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**WestCOP's Victims Assistance Services joins with hospitals in Westchester County, enhances services for sexual assault victims**

*Grant from New York State Crime Victims Board allows agency to provide hospitals with forensic rape exam equipment*

Victims Assistance Services, a component of Westchester Community Opportunity Program Inc. (WestCOP), will enhance services for sexual assault victims by providing updated equipment to nine hospitals throughout Westchester County that participate in its Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) program.

WestCOP received a \$40,818 grant from the New York State Crime Victims Board to provide new forensic rape exam equipment to nine hospitals that participate in the SANE program, which ensures that specially-trained nurses are on call, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to respond when a sexual assault victim seeks treatment at one of those emergency departments.

The agency was one of 19 organizations across the state, including hospitals, sexual assault/rape crisis centers and victims' services programs, that shared in grants from the Crime Victims Board totaling \$500,000 to enhance services they provide to survivors of sexual assault and increase awareness of those services. The SANE program also receives annual funding totaling \$28,125 from the state's Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS); that grant is made possible with funds available to the state through the federal Violence Against Women Act.

Victims Assistance Services Director May Krukiel said: "The combined support of the Crime Victims Board, the Division of Criminal Justice Services and Westchester County has enabled us to create a state-of-the-art SANE program, thus ensuring that every Westchester survivor of sexual assault has access to both compassionate care and competent evidence collection. We thank CVB, DCJS and Westchester County for their vision and for staying the course."

Added Crime Victims Board Chairwoman Tina M. Stanford: "The board is proud to support Victims Assistance Services and its SANE program. Statistics show that only 10 percent of rapes are ever reported to the police. It is my hope that by supporting this important program, we will empower sexual assault victims to come forward and seek help, knowing that they will be treated with dignity, compassion and respect during an extremely difficult and traumatic time."

Victims Assistance Services has coordinated the SANE program for 12 years, in addition to providing free and comprehensive support services to all crime victims. During the past two years, the SANE program has assisted 175 victims at nine participating hospitals: Hudson Valley

Hospital; Westchester Medical Center; White Plains Hospital Center; Lawrence Hospital Center; Dobbs Ferry Community Hospital; Saint Joseph's Medical Center; St. John's Riverside Hospital; Mount Vernon Hospital; and Sound Shore Medical Center.

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners complete comprehensive, forensic medical examinations, collect evidence using the standardized New York State Sexual Offense Evidence Collection Kit (often referred to as the "rape kit") and work in partnership with rape crisis counselors/advocates to ensure victims receive compassionate, comprehensive and specialized emergency treatment and follow-up care.

Provided by DCJS to all hospital emergency departments, the "rape kit" allows for a standardized evidence collection process in all sexual assault cases. DCJS worked in partnership with individuals from every discipline – medical, legal, scientific and social work – to recently revamp the rape kit so it reflects advances in DNA technology and streamlines an inevitably discomfiting physical examination.

The agency also created a training video, "A Body of Evidence: Using the NYS Sexual Offense Evidence Collection Kit," for medical professionals, to ensure that the inherently intrusive exam is less traumatic for victims and more productive for law enforcement. The kit and the training video have been distributed for free to all hospitals across the state.

In addition to funding equipment including colposcopes, forensic light sources and cameras, the grant will be used provide Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners with continuing education and training. A legislative initiative from the state Assembly – sponsored by Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Assembly Members Jeffrion Aubry, RoAnn Destito, Joseph Lentol and Helene Weinstein – allowed the Crime Victims Board to provide one-time grants to Victims Assistance Services and 18 other organizations.

"The SANE nurses are vital to our treatment of domestic violence and sexual assault victims," said Sari Maenza, clinical nurse manager of the Emergency Department at White Plains Hospital Center. "They guide the victims through the examination and treatment process and are extremely helpful to the emergency room nursing staff. A properly done exam of a sexual assault victim is time consuming and it's critically important that the evidence be obtained carefully and correctly. The SANE nurses, and the addition of this new colposcopy machine, are essential to this process."

The Crime Victims Board grants ranged from \$5,044 to \$67,124, with recipients using the money to either upgrade equipment or create and fund public awareness campaigns about the availability of sexual assault/rape crisis services (see attached fact sheet for a list of grant recipients).

In addition to providing these one-time grants, the board funds a network of 189 victims' assistance programs across New York State, including WestCOP/Victims Assistance Services. Victim assistance programs provide services including crisis intervention and counseling, assistance with filing compensation claims and arranging for legal assistance and transportation. A wide variety of non-profit organizations and government entities – from district attorney's offices to hospitals – receive funding.

The Crime Victims Board also provides direct compensation to crime victims and their families, including payment of medical and funeral expenses, compensation for lost wages, reimbursement for essential personal property such as eyeglasses, and the cost of forensic rape exams. During the 2008-09 state fiscal year, the board provided more than \$27.3 million in compensation to crime victims and their families.

Established in 1966, the board has five members appointed to fill seven-year terms by the Governor with the advice and consent of the state Senate; it has offices in Albany, Brooklyn and Buffalo.

Chartered in 1965, Westchester Community Opportunity Program, Inc. (WestCOP) is non-profit, social service agency operating community programs to combat poverty and its adverse effects in Westchester and Putnam counties. In addition to Victim Assistance Services, the organization supports a wide variety of programs, including day care/Head Start Centers, emergency food pantries, energy conservation and weatherization programs, and employment and training programs.

**Fact Sheet**

In addition to Westchester Community Opportunity Program’s Victim Assistance Services, the following organizations received one-time grants from the New York State Crime Victims Board, made possible through a \$500,000 legislative initiative from the New York State Assembly. The grants were designed to enhance sexual assault/rape crisis services throughout New York State and to increase awareness of those services.

*Upstate and Long Island*

○ Rockland Family Shelter	\$66,783
○ Victims Information Bureau of Suffolk	\$58,200
○ Crime Victims Assistance Center ( <i>Binghamton</i> )	\$46,560
○ Rape Crisis of the Southern Tier ( <i>Chemung, Schuyler and Steuben counties</i> )	\$34,222
○ Erie County Medical Center	\$33,259
○ Albany County Crime Victim and Sexual Violence Center	\$21,883
○ Southern Tier Health Care System ( <i>Allegany, Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties</i> )	\$20,952
○ Lewis County Opportunities	\$19,485
○ Planned Parenthood of the Mohawk/Hudson Inc. ( <i>Essex, Fulton, Hamilton and Montgomery counties</i> )	\$18,042
○ Opportunities for Oswego	\$7,760
○ F.F. Thompson Hospital ( <i>Ontario County</i> )	\$5,361
○ Lockport Memorial Hospital ( <i>Niagara County</i> )	\$5,077

*New York City*

○ New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault	\$67,124
○ HHC/Woodhull Medical Center	\$20,589
○ Harlem Hospital Center	\$19,807

○ Jacobi Medical Center	\$7,074
○ New York Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center	\$6,910
○ North Central Bronx Hospital	\$5,044

- The Crime Victims Board also funds 189 victims' assistance programs across New York State. Victim assistance programs provide services including crisis intervention and counseling, assistance with filing compensation claims and arranging for legal assistance and transportation. A wide variety of non-profit organizations and government entities – from district attorney's offices to hospitals – receive funding.
- The funding for those programs is provided to New York State through the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), which mandates that fees, fines and surcharges paid by individuals convicted of federal crimes be used to fund victims' assistance programs and crime victims' compensation throughout the country.
- This year, the Crime Victims Board distributed \$95.5 million in VOCA funds, as well as an additional \$1.79 million available through the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, to those 189 programs. Each program received grants for a three-year period from Oct. 1, 2009, through Sept. 30, 2012.
- The board funds the following victims' assistance programs in the lower Hudson Valley, in addition to the Westchester Community Opportunity Program:
  - Orange County: Orange County Probation Department Crime Victims' Assistance Program, and the Mental Health Association of Orange County
  - Putnam County: Child Advocacy Center of Putnam County and the Putnam County District Attorney's Victim/Witness Assistance Program
  - Rockland County: Rockland Family Shelter
  - Westchester County: Hopes Door, Empire Justice Center, My Sister's Place, Westchester County Probation Department Victims' Services and Outreach, and the Westchester County District Attorney's Office
  - Crime Victims' Specialists with New York State Police Troop F (Green, Orange, Rockland, Sullivan and Ulster counties) and Troop K (Columbia, Dutchess, Putnam and Westchester counties)