

Connections

An Annual Publication of
Washington Coalition of
Sexual Assault Programs

Volume XX

WINTER 2016

VICARIOUS TRAUMA, VICARIOUS RESILIENCY:

New Possibilities

for the Anti-Sexual Violence
Movement in Washington State

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Letter from the Editor

Jen Friedlander - Advocacy Specialist, WCSAP



I left the Anti-Sexual Violence Movement in the fall of 2012, unsure whether or not I would be able to return. I had built so much of my life around service to survivors of sexual assault.

It was a devastating blow when I realized that no matter how much I wanted to, I could not continue to do the work I loved. When I began doing anti-sexual violence work, I committed to taking excellent care of myself, thinking that if I just tried hard enough, I wouldn't experience vicarious trauma. What I have learned is that as a movement, we have not yet created the conditions for advocates to thrive in their work.

When training on this topic, I watch participants' eyes glaze over when I use the word self-care. It's a frustrating word, particularly because its meaning is so varied. As a Movement, when we talk about self-care and vicarious trauma prevention as synonymous, we are often not fully clear about what either term means. Baths are a wonderful form of stress reduction and can be healing, but a bath is not a solution to listening to the worst that people are capable of, day in and day out. Our work permeates every area of our culture; we see a unique, horrifying part of reality that many other people rarely think about.

There is another important implication when we use the term self-care. We are insinuating that advocates are responsible for preventing their own vicarious traumatization. While on some level, every person has responsibility for caring for themselves physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually, the term self-care seems to imply that if we just try hard enough, we will prevent our vicarious traumatization. It takes the responsibility off of our Movement to discover and employ solutions which will help protect advocates and ensure that we all can provide the best possible services to survivors.

Fortunately, there are many tools that advocates throughout Washington State can use and share with one another to address the impact of vicarious trauma. Throughout this issue of Connections, we will explore what programs are doing to support their staff and how current research can be distilled into practical and easily applicable tools, along with visioning new possibilities for the Anti-Sexual Violence Movement.

Instead of self-care, let's find a term that speaks to what we really need: a significant skillset that will offer protection and guidance as we do this incredibly difficult work. I have chosen the term "vicarious resilience"¹ because it speaks to an on-going process and experience. This term has come to encompass all the strategies we can use as a Movement to make our work more sustainable.

I believe that vicarious resilience is large enough to contain our personal responsibility to ourselves, as well as our Movement's responsibility to ensure that advocates have what they need to live healthy, connected lives.

I believe that vicarious resilience is large enough to contain our personal responsibility to ourselves, as well as our Movement's responsibility to ensure that advocates have what they need to live healthy, connected lives. It is time to start prioritizing advocate wellness in deliberate and meaningful ways so that we are at our absolute best when survivors seek services from us.

¹ Hernandez, Pilar PhD. Gangsei, David PhD. Engstrom, David PhD. (2007) Vicarious Resilience: A New Concept in Work With Those Who Survive Trauma. Fam. Proc., Vol. 46, June, 2007.



WCSAP

Washington Coalition of
Sexual Assault Programs

4317 6th Ave SE, Suite 102
Olympia, WA 98503
(360) 754-7583
(360) 709-0305 TTY
(360) 786-8707 FAX



**Vicarious Trauma,
Vicarious Resiliency:
New Possibilities for the
Anti-Sexual Violence
Movement in Washington State**

The mission of the Washington
Coalition of Sexual Assault
Programs is to unite agencies
engaged in the elimination of
sexual violence through education,
advocacy, victim services,
and social change.

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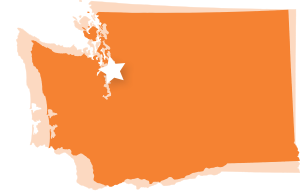
Editor:
Jen Friedlander

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The NW Network

Connie Burk, Executive Director, Seattle, WA

WCSAP: What organizational policies and practices does the Network utilize to prevent vicarious trauma among staff?

Connie: Trauma has impacts on everyone who is exposed to it. As anti-violence workers, we will be exposed to trauma and we will experience impacts. So our goal is not to prevent vicarious trauma exposure, but to create practices that help staff metabolize trauma and minimize negative impacts.

At the NW Network, we have a framework of organizational culture, policies, and practices related to trauma exposure and emotional labor. One of the most basic, and accessible, strategies to metabolize trauma exposure is debriefing after working with a survivor. There is a sense among some advocates that you “only debrief a situation when you can’t handle it,” or that asking to debrief a conversation means you are “in over your head.”

At the NW Network, we debrief every conversation with a program participant. It is a thoughtful process focused on increasing advocates’ understanding, compassion, and personal efficacy, their sense of their own abilities and personal power. Debriefing supports the wellbeing of advocates and equips them to bring their best skills and clearest thinking to their advocacy. Our trauma exposure as advocates is not meaningless. When we listen to a survivor’s story or bear witness to their struggle, we are building our understanding of their experience, their hopes and plans, and the barriers they are facing in order to bring the best advocacy possible to the situation. Being clear about why we are exposed to trauma helps foster resilience in advocates.

One of the most basic, and accessible strategies to metabolize trauma exposure is debriefing after working with a survivor.

Intentional debriefing soon after exposure can positively affect the way the brain processes the exposure. Debriefing is not a random conversation or a venting session. Advocates stop and get consent before debriefing, are considerate about the details they share, and intentional about their goals for the debrief.

Other practices include an outside “Clinical Support” consultant who meets with staff monthly in individual meetings and as a group and Trauma Stewardship Leave. Staff can use this leave to do whatever practices support them to metabolize trauma so that they can show up with their A-game. The purpose of this leave isn’t to “get out of work,” but to deal with trauma exposure so every advocate can come to work and do a great job.

We also promote what we call “HR for Liberation”. We prioritize good health care, long and short term disability insurance, life insurance, paying a living wage that allows someone to provide for their family (a “provider’s wage”), and foster a healthy, loving work culture. This includes being supportive of staff’s “work/life balance”. (Short term disability insurance kicks in when someone is out of work due to injury and illness and has exhausted their sick leave. Long term disability insurance provides a safety net in the event of catastrophic injury or illness that prevents someone from being able to work long term. They are surprisingly affordable!)



WCSAP: For organizations that want to increase their capacity to address and prevent vicarious trauma for staff, what one or two items you mentioned today would you suggest they start with?

Connie: I think the most important place to start is by paying “provider’s wages” (wages that allow a worker to provide for their family) and getting long and short term disability insurance for all staff.

And, again, intentional debriefing is a simple and powerful tool to add to your advocacy program. It works on so many levels. Not only does it support staff in metabolizing trauma but it is also an excellent way to promote quality supervision of advocates, transparency, accountability, and on-going learning about advocacy and resources. But, that being said, all the debriefing in the world is not going to help with resilience and retention if a staff person isn’t making a living wage with decent benefits. That has to be the foundation.

We prioritize good health care, long and short term disability insurance, life insurance, paying a living wage that allows someone to provide for their family.






Vicarious Trauma

Considerations for Survivor-Advocates

Michelle Dixon-Wall, Resource Sharing Project Specialist

A few years ago I had the eye-opening privilege of interviewing a small pool of sexual assault survivors who had volunteered their time to speak with me about their experiences of healing after sexual assault. At the program I was working for at the time, we engaged in this information gathering as a way to (1) begin to figure out if our services were in line with the needs of sexual assault survivors and (2) bring more parity between sexual and domestic violence service provision at the agency. Because at its fundamental roots advocacy is survivor-driven, this was a natural place to begin this evaluation.



I did not select the interviewees based on any criteria other than their self-identity as a sexual assault survivor. I simply interviewed those who volunteered to be interviewed (11 total) through the needs assessment closing date. I interviewed them in-person or over the phone, based on their preference. I asked the interviewees what types of things had helped them heal from their experience(s) of sexual assault and 10 of the 11 interviewed said that participating in the Anti-Sexual Assault Movement in some way was what contributed towards their healing. This included policy work, volunteering at their local program, employment at a rape crisis center, coalition work, and/or providing community education around the issue. A couple of them indicated that they preferred to work in a related field like domestic violence as a way to heal without being too close to sexual assault.

Prior to this, my perceptions of sexual assault service structures were based on my experiences as an advocate working in 3 different agencies in 2 states and my training within those organizations. Even though I knew that those structures did not work for me in my survivorship and my healing, I had never considered that services should or could be for me. Interviewing these survivors helped me realign my survivor-centered values and remember that I matter and that what I did for healing was really just like these interviewees. And I wasn't alone. Now, of course, the point of this project was not for me to find out more about myself, but it was a serendipitous side effect that I regard as one of the most important things I have done in this work, as well as one place of personal healing. I talked to survivors about their experiences without trying to figure out what services I had to offer them and where they might fit in those services.

There are little to no studies specific to sexual assault survivors who work in this field and the impact of vicarious trauma on those survivor-advocates; however, Karl LaRowe, MA, LCSW estimates that around 85% of social workers have experienced personal trauma (LaRowe, 2007). Additionally, he suggests personal trauma is a considerable variable in one's propensity toward compassion fatigue and hypersensitivity to traumatic stress. It is likely that we, as workers in this field already know this or feel that this is true. Through our experiences in this work we gather anecdotal information that shows us that, as an anti-sexual violence field:

- We work with survivors in our client base.
- We work with survivors as our coworkers and as our volunteers.
- As managers, we supervise survivors.
- As employees, we are supervised by survivors.
- We are survivors of other types of violence and trauma.
- We are survivors of sexual assault.

The percentages are uncertain and will also range from program to program. However, we know that this potential organizational makeup creates a unique work environment and impacts the way we experience vicarious trauma as a Movement and as individuals in this Movement.

Tips for Mitigating Vicarious Trauma

Practice and think ahead.

I cannot count the times in the last 13 years of this work that a survivor has asked me, “Has this happened to you, too?” In the first few years, each time this happened I panicked, trying to remember what I was supposed to say. I ended up sounding or feeling dishonest or contrived. And I didn’t feel good afterwards. This can be an empowering experience for both a survivor-client and a survivor-advocate if we practice and plan. In staff orientation and volunteer training, practice answering this question. Your answer should be well-thought out and reflect your comfort level and your agency policy and practices all while keeping the survivor-client at the center of the interaction. And that is hard to do, which is why practice is important.

My answer has changed over the years and the agencies I have worked for have had a variety policies and practices about disclosure which leads me to...

Consider your agency policy or practice around survivor-advocate disclosure. We often create policies and practices that we think will be best for the survivor-clients we serve in our agencies. Our intentions are good. But they sometimes fail to embrace complexities. It is easy to have blanket policies that prohibit the disclosure of a survivor-advocate to a survivor-client. We know that this ensures a survivor-client will remain the focus of an intervention and we know the advocate, survivor or not, will be able to maintain privacy and appropriate boundaries. While it is true that a policy or practice of this sort will accomplish those things, we effectively eliminate choice for a survivor and remove a chance for human connection—a missed opportunity for a survivor-advocate to say simply “yes” and for a survivor-client to see another survivor be okay in this-- the worst time in their life— and to experience some hope for healing, and to not be alone. And, if we are as truly choice-centered in our work as we aim to be, any advocate, of course, has the right to decline to share information with clients. Also, advocates do not need to be survivors to offer hope and healing to a survivor. But, when everyone can be authentic, they can do their best work, be their whole selves, and survivors can do their best healing.

Allowing staff members to bring their whole selves to their work can help mitigate effects of vicarious trauma and explore the real challenges of their work.



Practice consent in debriefing.

Too often we walk into our coworker's office and flop onto the chair and launch into the terrible stuff we just heard on the crisis line. When debriefing or case consulting with another advocate or supervisor, practice consent. Ask: "I need to check in with someone about this hard call I had, are you available?" And when asked, be honest about your capacity-- maybe you can't because you had a really hard call too or maybe you need 5 minutes to wrap up what you are working on before you can be present for your coworker. Create team agreements about how you will debrief or case consult in meetings to mitigate trauma exposure.

Practice low impact debriefing training.

When consulting, debriefing, or conducting a training, consider how much detail is really necessary to share to get your needs or learning objectives met while protecting those around you from additional graphic stories of violence. Also, even though we are permitted to share information internally with other agency staff, we are still holding someone else's story.

It is often not necessary when you are consulting with other advocates or supervisors to recount the graphic details of an assault. If you don't need more information from a survivor about their assault, don't ask for it. If you ask a lot of questions about a survivor's assault as a practice in your agency (screening), consider the reasons why and see if there are ways of limiting that practice. We can examine the options and services for a client with less information about what happened and more information about what they want to happen now.

Through debriefing we generally have a different goal in mind. We need to talk about a scenario because it was really hard or really disturbing. In those cases, try to talk about how you felt and talk about ways you need to be supported instead of relaying the details to your coworker. Give only as much information as is necessary for you to get the answers or the relief you need.

Scenarios are good in training and can help facilitate practice and role play. Advocates understand the gravity of the work we do and don't need graphic descriptions to motivate us. Use scenarios to describe the complexities of cases as opposed to the details of assaults-- examples that illustrate barriers to services or safety. And always follow emotionally challenging information with opportunities for debrief, breaks, stretching, or going outside.

Don't ask for survivor identity but allow a place for it.

We work with survivor-advocates open with their survivorship, survivor-advocates who prefer to keep their survivorship separate from their work, advocates who do not identify as survivors, and/or advocates who have not experienced violence. And they will all likely experience vicarious trauma to varying degrees at different points and it may or may not be connected to their lived experiences. Allowing staff members to bring their whole selves to their work can help mitigate effects of vicarious trauma and explore the real challenges of their work. When people are free to talk about their layered and complex identities, they feel better and safer at work.

Letting staff know that the work will go on without them and the work will be here if and when they are ready to come back, is compassionate.

Give permission for leave and to leave.

As a supervisor at a program, I have supervised many people. I have had challenging staff who were survivors and challenging staff who were not. If one's survivorship is getting in the way of their work, that is a performance issue. Some staff need to take leave for the day, or others for a period of time, and some need help deciding if this is the right work for them right now. Letting staff know that the work will go on without them and the work will be here if and when they are ready to come back, is compassionate. It is reflecting back what you see in their work and how it might be hurting them or the survivors they work with. It allows staff a choice to continue forward with changes or to take a step back from the work.

This is a growing list of tips and practices. We are, as a Movement, still in the midst of discerning best practices and much is still theory without as much practical application. Where survivor-centered philosophy is applied, we see the most success but also the most variety in approach as each is an expert in their own experience. WCSAP would love to hear what you are doing in your agency, what has worked well, what you've tried but decided against, and what resources you have found to help ease or reduce vicarious trauma at your agency. Contact the Advocacy Specialist at advocacy@wcsap.org to share your experiences.

A close-up portrait of Laurie Schacht, a Black woman with long, dark braids, smiling broadly with her eyes closed. She is wearing a light-colored, textured jacket. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

What Sustains Me:

Longevity in Anti-Sexual Violence Movement

**Laurie Schacht, Director
Sexual Assault Program**

Laurie Schacht is the Director of the Sexual Assault Program at the YWCA in Vancouver, WA. She has been in the Movement for fourteen years.

“What sustains you?” What initially seemed like such a simple question made me pause and reflect, leading to a few realizations and immense gratitude. It occurred to me that some of the key factors in promoting resiliency in this work closely mirror what we already offer in advocacy, such as reminders

of one’s foundational strength, respectful and compassionate connection, and interactions promoting self-efficacy and self-care. How this looks can be as unique as every staff member, volunteer, program, and community. Yet the underlying premises can be found across the board. Here are ways they manifest for me. I encourage you, as you read this, to identify your own strengthening factors and to create a plan to grow them if you’re finding the list is smaller than you’d like.

Recognizing all the work that has been done before us is humbling and strengthening. It’s a constant reminder that we are never alone in this work.

Remembering our foundational strength

Joan Renner was my introduction to this program over 14 years ago. Joan founded the local Clark County sexual assault program more than 21 years prior to my beginning and was still engaged with as much dedication as ever. Joan continued directing the program for a total of 33 years before retiring, and she continues to remain involved in various capacities. Recognizing all the work that has been done before us is humbling and strengthening. It's a constant reminder that we are never alone in this work.

Self-Efficacy and Growth

If given the space and support to decide, we each know what is best for us. What connections do you have outside of work...family? Hobbies? Sports? Volunteerism? Connections to social and/or faith communities? Whatever it is, maintaining connections that sustain you will foster resiliency. A good gauge for me that I'm getting out of balance is when I find myself too tired to do things outside of work that I used to enjoy. I simply observe this and gently work on a plan to return to my norm. If that is feeling too difficult because work has been hard, making use of an EAP (employee assistance program) if available can offer valuable counseling support.

A good gauge for me that I'm getting out of balance is when I find myself too tired to do the things outside of work that I used to enjoy.

Also, this isn't a toughness contest to be endured. When we can be honest with ourselves about our abilities and intentions, we can be successful in this field, as well as better able to take care of ourselves when it impacts us. There's no doubt that this work can be hard. Don't be afraid to have space for the feelings around it. Just as important as welcoming folks into this work, I want to support them when it's time for them to move onto something else.

Respectful and Compassionate Connection

It is my great honor to be part of a team that has well over 80 years of collective experience providing services around sexual assault. Our program is under the umbrella agency of YWCA Clark County, which provides much welcomed support and guidance. Obviously not every program has that resource, but every program has staff and volunteers with an incredible variety of skills sets and interests. Discovering what those are within our work team has really helped us play to our strengths as much as possible, as well as deepening our appreciation of one another.

And just as we regularly evaluate what's working and what might be done to improve service provision, we talk about what's working within the team and what could be done to make it better. For example, simply starting our staff meeting with two minutes of silence has allowed each person to leave behind what might be weighing on their mind, and be more present for our time together. A small change made a noticeable difference. Are there any team-building efforts that you do? Notes of appreciation and public kudos are important to share. How does your team celebrate successes? Since we see and hear daily so much pain and trauma caused by sexual violence, acknowledging successes is a critical aspect of this work. There are big and little successes every day. Highlight those! They remind us how much our work makes a difference.

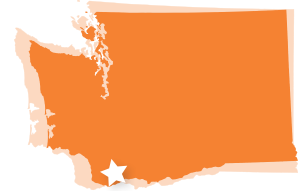
Deep Gratitude

Finally, I am daily strengthened and heartened by the amazing women and men that I work with, the connection we have to a much bigger movement, the patience and support from so many people, and for all the survivors who have so generously entrusted their stories and shared parts of their journey with us. What an honor it is to receive such a gift.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

Pathways to Healing



Interview with Debbie Hassler, Executive Director
Vancouver, WA

WCSAP: What organizational policies and practices does your organization utilize to prevent vicarious trauma among staff?

Debbie: We have quarterly offsite work retreats that are really important for us. At these retreats we go to a staff member's house, wear comfy clothes, and try to take a step back to get a big picture idea of what we are doing and where we are going. We check in about program services and talk about any changes we would like to see. Our staff has the opportunity to be involved in the decision making and to let us know what they need to continue to be productive.

We do a lot of cultural advocacy which means that we help survivors learn how to use ceremonies for healing and other cultural resources that are available. During staff retreats we ask what our staff needs culturally, either to learn for work with survivors or personally. Since we are together for a whole day we also share a meal and do a craft together, which is very important to us traditionally. We are located in the Health and Human Services building with other service providers. Staff in our building tend to take a lot of pain on as a result of the work. Once a year, a tribal elder comes to perform a healing ceremony with the whole building which helps us move forward in our healing.

Our staff has the opportunity to be involved in the decision making and to let us know what they need to continue to be productive.

Another practice that we use to address vicarious trauma is daily debriefing. Staff will usually check in either the first fifteen minutes of the day or the last fifteen minutes of the day. If there is a particularly difficult story, staff will debrief that as well. We try to create a space where it is okay for staff to talk about when they are triggered by a survivor's story. We want to give advocates the chance to understand how they are being impacted by these stories. A tool we use is journaling, which helps staff draw connections between the stories they are hearing and their own personal triggers.

WCSAP: How do you inform staff about vicarious trauma and encourage staff to prioritize vicarious trauma prevention?

Debbie: We have had very little staff turnover as an organization which requires less training of staff on the topic. In general we strive to support survivors mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We take the same holistic approach when thinking about how to best support our

staff. We ask our staff what they need to be healthier. We also try to support a work and personal life balance in staff. One of the ways I model this is that I don't have my work email on my phone. I don't expect myself or my staff to work after their regularly scheduled work hours.

WCSAP: For organizations that want to increase their capacity to address and prevent vicarious trauma for staff, what one or two items you mentioned today would you suggest they start with?

I think it is essential to view staff holistically, the same way we view clients. Since our program is a tribal program, spirituality is very important. We pray before staff meetings, drum, and smudge. We work really hard to ingrain spiritual practices into our work culture. We have noticed that regardless of the spiritual beliefs of staff they seem to benefit from these practices. I think a way this could translate for non-native organizations is to create a work culture where it is okay for staff to talk about their spiritual needs. It is important that there is space for staff to bring their spiritual selves to the work.

It is important that there is space for staff to bring their spiritual selves to the work.

The other thing I would suggest is regular work retreats. I think it's important that these retreats take place outside of the office, so the work is not getting interrupted by the phone and so that it is easier to focus. It is also important to be clear on the agency's intent for the retreat. Our retreats focus on bigger picture work, like goals and where we are as a program. I've talked to a lot of other programs who tried to accomplish a mixture of different types of tasks. We have found it helpful to set the intention that we are going to come together and that is our first priority.



Low-Impact Debriefing

Introduction by WCSAP
Reprinted with permission from
The Compassion Fatigue Workbook
by Françoise Mathieu

Advocates are often trained that they should debrief with co-workers or supervisors in an effort to discharge vicarious trauma. Debriefing can increase feelings of solidarity among co-workers and can normalize reactions that advocates have to their clients' stories. Unfortunately, very little has been done to determine best practices for debriefing in the Anti-Sexual Violence Movement. This has resulted in much confusion about what the term means.

Most advocates assume they should repeat the traumatic details verbatim to their co-workers. Although sharing some details can be helpful, not being intentional about the level of detail we share can harm our co-workers. We can unintentionally spread trauma around, without actually supporting advocates in feeling resolved about the client interaction. Since many advocates fear harming their co-workers by sharing the haunting details, they refrain from debriefing at all. This effort to protect those we work with can leave us feeling disconnected from our co-workers and alone with the stories we hear each day. Our opportunities for gaining different perspectives on our work with clients are also lessened. This can result in less growth in our work as advocates.

Although each advocate will have different needs when it comes to debriefing, these suggestions from the Compassion Fatigue Workbook can offer some guidance about how to debrief with our co-workers in a trauma-informed way. Increased Awareness, Fair Warning, Consent and Limited Disclosure provide a framework to ensure that the advocates involved in a debrief are on the same page and able to be fully present with what is being shared.

Increased Awareness

How do you debrief when you have heard or seen hard things? Take a survey of a typical workweek and note all the ways in which you formally and informally debrief with your colleagues. Note the amount of detail you provide them with (and the amount of detail they share with you), and the manner in which this is done: do you do it in a formal way, at a peer supervision meeting, or by the water cooler? What is most helpful to you in dealing with difficult stories?

Fair Warning

Before you tell anyone a difficult story, you must give them fair warning. This is the key difference between formal debriefs and ad hoc ones: if I am your supervisor and I know you are coming to tell me a traumatic story, I will be prepared to hear this information and it will be less traumatic for me to hear. If I am casually chatting with a colleague about their weekend plans and you barge in and tell us graphic details of a sexual abuse story you just heard, we will be more negatively impacted by the details. In fact, we use fair warning in everyday life: if you had to call your sister and tell her that your uncle has passed away, you would likely start the phone call with “I have some bad news” or “You’d better sit down.” This allows the listener to brace themselves to hear the story.

Consent

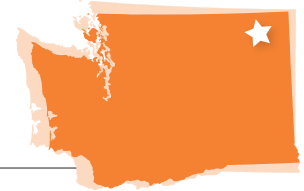
After you have given warning to the listener, you need to ask for consent. This can be as simple as saying, “I need to debrief something with you; is this a good time?” or “I heard something really hard today and I could really use a debrief; could I talk to you about it?” The listener then has a chance to decline or to qualify what they are able and ready to hear. For example, if you are my work colleague, I may say to you: “I have 15 minutes and I can hear some of your story, but would you be able to tell me what happened without any of the gory details?” or “Is this about children [or whatever your trigger is]? If it’s about children I’m probably the wrong person to talk to; but otherwise I’m fine to hear it.”

Limited Disclosure

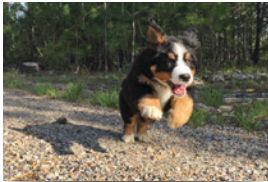
Now that you have received consent from your colleague you can decide how much of the tap to turn on. I suggest imagining that you are telling the story starting on the outer circle of the story (i.e., the least traumatic information) and slowly moving in toward the core (the most traumatic information) at a gradual pace. You may, in the end, need to tell the graphic details, or you may not, depending on how disturbing the story has been for you.

The Compassion Fatigue Workbook can be found in the WCSAP Lending Library. Contact advocacy@wcsap.org for more information on how to use low-impact debriefing at your agency.

Rural Resources Victim Services



Alex Panagotacos-Mueller, Community Engagement Program Manager, Colville, WA



Waffle is a Bernese Mountain Dog who is training to become a therapy dog for Rural Resources Victim Services.

WCSAP: How does Waffle encourage staff members and volunteers to take breaks?

Alex: We can all get wrapped up in a project. You might find yourself leaning closer and closer to the computer screen. You're completely oblivious to the time and then a wet nose nudges you in the elbow. It's Waffle and she wants to remind you that the world wants you back and wants you to be mindful. Sometimes we say that Waffle needs a walk when in fact we do.

WCSAP: Do staff come in to see Waffle when they are having a stressful day or feeling upset?

Alex: Yes! I love to see full-grown professionals on the ground, spooning Waffle. It's beautiful to see that animal-human connection, it's inspiring to see coworkers showing vulnerability, and it is joyful to see spirits lifted.

WCSAP: How has Waffle changed the atmosphere at Rural Resources?

Alex: Waffle brings a jovial, lighthearted energy to our office. Our staff are excited to see Waffle every day and proud to introduce her to visitors. No one can tell who she belongs to because the entire office cares for her and interacts with her so much. Waffle has changed the atmosphere of the office for our clients as well. A client recently visited us but was apprehensive about being here. She didn't want to be part of anything cold, clinical, and system-like. She'd had enough of

that. Waffle visited with her, sat on her feet, ate cookies out of her hand, and rested her head in her lap. By the end of the visit, the survivor said "I love it here!"

Waffle brings me back to the present, makes me laugh, and prompts me to get outside.

WCSAP: Do you feel like the quality of work is higher with her there? Does she help advocates ground after clients so they can be more present with subsequent clients?

Alex: Yes! I know that I personally feel that I get more work done. Waffle brings me back to the present, makes me laugh, and prompts me to get outside. All of these things make me a better advocate and preventionist. I see coworkers who are shaken by the trauma around them, or by the system itself. That stuff can hang on you, make your shoulders hurt, stifle creativity, and burn people out. Waffle forces us to hit the reset button. Sometimes all it takes is to see her sleeping with her feet in the air. It's just so carefree and adorable, that you can't help but smile. And just like that, you've given yourself an opportunity to heal. Sometimes she literally gives you a hug that knocks you over (we're still working on that, by the way!).

WCSAP: Does your staff get support from Waffle that they might not be able to get anywhere else? What do you think that is?

Alex: Waffle doesn't offer solutions for your problems. She doesn't criticize your life choices. She doesn't bad-mouth people who've hurt you, either. She doesn't judge. She just looks at you and leans in.

Question Oppression



Exploring the Connections Between Sexual Violence & Oppression

Use these questions to explore the connections between sexual violence and oppression with staff, volunteers, or board members.

Try discussing one or more at a staff meeting, in-service, volunteer training, or board retreat.

How might internalized sexism be a factor for how your organization responds to vicarious trauma in staff?

What cultural considerations can you think of that would support your organization in selecting vicarious resiliency strategies?

How does economic justice factor into the work we do with survivors and within our organizations?

Resources



Did you know . . . that WCSAP members have access to check out our library items? It's true. We mail them to you, you mail them back. Access our library online: <http://www.wcsap.org/lending-library>. These items can be checked out of our library:

- **The Compassion Fatigue Workbook; Creative Tools for Transforming Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Traumatization**
Françoise Mathieu
The Compassion Fatigue Workbook is a lifeline for any helping professional facing the physical and emotional exhaustion that can shadow work in the helping professions.
- **Help for the Helper: Self-Care Strategies for Managing Burnout and Stress**
Babette Rothschild and Marjorie Rand
How empathy can jeopardize a therapist's well-being.
- **Trauma Stewardship**
Laura Vandernoot-Lipsky and Connie Burk
An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others



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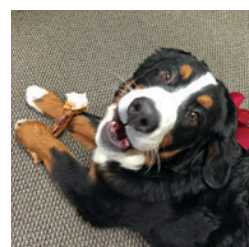
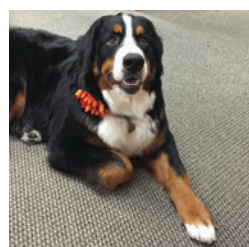
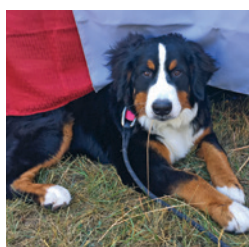
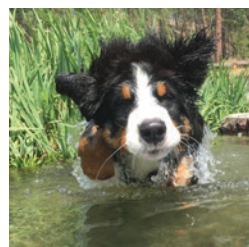
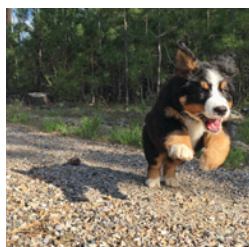
We invite guest authors to submit pieces on a variety of topics, and welcome your submissions on advocacy approaches, media reviews, and creative work like original art or poetry.

We would also like to feature highlights of your agency and the advocacy work you are doing.

Direct submissions to
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www.wcsap.org

For information about becoming a member of WCSAP, please e-mail us at info@wcsap.org, or call (360) 754-7583.



Waffle is a Bernese Mountain Dog who is training to become a therapy dog for Rural Resources Victim Services. Read article on page 15.