
ENHANCING VICTIM SERVICES THROUGHOUT RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

2023-2025 FINAL REPORT

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SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON ENDING VIOLENCE

INTRODUCTION

The “Enhancing Victim Services Throughout Rutgers University” project finished its eighth year on August 31, 2025. Generous funding from a Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant, administered through the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General, allowed Rutgers to continue to expand its services and education to better address issues related to campus interpersonal violence. This funding has also allowed the university to continue to expand and refine the “Rutgers Model,” a comprehensive, whole-school approach[1] to addressing interpersonal violence on campus.

The VOCA grant has enabled Rutgers work to address interpersonal violence university-wide, on its four campuses, and within the state. On each campus, with support from the VOCA grant, an Office of Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance (VPVA) offers students counseling and advocacy services, educational programming and training, and consultation and policy development services. The VPVA offices also support student victims/survivors and promote active bystander behaviors through education and training to enhance safety on campus. Through the VOCA grant, Rutgers has also engaged in university-wide efforts to demonstrate its own commitment to addressing issues of interpersonal violence on campus.

PROJECT GOALS



Sustain efforts on each Rutgers campus to address campus sexual assault, dating violence, stalking, and other types of violence through education and support.



Sustain and expand a coordinated community response across the university to build capacity, collaboration, and engagement in addressing interpersonal violence.



Further engage faculty and staff in efforts to address interpersonal violence on campus, including the development and implementation of a train-the-trainer program and continued collaboration with the campus community to continue to refine the Rutgers Model of interpersonal violence response.



Further disseminate “lessons learned” to other institutions of higher education around the state while facilitating statewide collaboration.



Build a comprehensive sustainability plan to continue the initiatives that have been established on campus as a result of the grant.

[1] McMahon, S., Steiner, J. J., Snyder, S., & Banyard, V. L. (2019). Comprehensive prevention of campus sexual violence: Expanding who is invited to the table. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 1524838019883275.

VICTIM/SURVIVOR SERVICES

To help achieve project goal #1 to sustain efforts to address various types of interpersonal violence through education and support, the four VPVA offices provided both clinical services and educational efforts. A total of 387 unduplicated clients received services at one of the four VPVAs across the university during the 2023-2025 time period.

SELECTED CAMPUS PROGRAMS

In addition to providing clinical and advocacy services to students across the university, VPVA offices helped achieve goal #1 by hosting regularly occurring programs that equipped students, staff, and faculty on how to intervene in potentially violent situations, respond to violence, manage disclosures of experiencing violence, and understand the experiences of survivors of violence. These campus programs forward a coordinated, university-wide effort to address and respond to campus interpersonal violence.

Camden

Get A Yes! is a presentation, in collaboration with Sigma Delta Tau sorority and Tau Epsilon Phi fraternity, that teaches student sorority and fraternity members about consent and bystander population and reviews consent and bystander intervention scenarios specific to the student Greek organization population.

New Brunswick

The Beneath the Surface Scuba Group was created in collaboration with the Marine and Coastal Sciences Department. The scuba group taught victims/survivors of violence about processing emotions, trust, communication and breathwork through skills acquired through scuba diving.

Newark

The Healing Together Trauma Processing Group is an 8-session trauma-processing program that helps victims/survivors of violence learn healthier coping skills, manage difficult emotions and memories and remove feelings of shame and guilt and improve self-esteem and confidence. The program also teaches participants how trauma affects the brain, dynamics abuse and how to identify a health relationship.

Rutgers Health

Trauma-Informed Care for Health Professions is a workshop for first- and second-year Rutgers Health School of Health Professions students. These workshops equipped students to recognize the impact of trauma on health outcomes, examine signs of trauma in patients and how it affects patient health, how to use trauma-sensitive communication and how to create care strategies and safe healthcare environments.

CAMPUS CAMPAIGNS

- Turn the Campus Purple is an annual, university-wide domestic violence awareness campaign, hosted in October, that provides anti-violence education through activities, trainings and public exhibits of support for victims/survivors. Purple is the signature color of domestic violence awareness.
- Turn the Campus Teal is an annual, university-wide sexual assault awareness campaign, hosted in April, that provides anti-violence education through activities, trainings and public exhibits of support for victims/survivors. Teal is the signature color of sexual assault awareness.
- Take Back the Night is an annual event comprised of a student march around campus that reaffirms the university's support for victims/survivors of violence and its stance against interpersonal and sexual violence.
- The Clothesline Project (TCP) is a public display of collected t-shirts bearing hand-made supportive messages for survivors of violence made by both survivors and Rutgers community members who want to honor survivors.





UNIVERSITY-WIDE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In addition to the work of the VPVAs at each Chancellor-Led Unit, and aligned with Project Goal #2, #3, and #5, the grant supported efforts across the university, designed to help sustain the work of the VOCA grant beyond its end date. Some of these efforts are described below.

Academic and Workplace Behaviors and Environment Workgroup

The Academic and Workplace Behaviors and Environment Workgroup is a university-wide effort convened under the leadership of the Office of the Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs, the President's Office, and the Chancellor-led units. Representing an institutional commitment to address sexual misconduct, the group includes various personnel such as institutional administrators, VPVA directors, Office of Title IX staff, student affairs professionals, VOCA-funded personnel from the Center for Research on Ending Violence and more. The workgroup focuses on policy and improving responses to campus sexual violence and incivility by implementing recommendations and strategies based on findings from Rutgers University campus climate surveys. This committee was established by the President to identify strengths and gaps in the university's sexual misconduct response and works to ensure institutional commitment.

Title IX and Sexual Misconduct Subcommittee of the President's Cabinet

The Title IX and Sexual Misconduct subcommittee operates based on four established key guiding principles: accountability, consistency, navigability and transparency. Together, the university-wide and chancellor-led efforts demonstrate sustainability of policy, service and education for the purposes of a violence-free campus culture and environment.

UNIVERSITY - WIDE ACCOMPLISHMENTS CONT.,

Special Advisor for Sexual Misconduct

Beginning July 2024, principal investigator of the Enhancing Victim Services Project and director of Rutgers University's Center for Research on Ending Violence, Dr. Sarah McMahon, joined President Johnathan Holloway's cabinet as special advisor to the president for sexual misconduct prevention and response. This role was created to oversee the institutional response to sexual misconduct and work with each of the Rutgers University campuses to ensure a smooth transition after the Enhancing Victim Services Project ends. As part of this work, the Advisor convened a university-wide steering committee on sexual misconduct. McMahon continues serving in this role during new university President William Tate IV's incumbency.

Assistant Vice President for Title IX and Sexual Misconduct

With approval from the President's office and with guidance from his Cabinet Subcommittee, a new Assistant Vice President position was created to oversee work related to sexual misconduct prevention and response. This position began in July, 2025 and will work across the university to sustain the efforts introduced by the Enhancing Victim Services Project.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND DISSEMINATION

To help address project goal #4 to disseminate "lessons learned" to other institutions of higher education, we've developed several resources that we will be sharing with others across the state and described below.

Addressing Interpersonal Violence on Campus: Rutgers University Resource Hub

The Rutgers University Resource Hub is an online resource that provides a library of evidence-informed materials that were produced throughout the VOCA project's lifespan related to addressing interpersonal violence on campus. Examples include videos, toolkits and white papers on topics such as how to start a victim assistance program on campus, trauma-informed services, remote service delivery and engagement, understanding the impact of violence on specific student groups, and evaluating victim/survivor services. The resource hub will be available to the public as a way to share resources created through the project.

Enhancing Victim Services Project Video

To overview the 8-year Enhancing Victim Services Project and promote the newly formatted Rutgers University Resource Hub, several VOCA-funded personnel from the Center for Research on Ending Violence (REV), in collaboration with a University Division of Continuing Studies video production team, produced an 18-minute video consisting of a round-table discussion amongst the REV personnel as well as previews of the online Resource Hub. REV team members talked about the purpose, history, achievements and impact of the project and how the Resource Hub can be used as a tool to help build cultures of care and anti-violence on college campuses.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Client satisfaction was assessed by the Center for Research on Ending Violence. Findings from these assessment are used to build on strengths, seize opportunities for improvement, and adjust victim services according to client feedback.

HIGHLIGHTS

Client Satisfaction

Client satisfaction at Rutgers-New Brunswick VPVA was evaluated for the Spring 2024 semester. Respondents had very high levels of satisfaction with service provision and experiences with VPVA staff. Measured on a 4-point scale, respondents said they were satisfied with the services they received (3.9), would use VPVA services again (3.9), would recommend services to a friend (3.9) and staff respected their background (3.9). They also shared the following thoughts about the service(s) they received:

“Supportive staff. Learning the yoga in a safe environment. Connecting with other survivors.”

“They were able to create a place where I feel safe.”

“I like the support I receive from my therapist. She provides me with resources like meditations and other practices that help me grow in my journey.”

EVALUATION FINDINGS

The Center for Research on Ending Violence evaluated a collaborative summit at Rutgers University-New Brunswick. Evaluation helps ensure that training events yield desired outcomes.

HIGHLIGHTS

Empower & Heal: Trauma-Informed Student Support Summit

The Empower and Heal: Trauma-Informed Student Summit was hosted at Rutgers University on October 22, 2024. This was a collaborative summit organized by the Rutgers-New Brunswick Office of Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance (VPVA), Center for Research on Ending Violence, University Compliance and Title IX offices and The Tyler Clementi Center for Diversity Education and Bias Prevention. The summit educated Rutgers staff and faculty on how to provide trauma-informed support to students experiencing identity-based violence. Staff and faculty received information about how to manage student disclosures, Title IX reporting, and how to provide trauma-informed care education. Survey participants completed an online survey before and after the summit with n=19 completing both pre- and post-surveys. After completing the summit, there was a 47% increase in those who strongly agreed that they had a high level of perceived knowledge of the interpersonal violence reporting process. There was also a 47% increase in those who strongly agreed that they were confident they can respond to a student disclosure according to Rutgers University's official procedures. Respondents shared the following thoughts about the student support summit:

“ Thank you so much. This was very helpful to us RU staff and faculty ! ”

“ Truly informative and insightful! This would be a wonderful fall gathering; encouraging all to attend. Thank you! ”

“ Incredible summit! A lot of helpful information, experiences, and stories shared. Also provided a lot of clarity on the reporting processes. ... ”



In Loving Memory of LISA "THE LEGEND" SMITH

Justice and Education Coordinator for the Rutgers-New
Brunswick Office of Violence Prevention and Victim
Assistance (VPVA)