

Section 3 Handout: Comparing Community-Based and System-Based Advocates¹

There are several different types of advocates, who work both in the community and within the criminal justice and medical systems. Each provides a distinct and valuable set of services to victims of sexual assault at different points in the system.

Community-Based Advocates

<p><i>Community-based sexual assault victim advocacy programs (often called sexual assault or rape crisis centers)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide advocacy and services to victims who report crime, as well as those who choose not to. • Typically are the primary local providers of advocacy services for victims of sexual assault. • Generally are nonprofit, non-governmental organizations that work to combat sexual victimization through provision of services, advocacy on behalf of victims, and training, education, and public awareness initiatives. • Usually offer free, confidential services to victims and others who have been affected by sexual assault. Victims can utilize these services from the time of disclosure of the assault to the time they decide they no longer need assistance. They can access services regardless of whether they report their assault to the justice system. Services may include, but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 24-hour crisis intervention, support, and safety planning, including phone hotline counseling and accompaniment through emergency medical and legal processes; ○ provision of information and community referrals; ○ advocacy on behalf of victims with various systems (e.g., criminal and civil justice systems, healthcare, social services, child protection, employers, and schools), including accompaniment (e.g., to investigative interviews, court, and other justice proceedings), and coordination and collaboration with system personnel; ○ support groups and education programs; ○ ongoing contact and assistance as needed to promote recovery; and ○ mental health counseling. • To improve community response or a particular institution's response to victims of sexual assault, these programs may coordinate or participate in
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System-Based Advocates

<p><i>Criminal justice system victim-witness advocates</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally help victims whose cases are processed through the criminal justice system, although some offer services to all victims. • Can help ease victims' entry into and journey through the criminal justice system because they have ready access to case information, established relationships with other criminal justice personnel, and an in-depth knowledge of the system. • Roles may vary from one jurisdiction to the next, but they are often responsible for tasks such as orienting victims to the criminal court process; informing victims of their rights, court dates, case status, and disposition; making community referrals; assisting victims with filing victim compensation applications; accompanying victims to court proceedings; and providing assistance with preparation of victim impact statements. • Because they offer assistance to all crime victims during their involvement in the criminal justice system, victim-witness specialists often are extremely busy and can spend only limited time on individual cases. They also may lack expertise on sexual victimization issues. • An important distinction between the support offered by victim-witness specialists and community-based sexual assault victim advocates is the degree of confidentiality afforded to communications with victims. Victim-witness specialists are usually obligated to provide information about victims to criminal justice personnel that may facilitate the investigation and prosecution of their cases. In contrast, community-based sexual assault advocates are obligated to focus solely on the needs of victims. To this end, most community-based sexual assault advocacy programs have confidentiality policies that prohibit advocates from disclosing information about victims to a third party without their consent (a protection that may be based on state statute).
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¹ (Adapted from "Engaging Advocates and Other Victim Service Providers in the Community Management of Sex Offenders," Center for Sex Offender Management, 2000).

Community-Based Advocates

	<p>activities such as the following: specialized professional training and technical assistance;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ prevention education and outreach targeted at specific groups; ○ partnering with local organizations; ○ community organizing and public awareness initiatives; and ○ public policy development. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is usually one community-based sexual assault victim advocacy program in a particular jurisdiction or region. However, some areas do not have such a program or have a program that provides limited services. In larger jurisdictions or regions, there may be more than one community-based sexual assault advocacy program. These organizations often (but not always) work collaboratively to ensure adequate service delivery to all local geographic areas and victim populations.
<i>State coalitions of local sexual assault advocacy programs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently exist in all 50 states. • Coalition staff members usually advocate for public policy changes that benefit victims, promote public awareness about victimization, and provide training and technical assistance to member programs and other organizations. • They also may seek and administer state and federal funding for their member programs.
<i>Child advocacy centers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically provide services to assist abused and neglected children and their families. The establishment of these centers in over 400 localities has helped improve the investigative process in child sexual abuse cases. Agencies responsible for the protection of children can coordinate their efforts through these centers, in order to prevent further trauma to victims. • While services vary across jurisdictions, the centers usually provide a child-friendly atmosphere to conduct investigative interviews; medically examine children suspected of being abused or neglected; provide support, education, and community referrals; and prepare children and their families for court. • They also may provide counseling, community education, and professional training on child abuse issues.

System-Based Advocates

<i>Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) programs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These programs have emerged over the last decade to improve the emergency medical-legal response to sexual assault victims. • SANEs are registered nurses who have education and clinical preparation in the forensic examination of these victims. • SANEs strive to collect forensic evidence from victims in a timely, compassionate, and respectful manner and ensure that proper emergency medical care is provided. They also collect forensic evidence from suspects in sex crime cases.
<i>Sexual Assault Response or Resource Teams (SARTs)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SARTs, or similar multi-disciplinary teams have been developed in many communities to coordinate immediate medical, legal, and victim service responses to sexual assaults. • SARTs can work to ensure that each aspect of coordinated response protects and supports victims, facilitates optimal evidence collection, and streamlines the service delivery process. • As SARTs evolve, they could expand to address more comprehensive responses to both victims and offenders.
<i>Multi-disciplinary and multi-jurisdictional investigative initiatives.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some communities have established these initiatives, which are typically are grounded in a belief that law enforcement's response to sexual assault cases can be enhanced by coordination and collaboration among advocates, health care providers, prosecutors, judges, child protection workers, probation and parole officers, and others.
<i>Child Protective Services</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All states sponsor some type of statewide child protective services (CPS) agency, with which sex offender management teams will interact in cases involving child sexual abuse. • CPS investigate reports of the abuse and neglect of children. • May provide services to children and families in their own homes, or may place a child in foster care and provide services there. • A listing of state telephone numbers and toll-free hotlines for reporting child sexual abuse is available at: http://www.therapistfinder.net/Child-Abuse/Child-Abuse-Hotlines-Phone-Numbers.html.

Community-Based Advocates

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<i>Court-appointed Special Advocates (CASAs)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CASAs are highly trained volunteers who represent abused and neglected children in the court system, and advocate for the best interest of the child.• There are more than 900 CASA programs – at least one in every state – and more than 52,000 trained volunteer advocates nationwide.• The National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association, which serves both CASAs and GALs, has a web site with additional information: http://www.nationalcasa.org/.
<i>Guardian Ad Litem (GALs)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• GALs are highly trained volunteers appointed by the court to protect the rights and advocate for the best interest of the child, including child sexual abuse victims.• A GAL will make investigate a case; facilitate support and resources for children and their families; make independent recommendations to the court that reflect the best interest of the child whom he or she is representing; and monitor compliance with the recommendations.