

Minnesota Victim Assistance Academy

Fall 2025

Office of Justice Programs

Minnesota Department of Public Safety





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Training Advisory Committee

Christina Busse	Monique Drier Sutton	Sarah Edstrom
Suzanne Elwell	Katie Kramer	Rebecca Kutty
Katie Rohas-Jahn	Sophia Maceda	Becca Muscat
Farji Shaheer	Brenda Skogman	Drea Stephani
Ashley Sturtz-Griffith	Thi Synavone	

MNVAA Sponsor

The 2025 Minnesota Victim Assistance Academy is made possible through financial assistance from:

Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Justice Programs

WELCOME FROM THE ACADEMY DIRECTOR



Welcome 2025 MNVAA participants!

On behalf of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Justice Programs and the OJP Training Advisory Committee, welcome to the 2025 Minnesota Victim Assistance Academy!

The academy is a one-of-a-kind community learning space, approaching collaboration and challenges with a fresh perspective that celebrates the unique skills, qualities, and life experiences you bring to your role each day. Here, you'll be immersed in a rich learning environment while still having the freedom to define your place within your own community of practice. Make the most of your time - connect, share, and build relationships with those around you.

The information presented over the next several weeks is powerful and facilitated by some of the state's leading subject matter experts. The academy offers ample opportunities to learn the what, how and why to better help crime victim survivors. From tested standards to best and promising practices, we have filtered through the content to ensure that you graduate with diverse and relevant knowledge to inform your work as well as share with others who are providing the critical resources to those we serve.

Curated spaces away from the classroom have also been thoughtfully designed to support your emotional and physical well-being while at the academy. A prayer and mindfulness space are dedicated to MNVAA attendees for use while at the academy. Take a break from the structured classroom by popping into the mindfulness room a little early for some coloring or to simply relax and enjoy the tech-free surroundings.

A big thank you goes to the Training Advisory Committee and to OJP staff for their assistance during the planning process for the academy. I'm grateful for their help, advice and dedication to plan this premier event each year.

On behalf of the Training Advisory Committee and OJP staff, thank you for your work and unwavering support of victims survivors across the state of Minnesota.

Best,

Joann M. Jones
Minnesota Victim Assistance Academy Director
Office of Justice Programs

ACADEMY INFORMATION

Congratulations on being selected to attend the 2025 OJP Minnesota Victim Assistance Academy! This booklet provides an overview of sessions, faculty and background that we hope is useful throughout the academy.

Academy Facility

We are fortunate to have the Heritage Center of Brooklyn Center as our MNVAA host this year. This will be our central location to all the sessions, meals and activities. The center has stairs and elevators for easy access to all levels. Please take some time to enjoy the spaces our gracious host has provided!

Safe Spaces

OJP is dedicated to providing an experience for attendees that is inclusive, safe, accessible, and welcoming for all. These expectations are for all those who participate in the academy. We invite all to help us create and maintain this space of belonging and make it a positive experience for everyone. If concerns arise, please connect with the MNVAA facilitators. MNVAA faculty members are also available to reach out to as well.

Staff is Available for You

MNVAA facilitators are available to assist you throughout the academy. Please discuss any concerns or questions you have with them, and let them know if you need special assistance.

Welcome Reception

The Welcome Reception is on Monday, October 6, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. in the Garden City Ballroom. See you there!

Classroom Discussions

Our classroom discussions are the “heart and soul” of the academy! Participation gives the opportunity to practice using the language of the discipline. Enhanced focus, increased awareness on viewpoints and background, and promoting participation are just a few reasons why these segments are so critical. MNVAA is an academic environment, so when you participate, you’re adding your voice in our classroom.

Evaluation Protocol

Students are asked to evaluate each individual session as well as complete the overall evaluation following the academy. These evaluations are used to provide feedback to the faculty, refine our curriculum, and provide guidance for improvements to next year’s academy. Timely reflection and communication on the content is important, and it is expected that students complete each session evaluation immediately following the session.

Self Care

The topics covered at MNVAA can be intense and emotionally impactful, and practicing self care is important at the academy as well as a good practice moving ahead as you maintain balance in your life and professional career. The mindfulness room is available if you need to step away and take a short break during a session. Also know that academy staff are here to listen and support you. For those seeking a private space for prayer, a room has been set aside specifically for academy students and faculty who wish to use it.

Graduation Ceremony

Your efforts are honored at the graduation ceremony on Thursday, November 6, 2025 at 11:30 a.m. Upon successful completion of the academy, MNVAA participants will receive a Minnesota Victim Assistance Academy certificate.

MNVAA AT A GLANCE

PHASE 1

MONDAY, OCTOBER 6

		Heritage Center
4:30 - 5:30 pm	Registration	Joann Jones and Rebecca Kutty
6:00 - 7:30 pm	Welcome Reception-Garden City Ballroom	OJP Deputy Dir Ext Relations Becky Rabb, TAC

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7

		All sessions will be in the Garden City Ballroom
		Garden City Ballroom
7:00 - 8:00 am	Breakfast	
7:30 - 8:00 am	Registration	
8:00 - 9:15 am	Introductions/Agreements	Joann Jones and Rebecca Kutty
9:15 - 9:30 am	Break	
9:30 - 10:30 am	Ethical Considerations in Victim Services	Joann Jones and Rebecca Kutty
10:30 - 10:45 am	Break	
10:45 - 12:00 pm	Elder and Vulnerable Adult Abuse	Marit Peterson
12:00 - 1:00 pm	Lunch	
1:00 - 3:00 pm	Financial Compensation for Crime Victims	Danielle Kitto
3:00 - 3:15 pm	Break	
3:15 - 4:15 pm	Reimbursement Online Crime Victim Services Portal/Form	Danielle Kitto
5:00 pm	Optional Yoga PM w/Casey Cashman 5:00-6:00 PM (tentative time)	

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8

		All sessions will be in the Garden City Ballroom
7:00 - 7:45 am	Breakfast	
7:45 - 8:00 am	Welcome and Introduction to Faculty	Joann Jones and Rebecca Kutty
8:00 - 10:00 am	Crossing the Power Line w/Discussion	MayTong Chang
10:00 - 10:15 am	Break	
10:15 - 12:00 pm	Panel: Barriers to the Criminal Justice System for Crime Victims Anjuli Cameron, Betsy Mevissen, Katie Meinhardt Moderated by Kelly Nicholson	
12:00 - 1:00 pm	Lunch	
1:00 - 3:15 pm	Introduction to the Criminal Justice System	Kelly Nicholson
3:15 - 3:30 pm	Break	
3:30 - 5:00 pm	ACE Study: Adverse Childhood Experiences: Identify, Intervene & Interrupt	Jane Straub

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9

		Garden City Ballroom
7:00 - 7:45 am	Breakfast	
7:45 - 8:00 am	Welcome and Introduction to Faculty	Joann Jones and Rebecca Kutty
8:00 - 9:45 am	Crimes Against Children	Rachel Johnson
9:45 - 10:00 am	Break	
10:00 - 12:00 pm	Oppression, Bias and White Privilege	Connie Rhodes

MNVAA AT A GLANCE

PHASE 2

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 3

No Programming

Heritage Center of Brooklyn Center

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4

All sessions will be in The Garden City Ballroom

7:00 - 7:45 am	Breakfast	Garden City Ballroom
7:45 - 8:00 am	Welcome and Introduction to Faculty	Joann Jones and Rebecca Kutty
8:00 - 9:45 am	Strengthening Responses for Gender Based Violence	Wilson Yang
9:45 - 10:00 am	Break	
10:00 - 11:15 am	Deep Fried and Burnt to a Crisp: Managing Burnout	Sarah Edstrom
11:15 - 12:00 pm	A Survivor's Account	Pethuel LeFlore
12:00 - 1:00 pm	Lunch	
1:00 - 2:30 pm	Crisis Response to Trauma	Farji Shaheer
2:30 - 2:45 pm	Break	
2:45 - 4:45 pm	Victim Services & Restorative Justice Minnesota DOC	Chris Godsey & Heather Kolling
4:45 - 5:00 pm	Debrief w/MNVAA facilitators	
5:30 - 6:30 pm	Optional Activity - Gentle Yoga w/Casey Cashman	

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5

All sessions will be in The Garden City Ballroom

7:00 - 7:45 am	Breakfast	
7:45 - 8:00 am	Welcome and Introduction to Faculty	Joann Jones and Rebecca Kutty
8:00 - 9:30 am	Responding to Native & American Indian Victims/Survivors of Crime	Linda Thompson
9:30 - 9:45 am	Break	
9:45 - 11:30 am	Panel: The Good, The Bad, and What I Wish I Had Been Told Christine Kleckner, Ashley Taylor-Gougé, Shoua Kong, Ameer Krogfus Moderated by Biiftuu Ibrahim Adam	
11:30 - 12:30 pm	Lunch	
12:30 - 2:30 pm	Crime Victim Rights	Suzanne Elwell
2:30 - 2:45 pm	Break	
2:45 - 3:30 pm	Systemic Trauma: The Unrecognized American Citizen	Farji Shaheer
3:30 - 4:45 pm	General Crime	Becca Muskat
4:45 - 5:00 pm	Debrief	MNVAA Faculty

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6

All sessions will be in The Garden City Ballroom

7:00 - 7:45 am	Breakfast	
8:00 - 8:15 am	Last Day Review/Instructions	Joann Jones and Rebecca Kutty
8:15 - 9:15 am	LBGTQ2IA+ Crime Victims	C.Michael M.
9:15 - 9:30 am	Break	
9:30 - 11:30 am	"Walking the Talk"	Alison Feigh
11:30 am - 12:00 pm	Graduation Address and Final Words	DPS Commissioner Bob Jacobson

Ethical Considerations in Victim Services

Joann Jones and Rebecca Kutty

The goal of this class is to provide participants with a basic understanding of the necessity to establish and maintain ethical standards for themselves and the agencies they represent. Understanding and upholding ethical principles will support the participant in maintaining respectful boundaries while providing professional services in a complex and challenging environment.

Objectives

1. Define ethics and professional ethics.
2. Be able to recognize when a person is acting in an ethically questionable way.
3. Be able to use a standard decision-making process when faced with an ethical dilemma.

Elder and Vulnerable Adult Abuse

Marit Peterson

Older and vulnerable adults are disproportionately victims of abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. Long considered by advocates in the field to be manifestations of power and control and instances of domestic violence, elder and vulnerable adult abuse is an increasingly urgent issue for all programs serving adult victims of crime due to a variety of factors, including demographic change. The majority of instances of these forms of abuse happen at the hands of individuals with whom the victim has a relationship of trust, and providing advocacy for older or vulnerable victims requires specific advocacy strategies and a sensitivity to the tremendous reporting barriers faced by these victims of crime. This session will explore elder and vulnerable adult abuse, neglect and financial exploitation, and the complex response system available to victims of these crimes.

Objectives:

1. Explore definitions and statistics related to these instances of abuse to illustrate the prevalence of these crimes.
2. Consider and discuss reporting barriers faced by older or vulnerable victims of crime.
3. Review interventions and responses available in the event an older or vulnerable adult experiences abuse, neglect or financial exploitation.

Financial Compensation for Crime Victims & Victim Service Portal (VSP) Walk-Through

Danielle Kitto

This session will provide information on financial assistance available to crime victims from the Crime Victims Reimbursement Program (CVRP). It will provide an overview of the eligibility requirements for the program, the appeal process, covered expenses, and a step-by-step guide to using the on-line application portal. Strategies to enhance collaboration between CVRB staff, advocates, and criminal justice professionals will also be discussed.

Objectives

1. Learn the eligibility requirements for the program as defined in Minnesota statutes and rules so that appropriate referrals can be made.
2. Learn what expenses are reimbursable to victims and their family members, including medical, dental and mental health counseling costs, wage loss, funeral and burial expenses, and loss of support for homicide survivors.
3. Identify your role in ensuring victims are informed of their right for compensation and collaborating with reparations staff to make the application process easier and faster for victims.

Crossing the Power Line

MayTong Chang

This interactive activity will help us begin to look at how societal inequalities impact our perception of the work that we do and how it creates barriers for domestic/sexual violence advocates. This exercise will specifically get us to look beyond stereotypes which also create barriers for advocates and the victims/survivors that we serve. Everyone is required to step outside of his or her comfort zone.

Objectives

1. Participants are challenged to remove labels and limitations regarding characteristics of what society defines as “the norm.”
2. Participants learn through this exercise and discussion the significance of inclusivity in their daily interactions with others.
3. Participants see how identity establishes a basis of respect, social justice and equity. The group also gets its first look at the similarities and differences between participants (playing a role in the activity), potentially in ways that reflect privilege and power.

Barriers to the Criminal Justice System for Crime Victims Panel

Moderator: Kelly Nicholson, Victim Witness Program Supervisor, Dakota County Attorney's Office

Anjali Mishra Cameron, CEO, SEWA-AIFW, Minneapolis, MN

Katie Meinhardt, Advocacy Coordinator, ThinkSelf, St. Paul, MN

Betsy Mevissen, Victim Services Manager, Minnesota Elder Justice Center, St. Paul, MN

The purpose of this panel is to examine the many barriers that exist for crime victims from underserved communities who are in the criminal justice system. The subject matter experts will talk about their experiences in direct services and how to best offer accessible resources to marginalized areas, while maintaining best practices. Challenges encountered while assisting victims of unserved/underserved communities and immigrant and refugee communities will be discussed, as will strategies to address common barriers for navigating the court system, social services, and/or related services to promote justice and healing.

Objectives

1. Students will be able to better understand the barriers to service provision and justice that distinguish certain underserved victims of crime.
2. Students will learn specific attitudes, skills, strategies, and resources required to better serve underserved/unserved marginalized crime victims effectively.
3. Students will understand the value of best practices and how these can be brought back to their workplaces to effect immediate change in serving victims.

Introduction to the Criminal Justice System

Kelly Nicholson

The purpose of this training is to present Victim Service Providers (VSP) with a basic understanding of the criminal justice system. This includes information about the different phases of the process, various court hearings, criminal justice participants and their roles, and how the system impacts the victims involved. By being familiar with the court process, VSPs are in a better position to offer support to their clients and recognize what they are experiencing.

Objectives

1. Understand fundamentals of each stage of the criminal court process.
2. Identify the unique challenges for the criminal justice system to uphold crime victim rights statutes in light of the presumption of innocence and other constitutional rights of the accused.
3. Recognize and appreciate the difficulties victims experience while their case is going through the system.

ACE Study: Adverse Childhood Experiences: Identify, Intervene and Interrupt

Jane Straub

Experiences in childhood matter. Numerous research studies have shown how childhood stress and trauma can impact adult health. The ACE Study is the largest study investigating the health and social effects of negative childhood experiences. Now that we have the research, what can we do about it? The cycle of violence, generational poverty and abuse, homelessness, substance abuse, incarceration, perpetration and victimization of violence are all related to ACEs. Strategies such as identification and assessment, reducing risk and exposure and nurturing resiliency and skill building are effective interventions. Changing the negative course that many children are on is our best way to prevent abuse in future generations. This presentation will increase your knowledge of trauma and provide ways to work with children, families, and communities to reduce the impact of trauma.

Objectives

1. Identify types of child maltreatment and adversity and their link to health in adulthood.
2. Recognize how the stress response system activates fight, flight or fear and becomes conditioned over time, especially in high stress situations.
3. Learn ways to build resiliency in your clientele.
4. Understand the concept of trauma-informed care and how it creates safety for those impacted by violence and trauma.

Crimes Against Children

Rachel Johnson

This course provides an overview on the dynamics of child abuse as well as the systems that respond to child abuse and maltreatment. Topics in this course will include the function and roles of the child advocacy center (CAC) and child abuse multidisciplinary team (MDT), what a forensic interview is and how systems professionals can support the forensic interview process.

This course is intended for those that are newer to the field or participate infrequently in the MDT response to child abuse, adjacent professionals or community stakeholders than can benefit from learning more about how forensic interviews, CACs and MDTs work and as a refresher for those who have been working within the field.

Objectives

1. Learn more about the dynamics of child abuse and how that informs the CAC and MDT response to child abuse and maltreatment.
2. Increase understanding of how the MDT functions to better prepare children, families and professionals for the process and reduce systems inflicted trauma.
3. Improve investigations and systems response to child abuse by bettering the shared understanding of the MDT and CAC processes.

Oppression, Bias, and White Privilege

Connie Rhodes

Bias, oppression, and white privilege inform our personal and interpersonal communication styles and content, and are also present in the systems and institutions with which we interact. The purpose of this session is to encourage advocates to think deeply about their own cultural experiences and the ways those experiences shape personal biases. Participants will examine bias, oppression, and privilege personally, inter-personally, and from the perspective of systems and institutions in an experiential learning environment.

Objectives

1. Understand the impact of oppressive systems on various communities.
2. Examine our personal cultures and the ways they inform our advocacy.
3. Discuss ways to create communication free from our own biases.

Strengthening Responses for Gender Based Violence

Wilson Yang

The purpose of this section is to enhance participant's understanding of the dynamics of gender-based violence and methods for strengthening services. The World Health Organization states intimate partner violence and sexual violence are the most common forms of violence experienced by women and girls globally. Although domestic violence, sexual assault, and sex trafficking are different forms of victimization, the harms are interconnected through violence and often involve the same complex dynamics of power and control.

Objectives

1. Define and examine the various forms of gender based violence.
2. Examine and review the intersection between domestic violence, sexual assault and sex trafficking.
3. Review barriers and effective practices and system change efforts that address and prevent gender based violence.

Deep Fried and Burnt to a Crisp: Managing Burnout

Sarah Edstrom

Burnout is a common experience among advocates. Despite this, it is a deeply stigmatized topic rarely discussed openly. Burnout is frequently treated as a character flaw instead of a natural response to being immersed in the trauma of crisis work. Using humor and brutal honesty, Sarah discusses her experiences with burnout during her 11 year career as a Sexual Assault Advocate. Through guided exercises, participants will have the opportunity to explore their experiences and needs on their own in a safe, non-judgmental environment. Audience members are encouraged (but not required) to participate at their own pace and comfort level.

Objectives

1. Normalize burnout in advocates.
2. Define Burnout, Vicarious Trauma, and Organizational Trauma.
3. Explore how leadership in advocacy organizations can play a role in protecting advocates from burnout.

A Survivor's Account

Pethuel LeFlore

Pethuel provides invaluable insight into the complexities victim survivors experience as they gain their voice on their path to restoration. Hear her personal account of thriving past trauma using tools and resources offered through the community, and how she has overcome the challenges while identifying the practical and inclusive practices in community responsive programs for crime victims.

Crisis Response to Trauma

Farji Shaheer

The purpose of this section is to educate staff members and advocates on how to develop genuine bonds with participants/clients who are traumatized or dealing with crisis. Every client/participant communicates in a different style/technique, and to better serve the population, as staff we need to communicate effectively to understand the situations and crises that our participants face. There are multiple resources when dealing with individuals in crisis but the most valuable resource is an effective staff member.

Objectives

1. Learn the meaning of and how to utilize Narrative Medicine.
2. Practice an exercise utilizing both Narrative Medicine and Motivational Interviewing.
3. Provide external resources for crisis intervention.

Minnesota Dept. of Corrections Post-Conviction Services for Those Impacted by Harm

Chris Godsey and Heather Kolling

The purpose of this session is to introduce students to the post-conviction services and opportunities the MN Dept. of Corrections Victim Services & Restorative Justice Unit provides to those impacted by harm. Attendees will learn about the services available through the DOC and opportunities for collaboration.

Objectives

1. Understand the structure and services of the MN Department of Corrections Victim Services and Restorative Justice Unit.
2. Define the role of the Minnesota Department of Corrections in responding to the various post-conviction needs of victims/survivors.
3. Explore opportunities for referrals, collaboration, and partnership.

Responding to American Indian Victims/Survivors of Crime

Linda Thompson

The purpose of this training is to develop a baseline knowledge for non-Native crime victim service providers on working with Native American victims of crime. This presentation will explore the historical aspects of policies and how they currently impact Native Nations and communities in relation to crime victimization. We will also go over approaches to working with victims of crime from a culturally and trauma-informed approach.

Objectives

1. Recognize the need for culturally appropriate actions based on the historical perspective of Native American Populations.
2. Identify service systems and delivery methods available to Native American Populations.
3. Identify culturally sensitive communication methods and techniques for Native American outreach efforts and how to apply effective strategies and messaging for working with Native American Populations.

The Good, The Bad, and What I Wish I Had Been Told

Moderated by: Biiftuu Ibrahim Adam, Minnesota Department of Public Safety

Christine Kleckner, Survivor Resources, St. Paul, MN | Ashley Taylor-Gougé, Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA) St. Paul, MN | Shoua Kong, Asian Women United, Minneapolis, MN | Ameer Krogfus, MN Dept. of Public Safety Office of Justice Programs

This moderated panel features four advocacy experts who candidly discuss questions from our MNVAA students, talk about their respective roles and how they adjust to unpredictable conditions and people while staying motivated to work with individuals facing ongoing adversity. Sage advice for helping victims navigate common barriers to the court system, social services, and/or related services to promote justice and healing will be centered, as well as the ever important question of “How do I make time for self-care?”

Crime Victim Rights

Suzanne Elwell

This session will review Minnesota’s statutory crime victim rights, outlining the primary categories of victim rights and identifying the responsibilities of criminal justice professionals in upholding those rights. The presenter will highlight the role of both community-based and prosecutor-based advocates in ensuring crime victim rights are upheld and the importance of good practices to prevent victim rights violations.

Objectives

1. Gain an understanding of the scope of victim rights in Minnesota and the importance of those rights to victims.
2. Learn about the most common complaints from crime victims about statutory rights violations and treatment by criminal justice professionals.
3. Become familiar with best practices regarding crime victim rights and identify ways advocates can incorporate them into their work with victims to avoid crime victim rights violations.

Systemic Trauma “The Unrecognized American Citizen”

Farji Shaheer

The purpose of the Unrecognized American Citizen session is to enlighten individuals on the different levels of perception that allow society to minimize the purpose and value of African/Native American male lives and living situations. There are systemic barriers that have been set in place to decrease the value and to dehumanize these Unrecognized American Citizens. If someone loses their life in these communities, the emphasis is not on support but on the criminalization of the individual’s character based on their zip code.

Unrecognized American Citizens have daily battles with self-esteem and self-worth. This session will highlight discrepancies in media and society that these American citizens are faced with that dehumanize them and make it more acceptable for them to be abused. Let’s help change the narrative so that we can bring value and support to the individuals affected.

Objectives

1. We will learn how to identify discrepancies in the narratives delivered by different levels of society and institutions.
2. We will learn how to understand the effects of psychological abuse and low self-worth.
3. We will learn how to develop a “No fear, No judgment” approach when working with individuals we have been programmed to fear.
4. We will learn how to begin promoting value and how to administer unbiased support for these individuals.

General Crime Victim Advocacy

Becca Muskat

The goal of this training is to introduce participants to the principles of general crime advocacy. The 2016 Minnesota Crime Victimization Survey found that just over 37% of Minnesotans experienced at least one victimization event within the previous year. Whether it’s a property offense (like a car theft or financial scam), a person offense (domestic violence, stalking, assault) or combination of both, all victims have the potential to suffer significant trauma and deserve support. This presentation will teach participants how victims of different types of crime experience symptoms of trauma in unique ways, as well as how advocates can offer support and referrals to make sure victims get the care they deserve.

Objectives

1. Learn brief history of general crime in Minnesota, crime victims’ rights, and the Minnesota Alliance on Crime.
2. Understand the types of general crime and the impact of general crime on victims.
3. Be able to identify resources available to general crime victims—locally and statewide.

Working with LGBTQ2IA+ Crime Victims

C. Michael M.

This training will provide you with knowledge to work with LGBTQ2IA+ victims in a manner that is welcoming, inclusive, and affirming. We will start by familiarizing ourselves with LGBTQ2IA+ identities and language, then tackle the prevalence and dynamics of domestic violence and sexual assault in the LGBTQ2IA+ community. A more advanced discussion of best practices when working with LGBTQ2IA+ victims and ways service providers can be active allies to the LGBTQ2IA+ community will follow.

Objectives

1. Students will gain a greater understanding of the LGBTQ2IA+ community's varying identities, terminology and language that typically surrounds the community.
2. Students will learn how to better serve LGBTQ2IA+ victim survivors from a trauma informed, person centered lens.
3. Students will be introduced to some barriers that can and do present themselves when working with members of the LGBTQ2IA+ community.

Walking the Talk

Alison Feigh

This session features Alison Feigh, a national speaker and MNVAA graduate. She renders a lighthearted, insightful "mini-keynote" closing session to our academy. Alison centers our awareness to the impacts we make in our work with her life-changing examples, why self-care is important, and how we too can learn and be inspired from others.

Thank you!

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Continuing Education Information

Continuing Education Credits are available through the MN Board of Social Work.
Event Code CEP 137 | 27 Hours

BIOGRAPHIES



Biiftuu Ibrahim Adam **Minnesota Department of Public Safety**

Biiftuu Adam is an Oromo American Woman who was born in Cedar-Riverside, Minneapolis, MN. She holds a Master's degree in Criminology and a decade of experience working with survivors of sexual violence, domestic violence, human trafficking, gun violence, and incarceration. She has served both in the nonprofit and government settings. She serves as the Legislative Coordinator for the Minnesota Dept. of Public Safety. She advocates for ending gender-based violence, and eliminating barriers that impact BIPOC communities from thriving. Biiftuu is a 2020-2021 Humphrey Policy Fellow, and was a 2018 NLC Fellow, is a proud member of the NLC National Black Caucus, and serves on the NLC National Diversity Committee (NDC). In 2020, she was appointed to serve on Hennepin County's first ever Race Equity Advisory Council (REAC). Biiftuu was appointed to Minnesota's inaugural Ensuring Police Excellence and Improving Community Relations Advisory Council to the POST Board. In 2018-2019, she participated in the Community Equity Program with the Wilder Foundation. She leads a critical conversation series, serves as an interpreter for those seeking asylum, and is dedicated to promoting policies centered in racial equity.



Anjali Mishra Cameron **SEWA-AIFW**

Anjali Mishra Cameron serves as SEWA-AIFW's CEO. She provides strategic direction towards the organizational mission and oversight in day to day operations. Anjali brings an extensive background in community-based research in state government and academic institutions. Her experience, combined with nearly two decades of community engagement help to address the complex issues faced by South Asians and underserved communities across Minnesota. Anjali previously served as the Research Director for the Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans, has led statewide coalitions, advocated for legislative policies and published original research on behalf of Asian Pacific Minnesotans. She holds a bachelor's degree in neuroscience from Carleton College and a master's degree in biomedical sciences from the Rosalind Franklin University of Medical Science.



Casey Cashman **Minnesota Office of Justice Programs**

Casey Cashman currently serves as a Crime Victim Services Grant Manager at the MN Office of Justice Programs (OJP) where she provides technical assistance and support to grantee programs. Casey began her work in victim advocacy as a domestic abuse liaison with the City of Minneapolis and also coordinated a community-based general crime program. She worked as a claims specialist with the Crime Victim Reparations Board for three years prior to becoming a grant manager in 2016. Beyond advocacy, Casey found her personal path to healing from trauma through the practice of yoga and mindfulness meditation. Casey is a certified 200 hour yoga teacher and has training in trauma-informed yoga, yin yoga, organizational wellness, and Reiki. She is also a graduate of the Minnesota Victim Assistance Academy and the National Victim Assistance Academy.

BIOGRAPHIES



MayTong Chang
Transforming Generations

MayTong (she/her) is a passionate mother who wants to create systemic change to make a better world for those who come after her. With 20 years of experience working to end gender-based violence, MayTong has been integral in the building, teaching and mentoring of many Hmong advocates today. In 2016, She was one of the few delegates from Minnesota to plan and participate in the Hmong Women's Global Summit in Thailand to address the global pandemic of gender-based violence. MayTong serves as a steering committee member with the Minnesota Hmong Gender Justice Collective and is currently the Advocacy Program Director of Transforming Generations, the non-profit that she co-founded.



Sarah Edstrom

Sarah Edstrom served as Sexual Assault Advocate for the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center for 11 years. She co-directed the award-winning documentary "Dodging Bullets: Stories from Survivors of Historical Trauma." She has an oil painting of her dog as Emperor Nero in front of Rome as it burns as well as a painting of her cats as Sherlock and Watson in The Hound of the Baskervilles. She loves bad movies, learning dance choreography and video games.



Suzanne Elwell
Minnesota Office of Justice Programs

Suzanne Elwell is the director of the Crime Victim Justice Unit in the Minnesota Office of Justice Programs, a victim rights compliance office that investigates complaints of crime victim rights violations and victim mistreatment. She trains on crime victim related issues, coordinates and participates on statewide multi-disciplinary efforts and teams, and assists with legislative initiatives related to crime victims. Suzanne has been working in the area of crime victimization for over 25 years, with experience spanning prosecution, domestic violence advocacy and legal assistance, and court monitoring and research.



Alison Feigh
Jacob Wetterling Resource Center

Alison Feigh, MS, is the Director of the Jacob Wetterling Resource Center, a program of Zero Abuse Project. As a subject matter expert on child and teen safety, she works with students, parents, youth workers, faith leaders, law enforcement and the media to help prevent childhood abuse and abductions. Alison's work also includes writing curriculum for youth serving organizations, training professionals about the online challenges kids face and advocating for families of the missing. Alison has been working in the sexual abuse prevention field for more than 20 years. She is drawn to prevention in faith-based communities and youth serving organizations, collaborating with teens regarding technology and helping empower parents to talk with their kids about personal and online safety. Alison is co-captain of a competitive trivia team complete with marathon weekends (50 hours+) with bragging rights of being the current record holder of the most wins in 43 years!

BIOGRAPHIES



Chris Godsey
Minnesota Department of Corrections

Chris Godsey has worked as a Minnesota Department of Corrections restorative justice specialist since January 2022. Much of his work focuses on helping incarcerated people prepare letters for the DOC Apology Letter Bank. Between 2019 and 2022, he co-coordinated the Men as Peacemakers Domestic Violence Restorative Circles Program in Duluth. Since 2010, he has co-facilitated critical dialogue in the Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs Creating a Process of Change for Men Who Batter Program. From the late 1990s until 2019, he taught writing and other courses at the University of Minnesota-Duluth and the College St. Scholastica.



Ashley Taylor-Gougé
Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Ashley Taylor-Gougé is a radical advocate and leader with more than ten years of experience working in anti-violence organizations. Currently serving as the Executive Director of the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA), they were formally the Associate Director of a rape crisis center in Minneapolis, and were responsible for coordinating the agency's social media presence as well as their outreach and education efforts.



Rachel Johnson
Minnesota Child Welfare Training Academy

Rachel Johnson is the Multidisciplinary Coordinator at the Minnesota Child Welfare Training Academy where she supports initiatives that strengthen collaboration amongst child welfare and child protection multidisciplinary professionals. She has sixteen years of experience serving victims/survivors of interpersonal violence across the lifespan.



Joann Jones
Minnesota Office of Justice Programs

Jo coordinates training and communications for the Office of Justice Programs, including the Victim Assistance Academy and the annual Crime Victims' Conference. Previous to her role at OJP, she was the Legislative Director for the Dept. of Human Services Chemical & Mental Health and State Operated Services Divisions. Earlier, she focused on Reentry programs for the Dept. of Corrections, bringing a controversial chance for level two sex offenders (MNCOSA) to reenter the community upon their release, with the assistance of volunteers, and introduced the Americorp VISTA program as a reliable source of human capital for program sustainability. For ten years prior, she served as a DOC agent in various capacities. Prior work experience also includes the Court of Appeals and the MN State Senate. Additionally, Jo serves as the communications chair for a women's shelter in rural MN. Away from work, you'll find her fitness coaching, in an ecommerce space, or traveling to see her adult children.

BIOGRAPHIES



Danielle Kitto

Minnesota Office of Justice Programs

Danielle Kitto serves as the Claims manager and trainer for the Crime Victims Reimbursement Program. In those roles, she develops policies and practices to ensure claims are decided fairly and paid accurately, and conducts trainings throughout the state to advocates, criminal justice professionals and community organizations. Danielle also serves as the Funds Recovery Manager, working with courts to secure restitution so that offenders are held accountable, and with civil attorneys to protect the programs subrogation interests. Danielle has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Augsburg College.



Christine Kleckner

Survivor Resources

Christine Kleckner returned to Survivor Resources in 2025 after serving as the Director of Client and Volunteer Services from 2017-2021. Christine has a passion for helping others succeed and live their best lives, which has always been the pillar of her professional endeavors. Her diverse background coupled with her personal grief journey provide a unique perspective on supporting others through loss. In her spare time, Christine enjoys staying active with her three boys and Aussiedoodle, Ryder. She believes that yardwork is good for the soul and appreciates all opportunities to be outdoors. When she isn't at the ballfields or ice rink watching her kids play, she enjoys doing household projects and spending time with friends and family.



Heather Kolling

Minnesota Department of Corrections

Heather is a Victim Services Specialist in the Victim Services and Restorative Justice Unit at the Minnesota Department of Corrections. She has a master's degree in Victim Services Management and a bachelor's degree in Victim Studies from Sam Houston State University. In nearly a decade of advocacy work, her prior experience includes time as a court-appointed guardian for vulnerable adults and as a community-based advocate supporting victims of domestic and sexual violence.



Shoua Kong

Asian Women United of Minnesota

Shoua Kong is a Community Advocate at Asian Women United of Minnesota and has been working with underserved communities for more than ten years. She continues to work out in the community to help underserved communities navigate systems.

BIOGRAPHIES



Amee Krogfus
Minnesota Office of Justice Programs

Amee Krogfus has provided general and legal advocacy for people who've experienced victimization from general crime, domestic violence, and sexual assault for more than 18 years. Amee has a deep understanding of the role of a crime victim service coalition and serving the needs of member programs, as well as grant management.



Rebecca Kutty
Minnesota Office of Justice Programs

Rebecca is a crime victim rights compliance investigator with the Minnesota Office of Justice Programs Crime Victim Justice Unit, a position she has held since 2007. Before that, she worked in various capacities at the nonprofit court monitoring organization WATCH for five years. She is a member of OJP Training Advisory Committee as well as the DPS Engagement and Recognition Team. Her current challenge is making sure that her not-quite-two-year-old Red Lab Sholay doesn't chew up any more pairs of slippers or shoes. In her free time, Rebecca likes to cook, read, watch public television, jog, dance, and spend time with family and friends.



Pethuel LeFlore
Oasis of Love

Pethuel is the Executive Director of Oasis of Love Crisis Intervention. A transplant from Chicago, IL, Pethuel understands displacement of families due to violence, having first-hand experience of rebuilding her life; mentally, physically, emotionally, financially, and spiritually. Pethuel is committed to seeing families find restoration, inner healing, and success. Pethuel obtained her bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice in 2002, from Tri-State University in Merrillville, IN. An ordained Pastor, Pethuel is a certified counselor (family/marital counseling, grief counseling, human potential and behavioral development, pastoral care, etc.), 12-step facilitator, At-Risk youth mentor, and motivational speaker. Before joining Oasis of Love, Pethuel held multiple positions within Wells Fargo Corporate Offices for 14 years. Today her passions and experiences lead her in this great work of advocacy, training, and teaching others how to thrive past trauma and move from Crisis to Success!



Katie Meinhardt
Thinkself

Katie Meinhardt is an advocate for equity and anti-violence within the Deaf, Deafblind, and Hard of Hearing (DDBHH) community. As the Advocacy Coordinator at ThinkSelf Minnesota Deaf, she works to promote access and support for DDBHH individuals experiencing domestic violence and sexual assault, aiming to empower them and ultimately "work herself out of a job." With 15 years of direct service experience in a variety of roles, Katie brings a unique perspective to advocacy and support with the Deaf* community.

BIOGRAPHIES



C. Michael Menge

OutFront MN

C. Michael Menge (They & he) is the Community Advocacy and Training Specialist at OutFront Minnesota's Anti-Violence Program (AVP). AVP is a broad-based effort to end violence and harassment against and within 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. They work in collaboration with victim-survivors of violence and community members to build safety and power, as well as outreach. C. Michael provides training for victim service organizations, healthcare providers, government departments, conference, and more on ways to better support 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. He's glad to join you all for this session!



Betsy Mevissen

Minnesota Elder Justice Center

Betsy Mevissen is the victim services manager for the Minnesota Elder Justice Center. She joined MEJC in March 2020 and is passionate about empowering clients and the community to address and heal elder abuse concerns. She has provided holistic and client-centered domestic abuse advocacy for over 10 years, and she holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Bethel University. Her self care includes gardening, cross country skiing, and listening to the music her family makes.



Becca Muskat

Minnesota Alliance on Crime

Becca Muskat currently works as the Associate Director of the Minnesota Alliance of Crime (MAC), a network for victim service professionals. Prior to working at MAC, Becca was a project specialist for the Family Advocacy Division at the National Center on Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), where she managed NCMEC's Family Advocacy Outreach Network by locating, recruiting, continually engaging, and encouraging child and family-serving professionals to provide pro bono or sliding scale assistance to the families served by NCMEC. Becca has also worked as a victim advocate for the City of Alexandria, Virginia - Sexual Assault Center. Becca has a Master of Arts in forensic psychology from Marymount University.



Kelly Nicholson

Dakota County Attorney's Office

Kelly Nicholson has worked as an advocate in the criminal justice system since 1995. She began in the Anoka County Attorney's Office where she worked for 11 years working directly with victims of crime. Since 2006, she has been the Victim Witness Program Supervisor of the Dakota County Attorney's Office. In addition to providing direct services to victims, she has directed community education and outreach efforts, supervised a sexual assault volunteer program, and provided training on victim issues to law enforcement, criminal justice professionals, advocates, and community members. Kelly has a Bachelor's Degree in Criminology and Sociology, and a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice Administration.

BIOGRAPHIES



Marit Peterson
Minnesota Elder Justice Center

Marit Peterson is the Associate Director for the Minnesota Elder Justice Center. Before joining MEJC, Marit practiced Elder Law in the Twin Cities metro. She is also an adjunct professor of philosophy at Augsburg College, where she teaches ethics and bioethics in the Augsburg Adult Undergraduate program. Marit currently participates in the Minnesota State Bar Association's Elder Law Section on the Governing Council, and Probate and Trust Section.



Connie Rhodes
Restoration Incorporated

Constance (Connie) Rhodes is the founder and executive director of Restoration Incorporated, a premier, faith-based, human services agency and lead consultant for Culturally Competent Consulting. She also works with Next Step, an innovative and effective hospital-based, violence prevention program that serves youth ages 10 to 28 who are victims of a violent penetrating injury. Connie is a graduate of the University of Chicago with a concentration in Behavioral Sciences and Psychology. Her vast experience in the social service arena spans over 25 years from her humble college days of helping at risk youth to her 16 years at BUILD Inc., working in some of Chicago's toughest neighborhoods to her work in Minneapolis helping youth and young adults who have been shot or stabbed. Her specialties include trauma informed care, circle keeping, youth violence prevention and cultural competency.



Farji Shaheer
Founder and Executive Director, Innovative SOULutions

Farji A. Shaheer is a healthcare professional that lives and breathes healthcare essentials, by promoting a healthy lifestyle, providing resources to continue and improve a healthy lifestyle and following up to see if a healthy lifestyle is sustainable. He worked diligently at a local Level 1 trauma center for more than 20 years, providing health care assistance and bed side mentoring for those suffering from mental health crisis situations to traumatic, traumatizing penetrating wounds such as gunshot wounds. Working with multiple non-profits during his career, he has become a prominent and respected community leader. He founded the non-profit, Innovative Soulutions, and currently serves as the executive director. Innovative SOULutions offers alternative options for individuals and corporations that are looking to become successful with engaging and educating themselves on making the progress needed to sustain adequate care for all.

BIOGRAPHIES



Jane Straub
CornerHouse

Jane Straub is the Director of Training for CornerHouse, Interagency Child Abuse Evaluation and Training Center. She has been working in the violence prevention and intervention field for over 25 years and has worked with youth and families for more than 30 years. In addition to providing advocacy and support, Jane is a national trainer on topics such as the impact of trauma (ACE Study), trauma-responsive care, child sexual abuse, domestic violence and sexual violence, stalking, trafficking, cyber/bullying, reproductive coercion, healthy relationships, consent and supporting disclosure. She was instrumental in creating the curriculum “From Trauma to Resilience: Fostering Hope through Trauma Informed Care”. One of Jane’s goals is to work collaboratively with fields such as law enforcement, all components of health, education, social services and business to collectively connect the dots of risk and prevention and to provide coordinated services to create hope and health for all of our children and families.



Linda Thompson
Minnesota Indian Womens Sexual Assault Coalition

Linda Thompson is a member of the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa in Minnesota; she is also a lineal descendent to Leech Lake and Mille Lacs Lake Tribes. She is committed to social change work and ending all forms of violence, with a focus on gender-based violence. With proven leadership in developing and leading a Tribal domestic violence and sexual assault program and co-creating a Tribal coalition, she understands the challenges and realities of service providers in a Tribal advocacy program. She has experience with policy and legislative efforts on Tribal, state and national levels as well serving in rural, reservation, and urban areas.



Wilson Yang
Cornerstone

Wilson Yang (he/him/his) is the School-Based Services Program Supervisor at Cornerstone Advocacy Service. The School-Based Services program serves middle and high school students in Hennepin County through one-on-one support and violence prevention education. Wilson has worked at Cornerstone for a little over six years. He also has experience in other areas, such as electoral organizing and leading culturally focused workshops. He is a Hmong American and a proud son of refugees. Wilson is passionate about supporting youth, addressing gender-based violence, and exploring healthy masculinity.

PANEL ORGANIZATIONS

Asian Indian Family Wellness | SEWA-AIFW

6645 James Avenue Brooklyn Center, MN 55430 | sewa-aifw.org

Mission statement: SEWA-AIFW is a nonprofit organization committed to serving, supporting, and enhancing family wellness for the South Asian community, especially the vulnerable and underserved, in the Twin Cities and around Minnesota, by providing health care access and wellness information and resources; access to family violence resources and supports; and elder socialization activities.

About SEWA-AIFW:

SEWA-AIFW serves and promotes “total family wellness” for Asian-Indians in Minnesota by: Health Initiatives: Free health clinics at various community locations by culturally sensitive volunteer doctors. Programs for Women: SEWA-AIFW holds Women’s events at various locations, bringing the new immigrant and refugee women together to understand their needs and inform them of available resources in the community. Programs for Seniors: SEWA-AIFW understands the challenges that South Asian seniors face in the United States and offers various programs aimed at helping them live a comfortable and healthy lives in Minnesota. Their comprehensive website has a calendar of events.

Asian Women United of Minnesota

PO Box 6223 Minneapolis, MN 55406 | awum.org

Mission statement: Asian Women United of Minnesota will end domestic violence by promoting safe and healthy relationships within the Asian Pacific Islander community, and beyond.

About Asian Women United of Minnesota:

Asian Women United of Minnesota is made up of women and men who believe in every woman’s right to a life of peace, wholeness, and happiness. That includes a life free from emotional, physical, verbal or sexual abuse. Asian Women United of Minnesota has programs and expertise that focus around Asian women and girls, but their mission includes all domestic violence victims. Advocacy services, community resource referrals and an emergency shelter facility are at the core of AWUM. Connections to providers, multi-disciplinary teams, and assistance with navigating the court and human services systems are just a sampling of the work they do. Much more can be found on their website.

Minnesota Alliance on Crime

One West Water Street, Suite 260, St. Paul, MN 55107 | mnallianceoncrime.org

Mission statement: The Minnesota Alliance on Crime advances a collective movement to eliminate the systemic barriers experienced by people impacted by crime.

About Minnesota Alliance on Crime

MAC is a membership coalition of more than 90 crime victim service organizations in Minnesota, including prosecution-based victim/witness programs, community programs, law enforcement agencies, civil legal organizations, and also individuals committed to supporting crime victims. We support our membership through training, technical assistance, resources, public policy and legislative initiatives, and networking opportunities.

ThinkSelf Minnesota Deaf Adult Education & Advocacy

2375 University Ave W Suite 110, St. Paul, MN 55114 | thinkself.org

Mission statement: Offer resources, education & support to Minnesota Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing adults seeking full access to options for learning, safety, justice, employment skills, and community.

About ThinkSelf Minnesota Deaf Adult Education & Advocacy

ThinkSelf Minnesota Deaf Adult Education & Advocacy is a statewide nonprofit offering adult basic education and domestic violence/sexual assault advocacy services to Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing adults. Our community-based DVSA program partners with agencies around the state to offer co-advocacy, training, and consultation.

PANEL ORGANIZATIONS

Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA)

161 Rondo Avenue Suite 1001 St. Paul MN 55103 | mncasa.org

Mission statement: MNCASA is a statewide coalition driving transformative culture change to address sexual violence through advocacy, prevention, racial justice and systems change. Vision: We envision a world free of sexual violence in which all human beings are treated with dignity and respect and communities are transformed through safety, healing and partnerships.

About MNCASA:

MNCASA is committed to providing support and resources through a group of member programs. Educational opportunities, technical assistance, policy and prevention work and community awareness events are a few of their areas of expertise as they work to address sexual violence through advocacy, prevention, racial justice, and systems change. In 2001, MNCASA added a national technical assistance program to provide leadership around strengthening community response to sexual violence.

Minnesota Elder Justice Center

3001 Broadway St NE, Suite 170, Minneapolis, MN 55413 | elderjusticemn.org

Mission statement: The mission of the Minnesota Elder Justice Center is to mobilize communities to prevent and alleviate abuse, neglect and financial exploitation of older and vulnerable adults.

Who We Are

Statewide nonprofit organization working to prevent and alleviate abuse of older and vulnerable adults. All services are free of charge. Seven staff located in St. Paul and Moorhead.

About Minnesota Elder Justice Center (MEJC):

We provide support and advocacy to older and vulnerable victims of abuse and their families through direct victim service advocacy. Services include support groups and limited legal representation to victims. Statewide educational opportunities are provided to be informed and build communities that do not tolerate abuse against older and vulnerable adults. We partner with researchers to provide accurate and up-to-date strategies to prevent abuse. Professional training, both entry-level and advanced, are provided to advance the understanding to those who work with older and vulnerable adults. Specialized 8-hour trainings for law enforcement and criminal justice professionals are also available. Policy initiatives that benefit older and vulnerable victims of abuse, prevention, and hold perpetrators accountable are also part of our advocacy. We work with county and community teams to support a coordinated response. We coordinate a learning forum - Center Partners - around discussion and recommendations to strengthen systems to protect older and vulnerable adults.

Survivor Resources

St. Paul/Minneapolis MN | survivorresources.org

Who We Are

Survivor Resources, a non-profit, has the ability to support families affected by homicide, and those who have experienced unexpected events of suicide, accidental, violent and/or deaths due to an overdose. They have helped tens of thousands clients in the Twin Cities metro and surrounding areas, since 1995.

About Survivor Resources:

Survivor Resources has family advocacy services to assist during the criminal justice process and provide immediate crisis support, help with media interaction and more. They also serve as a liaison between police, the county attorney's office and grieving families, to help maneuver through the logistics after a death, support during the viewing of the body, explaining autopsy procedures and results, help with notification of friends, family and children, providing resources for cleaning a crime scene, education, training and consulting, all serving the greater metro area.

