



Help and Healing for
Victims of Violence

Witness Justice e-Newsletter

June 2008

In This Issue ...

[Changing the System!](#)

[WJ Profiles Board Member Mildred Muhammad](#)

[Victory for Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence](#)

[Alcohol Abuse: New Statistics Released from the University of Maryland](#)

[WJ - Where We've Been](#)

[Useful Resources](#)

[Calendar of Events](#)

Join the WJ
Mailing List!

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

Start talking about
Trauma-Informed Care
Visit
[Dare to Transform](#)
on [Ning.com!](#)

Changing Systems, Changing Lives

A Thousand Ways to Cry and Nothing but a Kleenex: The Need for "Trauma-Informed Training"

Trauma survivors move in and around systems that are ignorant about trauma, its effects on survivors, and their subsequent needs. And that ignorance is not bliss for the trauma survivor.

Trauma survivors cry in many ways. Only some of them involve actual tears. Ways of coping with various types of trauma may include substance use, chemical dependence, suicide attempts, and criminal activity. According to the [report on Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACE\)](#), funded by the Center for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente, trauma experienced during the childhood years may lead to many other, dangerous behaviors. Of the seventeen thousand participants, almost 65%

**NCTIC's
Dare to Transform
Summit will take place on
July 11-12**

*Revolutionizing Health
and Human Services*

**California Guitar Trio
Benefit Concert**

Witness Justice will be presenting a benefit concert by the [California Guitar Trio](#) on Tuesday, October 21, 2008 at 8:00 pm, EST. The concert will be held at All Saints Episcopal Church in Frederick, MD.



Tickets are \$20.00 per person and proceeds will benefit Witness Justice programs and services. For more information and to purchase your tickets [Click Here](#).

Quick Links

[Witness Justice Home](#)
[Team Heal Trauma](#)
[National Center for
Trauma-Informed Care](#)
[Office on Violence
Against Women](#)

reported experiencing at least one instance of abuse (emotional, physical, or sexual), neglect, substance use in the home, or some other traumatic experience. These negative childhood experiences, the study found, led to troubling behavior later as survivors turned to various strategies to cope, such as drug or alcohol use, smoking, suicide attempts, or high-risk sexual behavior that can lead to sexually-transmitted diseases.

Reader Catherine H. describes these many coping strategies: "many, or at least most or even ALL forms of addiction stem from the person's need to 'escape' the horror of the reality of their lives." She notes that many survivors try "a variety of addictions" in an attempt to find the "magic key" that "will lock away" the traumatic events and lead to a life "numbed and disconnected from the 'real life'" taking place around them.

Yet too often, health care systems treat the symptoms of trauma and not the root causes, which is like handing a Kleenex to a person who is sobbing and then walking away. The Kleenex may dry the tears but does nothing to assuage the hurt that caused the tears in the first place. A rape survivor who has turned to Vicodin or Valium to numb the pain of a silent wound may be treated for drug use at a clinic but not the rape that led to the coping strategy.

The nature of these behaviors, though, often goes unrecognized as survivors are labeled and treated according to the symptom and not the root cause. Part of the problem, Catherine H. notes, is that people are often massed together according to the coping strategy with little or no regard given to the root cause. She explains "Too often abuse victims are lumped in with people with learning disorders, Mental Retardation, and biochemical mental disorders such as schizophrenia or bi-polar disease."

To treat the root cause of the crying though, to even begin to reach beyond the Kleenex box, trauma-informed care must also be "informed," and one step toward that goal would be to provide mental health professionals with what Catherine H. calls "Trauma-based treatment training."

Many people are crying in various ways. Too often they are simply handed a Kleenex. With appropriate training, the various systems can learn that they'll need more than a box of tissue when helping trauma survivors.

[Advocating for Change](#)

Until our many human service programs and systems take a trauma-informed and survivor-centered approach, we are failing our sisters and brothers - and we are missing an opportunity to improve the effectiveness

iGive.com Surfathon

Surf for Witness Justice!



[ClickHere](#)

for details that could help you earn \$1,000 for Witness Justice by window shopping online. The more you use this portal to do your online shopping, the greater your chances are of raising \$1,000 for Witness Justice.

SHOP TODAY FOR WJ!

Lights! Camera! Advocacy!

John Walsh, host of television's **America's Most Wanted**, and Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D-RI), co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on Addiction, Treatment and Recovery, appear in a 4-minute informational video on Witness Justice. [Click here](#) to view the video.

of our work. Witness Justice is committed to fostering trauma-informed implementation by advocating with our federal legislators, providing education and outreach, and developing new programs that embrace this philosophy of healing.

You can be a part of the change. [Trauma is the Common Denominator - Healing is the Common Goal](#) is a Witness Justice publication created to help others understand the nature and impact of trauma. Consider sharing this paper with legislators, funders, service providers and anyone else you think could benefit from learning more about the insidious effects of trauma. You can also learn more about how to implement trauma-informed change at the [National Center for Trauma-Informed Care](#).

With a little help and a lot of change, we can provide trauma survivors with more than a box of Kleenex.

Editor's note: each month, the column "Changing Systems - Changing Lives," will explore a topic raised by readers, discuss issues relevant to that topic, and provide suggestions for effecting change in trauma-informed care systems. Witness Justice invites suggestions for future topics; please email suggestions to editor@witnessjustice.org.

Board Member Profile of the Month

Mildred Muhammad - Sole Survivor

Mildred Muhammad's website is called [After the Trauma: Helping Survivors of Domestic Violence Re-Establish Their Lives](#). The introductory letter is titled "From a Survivor to Survivor," in which she states "I started After the Trauma because of my own personal domestic violence experience and thought of all of the other women in similar situations who need day-to-day assistance, as I did." If anyone has the authority to write this letter, it is Mildred Muhammad.

By her own account, Mildred Muhammad is lucky to be alive. Her husband, John Allen Muhammad, the "DC" or "Beltway Sniper," gunned down twenty-seven people, seventeen of whom died, in what she believed was a bizarre plan to cover-up her impending murder. The shootings, she maintains, were her estranged husband's way of creating a smokescreen so that when he murdered her, authorities would see it as another one in a random series of murders and not suspect an ex-husband with a vicious temper.



Verizon Velocity

Purchase qualifying Verizon products to help us meet our fund-raising goals!

We can earn up to \$65 with one purchase. Current or new Verizon customers can participate. Simply call the special Verizon Velocity number below and provide our special tracking code. It's that easy. Simply call:
1-888-695-5299
and give
Tracking Code:12250

The plot began with a threat: you're my enemy, John told his wife, and I'm going to kill you. The threat came after Mildred Muhammad grew weary of her husband's verbal abuse and cheating and filed for divorce.

Family and friends just didn't believe that John Allen Muhammad posed a threat to anyone, but the threats continued. She would wake up in the middle of the night and find him standing over her. Yet no one believed that she was the victim of serious mental and verbal abuse. Mildred Muhammad was afloat on a life raft, the sole survivor of a home shipwrecked by her husband's wrath.

And then in 1999, he disappeared with their three children after a shopping outing. The last stop in his shopping trip, unknown to Mildred or anyone else, including the FBI, was the Caribbean island of Antigua, where John remained for over a year. When he returned, he brought with him a youth named Lee Boyd Malvo, who would become his accomplice in the shootings.

John Allen Muhammad resides on death row, while Malvo received a life sentence for his part in the killings.

In the wake of John Allen Muhammad's killing spree, several families had to pick up the pieces of seventeen lives shattered by a high-powered rifle. Make that eighteen. Mildred Muhammad had to cope with the infamy of her husband's crimes, her association with the "DC Sniper," her near brush with death, the temporary loss of her children, and the promise of a dream family that had in time become a nightmare.

She in part coped with her personal tragedy by writing a journal, which she published in book form under the apropos title [*A Survivor's Journal*](#). But *After the Trauma* is designed to provide to others what she never had: a support network for survivors of domestic violence. Because Mildred Muhammad knows so well how lonely and miserable it feels to be floating in a life raft - alone, after your world has been shipwrecked.

Increased Funding for Victims Passes in the Senate

If one person shouts really loud, she can be heard for miles. How far away can thousands of voices, all shouting for the same cause, be heard? All the way to Capitol Hill - and the Senate listened; on Thursday, June 19, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed a bill that will send a massive increase in funding for programs designed to help survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

The bill boosts the funding for the programs of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) - a Department of Justice initiative-by \$15 million, while the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) fund receives a hike of \$45 million, increasing its cap to \$635 million.

Several new programs will receive funding under this bill, and many established programs, such as the STOP Grant and Legal Assistance to Victims Programs, will receive infusions of badly-needed capital.

This bill is not yet law and must leap over several hurdles before passage. If you want to help, call your Senator or Congressional Representative. While the President has indicated that he will veto any proposed legislation that will increase spending, enough voices can be heard -all the way to the White House - and can make a difference.

Interested readers will find details about the proposed legislation at the [National Network to End Domestic Violence Web site](#).

"Tweeners" and Alcohol Use: Between a Bottle and a Hard Place

In abusive households, husbands and wives often exchange verbal slaps that sometimes turn into physical ones. These altercations can lead to bruises, black eyes, and broken bones for the participants - shattered innocence for the spectators.

According to an article recently published in the *Journal of Studies of Alcohol and Drugs* and reported in the [May 12, 2008 issue of CESAR FAX](#), an online publication of University of Maryland's Center for Substance Abuse Research, children who survive physical and/or sexual abuse are likely to begin using alcohol at an early age. This is not an altogether surprising discovery; other studies have explored this link. But authors Hamburger, Leeb, and Swahn also report that youths who witnessed domestic violence between their parents were just as likely as children who were victims of physical or sexual abuse to use alcohol before the age of 13.

The study surveyed over 3,500 public school students to probe the relationship between abuse experience and use of alcohol at an early age. Over fifty percent of students who experienced physical abuse before age 10 reported using alcohol before age 13; almost half of the responders who reported experiencing sexual abuse before age 10 turned to alcohol before age 13; and forty-six percent who witnessed domestic violence but did not directly experience abuse used alcohol before they reached high school.

These numbers, while shocking, suggest that prevention of domestic abuse, as well as healing of its survivors, including the children who may observe it, may drastically cut down on alcohol use among children, particularly "tweeners" aged ten to thirteen.

The alcohol use found in the study by Hamburger et. al. is one of many possible coping strategies, or ways to kill the pain of a silent wound caused by the trauma of watching parents turn into combatants. It is also a horrific harbinger of bad things to come; such trauma survivors typically turn to strategies such as long-term substance use that can lead to chemical dependence, or worse-suicide. They may plummet down a spiral staircase to a life of prostitution, self destruction, homelessness, or criminal activity.

"Tweeners," are caught between two worlds: the world of the child with dolls and trucks, and the world of the teenager with MP3 players and dating. The numbers from the study by Hamburger, Leeb, and Swahn indicate that "Tweeners" who experience or even just witness physical or sexual abuse find themselves caught in another way, between a bottle and a hard place. Left to numb the pain caused by an abusive parent's fists or leather belt, the tweener turns to the only painkiller available: the bottles in the liquor cabinet.

Where We've Been...

May 31 - TruTV aired a series of interviews with WJ Board Member Mildred Muhammad titled, "The Mildred Muhammad Story"

June 24 - Witness Justice Virtual Training Academy featured a session presented by Helga West titled, "Trauma 101 - Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care"

Useful Resources

New! Healing Self-Injury Blog

A continuation of *The Cutting Edge: A Newsletter for People Who Live with Self-Inflicted Violence*, which was recently transitioned into a web-based resource, the [Healing Self Injury Blog](#) is designed to offer those living with Self-Inflicted Violence (SIV) a place to find support, acceptance, and others living with SIV.

Spiritually Sensitive Caregiving: A Multi-Faith Handbook

This recently published resource for caregivers offers information on beliefs, rituals, justice, and death issues for each of the six largest faith groups in the United States: Native American, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. [Spiritually Sensitive Caregiving: A Multi-Faith Handbook](#) was compiled by four highly qualified authors who thoughtfully considered how to offer services that are culturally-sensitive in order to provide support and a path for healing to all.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention -
[Your're Not Alone: The Journey from Abduction to Empowerment](#)

U.S. Congressional Victim's Rights Caucus - [Find out more today!](#)

Calendar of Events

July 11-12 - National Center for Trauma Informed Care's "Dare to Transform" meeting at The Phoenix Park Hotel - Washington, DC http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/nctic/newsletter_12-2007.asp#dare

October 26 - Team Heal Trauma runs the 33rd Annual Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, DC
<http://www.witnessjustice.org/THT/index.cfm>

October 29 - California Guitar Trio concert to benefit Witness Justice in Frederick, MD
<http://allsaintsmd.org/cgt/index/php>

November 13-15 - International Study for Traumatic Stress Studies meeting on "Terror in the Aftermath" meeting at The Palmer House Hilton - Chicago, IL
<http://www.istss.org/meetings/index.cfm>

Witness Justice is a national, grassroots, nonprofit organization created by survivors for survivors. Our mission is to offer advocacy and support to victims of violence and trauma. Witness Justice offers support regardless of where a victim lives, when or where the crime occurred, or whether the crime was ever reported. For more information, visit www.WitnessJustice.org.

[Forward email](#)

 **SafeUnsubscribe®**

This email was sent to hwest@witnessjustice.org by info@witnessjustice.org.

[Update Profile/Email Address](#) | Instant removal with [SafeUnsubscribe™](#) | [Privacy Policy](#).

Email Marketing by



Witness Justice | PO Box 475 | Frederick | MD | 21705-0475