

October 2009

# Practitioner Perspectives

## **Deirdre Keys:** Stalking Program Coordinator *Battered Woman's Legal Advocacy Project*

An interview with Deirdre Keys, Coordinator of the Stalking Response Program at the Battered Woman's Legal Advocacy Project, a state-wide agency supporting advocacy in Minnesota, and formally of Cornerstone Advocacy Service, Bloomington, Minnesota.

**Q: What was the impetus for establishing the Stalking Response Program?**

A: We saw a need to help an under-represented demographic of victims. After attending a training session discussing the severity of stalking, we wanted to take action to help victims of this crime in Minnesota.

**Q: When was your program established and how are you funded?**

A: At Cornerstone we started in January 2007 and were federally funded through a two-year Office of Violence Against Women grant that ended in December 2008. A STOP grant was awarded to Battered Woman's Legal Advocacy Project to take the Stalking Response Program state wide.

**Q: Roughly, how many victims of stalking do you see in a year?**

A: In the three years of the program, we have averaged 150 contacts with stalked victims throughout Minnesota.

**Q: How is your program evolving to meet the emerging issues of stalking?**

A: Because of the relation between sexual assault and stalking, we have expanded training for sexual assault workers. With technology becoming utilized more and more

in stalking cases, we stress the issue of cell phone usage and global positioning systems (GPS) tracking used by stalkers.

**Q: In your program, is there a collaborative effort by different departments to ensure victim safety and offender accountability?**

A: Yes. We actively work with the law enforcement, prosecutors' offices, and our community partners to ensure both these things. We are all better informed, and no one department provides more leadership than others. Instead, there is a collaborative effort between departments when needed.

**Q: How does your program portray the image of a stalking victim to officials being trained to handle these crimes?**

A: It is important to remember that as officials handling these issues, we act as the voice of the victim, regardless of who that victim is. We try not to form a personal opinion or judgment of the victim. With this in mind, officials are instead trained to recognize potential scenarios, behaviors, or

The **Battered Woman's Legal Advocacy Project's Stalking Response Program** is a state-wide resource for stalking victims based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Stalking Program Coordinator Deirdre Keys directs the program, holding information sessions and training for multidisciplinary audiences, and providing victim services to address the issue of stalking. Formerly at Cornerstone Advocacy Service, the Stalking Response Program recently created a stalking protocol for law enforcement, prosecutors, and direct service providers for the state of Minnesota.

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phrases that they will likely encounter when working with victims.

**Q: How does your community cope with the reality that stalkers often pose threats too difficult to prevent, and what do you do to enhance victim safety?**

A: We created a protocol that would be referred to for use in threat assessment. We explain and apply the law to specific situations, assisting the victim to understand a reasonable expectation of law enforcement, prosecutors, and themselves. We will also create timelines and safety plans with clients so that we can assist them with discovering and addressing the most plausible threat of their situation. Victims also use the Minnesota State Incident Behavior Log, and law enforcement officers carry it in each squad car.

**Q: How is the Minnesota State Incident Behavior log used?**

A: The aim of the log is to be a resource used to criminalize perceivably non-criminal stalking behaviors. Victims use the log to record specific stalking events they experience, which later can aid in the prosecution of stalking cases.

**Q: How does your program protect third parties impacted by the stalking of someone they know?**

A: We are very adamant about not having third parties involved in facilitating contact between the stalker and the victim. We strongly recommend that law enforcement intervene if a partner or family member wants to confront a victim's stalker. Stalkers may go after anyone who gets in their way, and this risk is explained to the victim as well as third parties.

**Q: What do you stress the most when training officials about stalking?**

A: Trainings have been designed to assist the participant to have a paradigm shift about stalking. The most important point of training is to have the viewer recognize the severity of stalking and the need to address it more appropriately in communities. As well, talking about the victim's presentation and how to identify a stalking victim is important. I have found that the most common complaint of a stalking victim is that the police say he or she is paranoid. Educating law enforcement to understand the paranoia that may come with being stalked is important. Identifying a paranoid person from a stalking victim is a distinction that is stressed through examples of stories we have encountered.

**Q: What can you suggest to other organizations that are trying to replicate your program?**

A: Use the Stalking Response Program and stalking protocol as a resource. Because there are not many organizations or task forces specific to stalking, take notice of those working with these crimes and collaborate with them so as to not have to start from scratch creating programs. Also, create a support group for victims. The isolation victims feel is overwhelming, and our group participants have stressed the importance of and appreciation for having a group. Finally, as an advocate or official dealing with stalking issues, it is important to always remember to protect one's own personal data and internet information.