An Act Concerning Stalking. Connecticut's stalking laws have not been revised or updated since their creation in 1992. They do not apply to stalkers who use technology such as GPS, cell phones, or the internet to track their victims, and they do not apply to offenders who make their victims fear for their emotional well-being, the safety of their family members, damage to their property, or loss of employment. HB 6633 would make several important updates to existing Connecticut stalking laws and provide better protections to victims. An Act Concerning Stalking was successfully voted out of the Judiciary Committee and is on the House calendar awaiting a vote.

SB 1033 – An Act Concerning the Limitation of Time to Bring a Civil Action for Damages Caused by Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation or Sexual Assault Suffered by a Person Prior to Attaining the Age of Majority. SB 1033 would have eliminated the civil statute of limitations for child sexual abuse. Survivors of child sexual abuse need time – sometimes decades – to process and confront the abuse that they experienced. This bill would have sent the message that there is never a bad time to hold offenders accountable for abusing children. Although SB 1033 had a successful public hearing, it was never called for a vote and died on the Judiciary Committee calendar.



In the News

[Federal Legislation to Protect Military Victims of Sexual Violence](#)

Recent studies have revealed that as many as one in three U.S. servicewomen are assaulted during their time of military service, and new federal legislation aims to improve

UCoin Women's Center, she has helped organize and run the "Students United for Reproductive Rights" and events such as Take Back the Night and the Clothesline Project. She has mentored at Journey House, a lockdown facility for youth women, and last summer she was a Child Caretaker at the Family Center in Vermont. Emily is currently in South Africa, where she is an intern/research assistant at the Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust, one of the area rape crisis centers. There she has worked on drafting legislation and reports focusing on survivors of rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence. When she finishes school, Emily wants to become a registered psychologist and focus on women-centered counseling.

The winner of the 2011 "Dare to Dream" award is Megan Reback, a junior at Connecticut College who is double majoring in English and Government. She is a student coordinator at the Connecticut College Women's Center and served on the Vagina Monologue committee. She currently serves as a Campus Action Intern at Planned Parenthood and works to bring the knowledge she gains there back to her campus through the school newspaper. She also tutors students on her campus in writing and English. With the organization, "Students Implementing Support through Education and Recreation," Megan mentors middle school students and works to integrate topics such as sexual abuse, sexuality, domestic violence, and future plans into their discussions.

After studying abroad in South Africa, Megan became interested in the country's extremely high rate of rape and proposed a research project to the Connecticut College's Program in Community Action and Public Policy which focused on how to prevent rape and how to best represent women who are raped. This summer, Megan will be interning at Talking Points Memo, a political blog in New York City. She plans to use the "Dare to Dream" stipend to help pay for her living expenses while she is in New York. In the future, Megan wants to continue work in the field of Public Policy and Communications, advocating for victims and proper representation in the media.



Sexual Assault Awareness Month

April was Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and CONNSACS joined advocacy organizations throughout the country in raising awareness and encouraging the public to get involved in ending sexual violence. During the month of April, Connecticut's nine rape crisis programs hosted events to honor survivors and educate their communities, and leaders from around the country used their voices to speak out against sexual violence.

CONNSACS is thrilled that President Barack Obama and Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy were among those who acknowledged Sexual Assault Awareness Month. President Obama issued an [official proclamation](#), and Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy released the following [statement](#) in recognition of SAAM.

U.S. servicewomen are assaulted during their time of military service, and new federal legislation aims to improve sexual assault prevention and response in the ranks. The Defense STRONG (Sexual Trauma Response, Oversight and Good Governance) Act would provide military victims with new rights, including the right to transfer to a new base.

[Women Turn Spotlight on Haiti's Silent Rape Epidemic](#)

Fifteen months after Haiti's devastating earthquake, sexual violence is commonplace in the nation's displaced persons camps. Grassroots advocacy organizations are trying to find ways to combat sexual assault and other forms of gender-based violence in the midst of Haiti's ongoing humanitarian crisis.

[Sexual Assault on College Campuses](#)

Between a Yale University [lawsuit](#) alleging "failure to eliminate a hostile sexual environment on campus," and new [White House efforts](#), sexual violence on college campuses is receiving increasing amounts of attention. A recently released "Dear Colleague" [letter](#) from the U.S. Department of Education outlines how colleges and universities ought to respond to sexual assault and harassment under Title IX.

[Sexual Violence in the Peace Corps](#)

During the past decade, over one thousand female Peace Corps volunteers have been sexually assaulted, according to an investigation by ABC News 20/20. Now, volunteers are beginning to speak out and ask the Peace Corps for improved policies related to sexual assault prevention and response.

[The FBI's Definition of Rape: Older Than a Lot of Things](#)

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has not updated its definition of rape since 1929, and the definition – carnal knowledge of a female, forcibly and against her will – does not apply to many forms of rape. Ms. Magazine points out just how old this definition is and provides information about how to tell the FBI that it's time to update the definition of rape.

Sexual Assault Crisis Services Programs in Connecticut

24 Hour Free and Confidential Hotline
1-888-999-5545 (English)
1-888-568-8332 (Español)

[Center for Women and Families of Eastern Fairfield County, Inc.](#) (Bridgeport)
Office: 203-334-6154
Hotline: 203-333-2233

[Women's Center of Greater Danbury Sexual Assault Crisis Services](#)
Office: 203-731-5200
Hotline: 203-731-5204

[Women and Families Center](#)
(Meriden, Middletown, New Haven)
Meriden office: 203-235-9297
Middletown office: 860-344-1474
New Haven office: 203-389-5010
Hotline: 203-389-9700

[Rape Crisis Center of Milford](#)
Office: 203-874-8712

Connecticut Governor Dannel Malloy released the following [statement](#) in recognition of SAAM:

"Unlike the victims of other crimes, sexual assault survivors may feel shame or embarrassment that may prevent them from seeking the help, treatment and services they need and deserve. It is incumbent upon all of us to ensure that survivors find protection and justice under the law, and that advocates have the resources they need to provide the care and support to victims and their loved ones. We recognize the extraordinary work done by the thousands of dedicated sexual assault crisis service employees, medical professionals, lawyers and police officers who protect and help heal survivors of sexual assault. But as a former prosecutor, and through conversations with my wife, Cathy, a sexual assault crisis center executive director, I have seen first-hand the successes and failures of our system. I am committed to working to build safer communities, prevent the escalation that leads to sexual violence, and protect our citizens from sexual assault and the devastation left in its wake."

While sexual violence impacts individuals and communities every month of the year, CONNSACS is pleased that the month of April receives special recognition and is set aside as a time to raise awareness and honor survivors.

[Rape Crisis Center of Milford](#)

Office: 203-874-8712

Hotline: 203-878-1212

[YWCA of New Britain Sexual Assault Crisis Services](#)

(Hartford, New Britain)

New Britain office: 860-225-4681

New Britain hotline: 860-223-1787

Hartford office: 860-241-9217

Hartford hotline: 860-547-1022

[The Center for Sexual Assault Crisis Counseling and Education](#) (Stamford)

Office: 203-348-9346

Hotline: 203-329-2929

[Susan B. Anthony Project](#) (Torrington)

Office: 860-489-3798

Hotline: 860-482-7133

[Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury](#)

Office: 203-753-3613

Hotline: 203-753-3613

[Sexual Assault Crisis Center of Eastern Connecticut](#)

(Willimantic, New London)

Willimantic office: 860-456-3595

Willimantic hotline: 860-456-2789

New London office: 860-442-0604

New London hotline: 860-437-7766