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Strategic, Victim-Centered Community Responses – Redefining Our Success

Investigating and prosecuting sexual assaults is a privilege and yet a very tough job. Only the most skilled officers, detectives and prosecutors should be assigned to respond to crimes against women and children. Criminal Justice administrators must recognize this fact and create an environment which supports and mentors professionals who choose to work in this difficult field.

Traditional criminal justice measurements used to evaluate our success must be challenged. Most law enforcement officers already know, but many of our team members do not yet understand, that an arrest statistic is not an effective measurement of success. A person needs to question what happened to the arrest. For example, a premature arrest might be the easiest and quickest field response, but serves no purpose if a complete and thorough investigation isn't completed. Law enforcement officers must recognize that their first responsibility is to "protect and serve" regardless of the potential for successful prosecution. Therefore, a law enforcement officer is successful when he or she provides the best, most professional services possible, regardless of whether the prosecutor can file charges or whether the jury convicts. This attitude will also help prevent burn out because a person can achieve success regardless of the actions of others.

Because of the complexity of these cases and the dynamics of sexual assault, a multi-disciplinary community response is absolutely necessary to successfully respond to crimes of sexual violence. Sharing responsibility also helps prevent a sense of hopelessness when faced with the trauma of sexual assault day after day. Collaboration and interface among essential service providers is therefore, a necessity.

At the conclusion of the session, participants will be able to:

- Recognize successful criminal justice programs created to successfully respond to violence against women and children
- Identify obstacles that deter law enforcement agencies and prosecutors from creating specialized units
- Discuss ways to overcome these obstacles by identifying needs and promoting accomplishments
- Understand that Administration and policies and procedures are key to creating successful programs
- Recognize that police culture must change to recognize and reward officers and detectives who appropriately respond to violence against women and children
- Identify skills needed by prosecutors and officers who respond to violence against women and children
- Understand that success must be redefined. Prosecutors and officers need to be recognized for the process and not necessarily the final outcome.

- Understand how current statistical evaluation methods used by law enforcement agencies and the community contribute to a false view of criminal justice outcomes
- Identify the advantages of multi-disciplinary community responses and collaboration