

exemplary project

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**STOP RAPE
CRISIS CENTER**
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

U.S. Department of Justice
Law Enforcement Assistance Administration
National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice
Office of Development, Testing and Dissemination



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An Exemplary Project

October 1979

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Prepared for the National Institute of Law Enforcement and
Criminal Justice, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration,
U.S. Department of Justice, under contract number J-LEAA-
030-76.

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- Overall effectiveness in reducing crime or improving criminal justice
- Adaptability to other jurisdictions
- Objective evidence of achievement
- Demonstrated cost effectiveness

Validation results are then submitted to the Exemplary Project Review Board, made up of LEAA and State officials, which makes the final decision.

For each Exemplary Project, the National Institute publishes a range of information materials, including a brochure and a detailed manual. Publications are announced through the National Criminal Justice Reference Service. To register for this free service, please write: NCJRS, P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850.

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STOP RAPE CRISIS CENTER

She thought he really was a salesman when she opened her door and let him in. But almost immediately she realized her mistake.

Rape. This can't be happening to me, she thought . . . but it is.

After the shock wears off, she considers her dilemma: She is too ashamed to tell her family, too scared to call the police. Her first thoughts are to forget the whole thing — but she can't. She wants her assailant caught and punished. But she feels so alone. She must tell someone, but whom? What will her family think? Will the police and the courts believe her?

The dilemma of whether to report a rape is faced by thousands of rape victims. For many the answer is no. Although regrettable, the response is understandable. The rape victim has long been the victim of the popular but false belief that "she asked for it." Police, prosecutors, and medical examiners have been accused by many rape victims of insensitive behavior. Social service agencies are often ill-equipped to deal with the rape victim's special needs.

And so, a pattern has emerged: the lack of support from the community, and the low priority given rape cases by police and prosecutors, alienate victims and discourage many from even reporting assaults. Those victims who persevered to the trial stage have found themselves "put on trial" as defense attorneys grilled them about their own sexual histories. It's not surprising that actual rapes far exceed the number reported to police. Nor is it any wonder that many victims who do report later refuse to prosecute.

The irony of the situation is that when rape victims, police, prosecutors, and the general community can't work together effectively, they unwittingly perpetuate the pattern. The result: rapists remain free to victimize others — again and again.

BATON ROUGE TAKES ACTION

In Baton Rouge, Louisiana, citizens have worked together with local criminal justice and medical personnel to break this pattern. In 1974 a committee of the Baton Rouge YWCA organized a Stop Rape Task Force to study the rape problem in Baton

Rouge. They found that the actual number of rape incidents was 4 to 9 times the number reported to police. Only about one-third of the reported rapes resulted in arrests. Even more disturbing, only 3 percent of rape prosecutions resulted in convictions.

The Task Force presented their findings to the newly elected District Attorney of East Baton Rouge Parish who took action:

- He worked to change Louisiana rape statutes. Evidence related to the victim's prior sexual conduct is no longer admissible in court, and a charge of aggravated rape now includes lesser rape charge. Thus, should the jury feel that the evidence does not warrant a conviction on aggravated rape, they may still convict on a lesser charge. Previously, under those circumstances, the defendant would have been acquitted.
- He worked to change rape prosecution procedures. Victims are no longer required to repeat their stories as they enter each new stage of the prosecution. Each case is now



Two volunteer counselors review the status of a victim's case.

assigned to a single prosecutor, who in turn is assigned to a single courtroom and judge.

- He worked to improve rape victim services by creating the Stop Rape Crisis Center (SRCC).

At the outset, the DA and the Task Force envisioned two sets of goals for the SRCC:

Victim Support Goals —

- to develop innovative procedures for law enforcement and medical agencies that would reduce the victim's psychological and physical trauma;
- to involve the community in the delivery of program services.

Criminal Justice Goals —

- to increase the reporting of rape; and
- to increase the number of arrests and ultimate convictions of rapists.

The DA recognized that the two sets of goals could be mutually supportive: rape victims who have been treated competently and sympathetically in all their contacts with the criminal justice system might now be more favorably inclined to cooperate with the system in prosecuting their assailants. The end product would be higher arrest and conviction rates.

To forge a clear link between the two sets of goals, the SRCC was created as a division of the District Attorney's Office. As chief spokesman for the program, the DA sought to enlist the support of every official the rape victim encounters when she reports the crime: the law enforcement officer who responds to her call for assistance, the doctor who examines her, the prosecutors who take her case to trial, even mental health workers who provide aftercare.

The responses of these agencies and individuals attest to the DA's success. The Baton Rouge Police Department created a Sex Crimes Investigation Unit of specially trained officers, and the sheriff's department added trained officers to its General Investigation Division. Two private hospitals donated their staff and facilities for examination of rape

victims. Twelve doctors volunteered to perform the medical exams. A community mental health center agreed to provide follow-up counseling to rape victims at no charge.

Finally, because rape, like every other crime, is a community problem, the DA and the Task Force sought to involve the public in the SRCC's activities. Their success is reflected in the Center's staffing arrangement. The SRCC employs only a director and a secretary, who handle administrative duties and represent the Center at group meetings and civic functions. The Center's direct services for rape victims — particularly the 24-hour telephone hotline and crisis counseling — are provided almost exclusively by volunteers. Other volunteers sit on the Center's Advisory Board, whose primary functions include publicizing the Center and recruiting volunteers.

So with the support and assistance of the law enforcement agencies, the medical community, and the general public, the SRCC began operations in July 1975.

SPECIAL SERVICES FOR RAPE VICTIMS

The rape victim typically contacts the Center via its *24-hour hotline* telephone number. Regardless of the time of day or night, her call will always reach a counselor, not an answering service or a recording. A special telephone service automatically forwards calls from the SRCC office to a counselor's home during non-working hours.

The counselor offers the victim immediate advice and support and explains the reporting procedure. If the victim feels uneasy about reporting the crime to police, she is encouraged to file an *anonymous report* with the SRCC counselor. Information concerning the attack and the assailant is valuable to police investigators, who have solved at least three cases with the help of anonymous reports. Victims who choose not to report are still given crisis counseling and are referred to community agencies for further assistance.

If the victim decides to report the crime to police, she will be accompanied by a trained *escort coun-*



A Center volunteer receives a crisis call at her home via an automatic call forwarding system.

selor from the time she reports the crime through the medical examination, investigation by police and prosecutor, preparation for trial, and throughout all trial hearings.

A police officer takes the victim to the hospital, where she will meet the SRCC escort and the assistant district attorney who will handle the case. She is quickly ushered into an examining room that has been set aside expressly for the care of rape victims. The doctor performing the exam uses a *rape evidence kit* that includes instructions and all the equipment necessary to collect and preserve physical evidence required for trial. These kits were developed jointly by the District Attorney's Office and medical advisors, and are prepared by Center staff.

With the SRCC escort by her side, the victim is interviewed by the police officer and the assistant district attorney after the medical exam. This interview results in a *tape-recorded statement* which can later be used by the police and attorneys to relieve the victim from having to retell and relive the story of her attack. The police officer or escort then takes

her home. If a suspect is arrested, the SRCC escort will be the victim's constant companion throughout all the law enforcement and court proceedings that follow.



The assistant district attorney records the victim's statement.

OUTSTANDING FEATURES OF THE SRCC

Many rape crisis programs provide services similar to those offered by the SRCC. One in particular is the Rape/Sexual Assault Care Center of Des Moines, Iowa, designated an Exemplary Project in 1976. Yet there are several features of the SRCC that make it equally outstanding.

Affiliation with the DA's Office

The most important distinction of the SRCC is its placement within the District Attorney's Office. This position greatly enhances the Center's credibility in dealing with other criminal justice personnel, community agencies, the public-at-large, and potential and actual rape victims.

Indeed, the DA's active sponsorship of the rape program has proved to be a definite "plus" in many ways. Beginning in the DA's Office itself, his support guarantees that rape cases will get priority attention from prosecutors. In fact, prosecutors in Baton Rouge handle rape cases in much the same manner as homicides and armed robberies.

Coordination Among Participating Agencies

The DA's enthusiasm for the project played a large part in the Center's early stages. Largely due to his efforts, representatives of the police and sheriff's department and local physicians all participated in the planning of the SRCC. Both the police and the sheriff have instituted standard operating procedures to ensure that all rape victims are treated fairly and equally, and that a SRCC counselor is involved in all rape cases. Similarly, the involvement of medical advisors in developing an examination protocol and designing the rape evidence kits guarantees that medical needs and evidentiary requirements will be met simultaneously.

No-Cost Medical Services

One of the SRCC's most impressive achievements is its approach to providing emergency medical treatment for rape victims. *At no cost to the victim or the project,*

- two hospitals provide private treatment rooms for rape victims in their emergency



The SRCC escort counselor assists a victim directly to a special examining room at the hospital.

departments, laboratory facilities, and the assistance of specially trained nursing staff; and

- twelve physicians volunteer their time on an on-call, rotating basis, to perform medical examination of rape victims.

Again, the District Attorney's efforts were instrumental in fostering the good will and support of the medical community.

Volunteer Counselors

The importance of community support for the project cannot be overstated. More than 60 women are active as volunteer escort counselors and hotline operators. The Center's 19-member Advisory Board, also a volunteer group, is composed of representatives of community service agencies, the police and sheriff's departments, Louisiana State University and Southern University, and a number of concerned citizens. The volunteers are so valuable to the SRCC that the DA issues them cards identifying them as representatives of his office.



The volunteer counselor comforts the victim and prepares her for the upcoming examination and interview.

Educating the Public

To publicize the SRCC in Baton Rouge, local television and radio stations broadcast a series of public service announcements at no cost to the project. These media spots focus on dispelling common myths about rape, and direct listeners to call the Center's hotline for assistance or information. The Center's director and members of the Advisory Board are much in demand as speakers for classes and meetings. In addition, the Center distributes brochures offering prevention tips and information on reporting the crime. Plans are underway to develop a brochure based on rape incident data collected by the Center.

GETTING THE MOST FOR THEIR MONEY

Although the SRCC was started with LEAA funding, since July 1978 it has been fully funded by the City/Parish of Baton Rouge. Thanks to the hefty contributions of time by volunteers — as counselors, Advisory Board members, and examining physicians — the SRCC's annual budget is only \$40,000. This

budget covers salaries, rent, supplies and utilities — everything the Center needs to function.

The costs are low but the returns — in terms of goal achievement — are substantial:

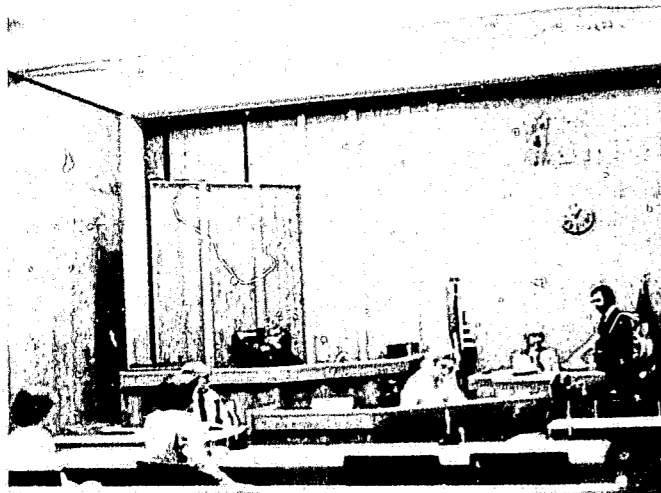
Victim Support Goals . . . Achieved

Clients surveyed by the Center gave it high marks in alleviating the anxiety and embarrassment frequently suffered by rape victims. Eighty-six percent rated the SRCC's services as "excellent," and the remaining 14 percent described them as "good."

Criminal Justice Goals . . . Achieved

With its 24-hour hotline, anonymous reporting alternative and police liaison, SRCC has made reporting rape and the subsequent police investigation substantially easier. Thus, it is not surprising that the arrest rate for reported rapes has climbed from 38 percent to 69 percent, and the conviction rate has jumped from a meager 3 percent to an impressive 88 percent.

The Stop Rape Crisis Center is Baton Rouge's solution to the rape victim's dilemma. Through a program of sensitive treatment and priority prosecution, the Center has shifted the taint of guilt from the victim to the rapist, where it belongs.



The SRCC escort counselor's constant companionship encourages the victim to prosecute her assailant.

☆ U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1973-O-305-584

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402
Stock Number 027-000-00867-1

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