

# Travis County Sheriff's Office Victim Services Unit



April 2018

## Vulnerable Adults—Elder and Disabled Victims

*By: Tony Switzer*

Here are a few examples involving vulnerable adults that we have dealt with and that you may encounter as a volunteer:

- A 25 year old woman with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (IDD) who had been sexually assaulted who we transported to get a SAFE exam, and we assisted in finding a residential placement for her
- A 92 year old man left by his son at home in the summer heat without food and with the only water available from a distant well
- A legally blind 69 year old man with terminal cancer and mobility impairment who was assaulted by his violent son and asked for help to keep him away
- A 50ish disabled woman who was conned into giving her long distance boyfriend whom she had never met over \$27,000
- An 89 year old woman we visited in the hospital after she was attacked by dogs in her home after her adult daughter left them locked in her house
- A 58 year old woman disabled and home-bound by her multiple medical conditions was abandoned by her husband who moved out and filed for divorce

It is best to offer a couple of definitions here. An elderly person is defined as anyone 65 years of age or older. A person with a disability has a physical or mental condition that *substantially impairs* his or her ability to live independently or provide self-care.

You will run into situations as a volunteer where vulnerable adults are victims and may be in the care of suspects who hurt them. Our responsibility as always is to advocate for and help those victims as best we can.

If you are responding in person (as opposed to making phone contact), you will be briefed by a Deputy or Detective. Be thorough in your conversation with the Deputy/Detective to verify the victim's age, ongoing needs, potential support system, etc. If applicable, verify that a report to Adult Protective Services has or will be made and determine who will be making the report.

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**Next  
Volunteer  
Meeting**

**May 16th**  
**CPS Process**

**6:30pm to 8:00pm**  
**Sheriff's Office**  
**5555 Airport Blvd.**

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Just as there is a legal obligation for all of us to report child abuse there is also an obligation to report abuse, neglect or exploitation of elder and disabled persons. Reports can be made to 1-800-252-5400.

A report about a vulnerable adult who has been abused, neglected or exploited will be investigated by Adult Protective Services (APS). Here are definitions used by APS:

- Abuse is negligent or willful infliction of injury, unreasonable confinement, intimidation or cruel punishment resulting in physical or emotional harm or pain to an elderly or disabled person by the person's caretaker, family member or other individual.
- Neglect is failure of a caretaker to provide the goods or services, including medical services, which are necessary to avoid physical or emotional harm or pain. Note also that reportable neglect includes self-neglect.
- Exploitation is the illegal or improper act of a caretaker, family member or other individual who has an ongoing relationship with the elderly or disabled person to use their resources for monetary or personal benefit, profit or gain *without* the informed consent of the elderly or disabled person.
- Sexual Abuse is non-consensual sexual activity between the vulnerable adult and a person's caretaker, family member or other individual *with whom they have an ongoing relationship*. Non-consensual sexual activity with someone with whom they don't have an ongoing relationship is a strictly criminal matter and APS does not typically get involved.

When an APS report is made and their investigation finds that the victim may be in a dangerous situation, they may provide short-term emergency services. The APS Annual Report for 2016 reads:

APS may also provide or arrange for emergency services to alleviate or prevent further abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation. These services may include short-term shelter, food, medication, health services, financial help with rent and utilities, transportation, and minor home repair.

Remember that we can't promise these emergency services, but we can assure the victim that their situation and needs will be made known to APS.

As you are interacting with vulnerable adult victims, don't be afraid to ask questions to determine the person's status and needs. For instance, after establishing some rapport you can ask about:

- Their living conditions (Who do you live with? Who does the cooking at home? Who shops for food? Can you get around the house OK?)
- Family and/or caretakers (Do you have someone who helps you with daily tasks? How often do you see them? Do you get along with the person who comes in to help you?)
- Their health (Do you have all the medicines you need? How do you get to the doctor when you have an appointment? Who is your doctor? Caseworker? Psychiatrist?)
- What they want to happen and what they need

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When you have assessed the situation and learned what the vulnerable adult wants and needs, you can turn to your Resource Guide. Pages 22-24 list specific resources for Elderly/Disabled individuals. However, it is not an exhaustive list. Do they need to apply for CVC? Do they need a Protective Order? Do they need legal help? Do they need to evict someone? Offer what seems appropriate for the circumstances, document it in your report, and pass along any other pieces of information that the staff might benefit from when they do follow-up.

Each new call that we respond to requires us to evaluate the situation and apply all that we know often in new ways to account for special circumstances. When we encounter situations involving vulnerable adults I have found that there are many of those special circumstances that arise. I hope this short article helps prepare you for working with and providing services to vulnerable adults.

## Tips

- You may have to speak loudly and slowly to vulnerable adults.
- You don't have to speak to them in oversimplified language, unless you have determined that it is necessary.
- Be patient, it may take a while. Take your time and actively listen.
- Be aware of undue influence from family and caretakers over the vulnerable adult. The person may look nervous or scared or reluctant to say anything on their own. Unless the others are the legal guardian, the vulnerable adult has the right to make his or her own decisions. If the family/caretakers are hovering/interrupting/answering for the vulnerable adult, you can ask them to let the person answer for themselves. If the problem persists, ask them to allow you some moments of privacy to talk to the vulnerable adult alone. If they refuse, consider enlisting the Deputy's help in getting the privacy.
- If possible, get down on the person's level (ex: if the person is sitting, sit with them). It goes a long way toward establishing rapport and communicating respect.
- Dementia is an umbrella term for cognitive impairments which include memory loss, confusion, personality changes, and difficulties with language and communication. When interacting with a person with dementia it may work best to ask simple, yes/no questions.
- Trauma may make everything harder for a vulnerable adult who has been victimized.

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Here are a few additional resources and sources of information related to vulnerable adults:

- The 2017 Annual Report of the Department of Family and Protective Services—the parent agency of APS. [http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About\\_DFPS/Annual\\_Report/2017/DFPS\\_2017\\_Annual\\_Report.pdf](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Annual_Report/2017/DFPS_2017_Annual_Report.pdf)
- The Age Test <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html> . This is an interesting tool that can evaluate your subconscious biases about older adults—useful to know yourself as you undertake this work.
- Family Eldercare is Austin-based and provides a variety of resources for older persons. <https://www.familyeldercare.org>
- The ARC is a non-profit organization that provides services to children with disabilities and their families. [www.arcofthecapitalarea.org](http://www.arcofthecapitalarea.org)
- The Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) of the Capital Area is a single access point to long-term services and support program benefits for older adults, those with disabilities and their caregivers. <http://www.capcog.org/divisions/area-agency-on-aging/ADRC>

## A Message from Amy

Hey everyone,

It is with a mixture of a heavy heart and a sense of excitement that I'm letting you all know that I have submitted my resignation from TCSO. My final day will be April 27<sup>th</sup> and I'll be leaving the Austin area.

I have accepted a position as a Project Manager for a Sexual Assault Kit Initiative. This will involve providing assistance to multiple (40-50) identified sites to implement evidence-based practices to address the challenges related to unsubmitted sexual assault kits. This work will also involve the identification and dissemination of successful strategies, policies and practices for investigating cold case sexual assault, and advancing strong community and criminal justice system partnerships.

Hopefully each of you has heard with sincerity my belief that Victim Services plays a vital role in law enforcement response. Often times, the very practices that work well for law enforcement professionals, end up burdening victims with increased inconvenience, stress and trauma. Each of you, through your committed presence and ethical practice, have eased that burden for the people you serve. I also hold a belief that there is no better long-term capital for any agency than to be remembered in a favorable way by those whose lives have intersected with law enforcement via crisis. Each and every one of you has contributed to the positive impact left on this community, and for that I could not be more appreciative and proud!!

All of the lessons learned from each of you will be carried with me into the next phase of my life and I can comfortably say that...how things are done, why things are done, when things are done...it all matters.

Although I am extremely excited about the next phase of my life, there is a part of me that needs to acknowledge a sense of sadness/loss that accompanies a big change. As plans develop for an opportunity to say a proper farewell, I will keep you all posted.

Your partner in service,

Amy Durall

**March 2018 Stats—Call Type**

**ADAM**

Assault w/Injury/FV (1)  
 Assault w/Injury/FV- Strangulation (3)  
 Deceased Person (3)  
 Disturbance/Other (1)  
 Felon in Possession of a Firearm (1)  
 Structure Fire (1)  
 Violation of Protective Order/FV (1)

**BAKER**

Aggravated Assault w/Deadly Weapon (1)  
 Aggravated Assault w/Deadly Weapon/FV (1)  
 Assault by Contact (1)  
 Assault w/ Injury (1)  
 Assault w/Injury/FV (10)  
 Assault w/Injury/FV- Strangulation (6)  
 Assist DPS (1)  
 Death Notification (3)  
 Deceased Person (4)  
 Family Disturbance (3)  
 Harassment/FV (1)  
 Indecency w/ a Child (1)  
 Injury to a Disabled Person/FV (1)  
 Robbery/Assault (1)  
 Sexual Assault (1)  
 Sexual Assault of a Child/FV (1)  
 Structure Fire (1)  
 Terroristic Threat (1)  
 Terroristic Threat/FV (1)

**CHARLIE**

Aggravated Assault w/ Deadly Weapon/  
 FV (1)  
 Aggravated Kidnapping (1)  
 Assault w/ Injury/FV (1)  
 Assault w/ Injury/FV w/ Prev. Conv. (1)  
 Assault w/Injury/FV- Strangulation (1)  
 Death Notification (1)  
 Deceased Person (2)  
 Family Disturbance (1)  
 Sexual Assault (1)

**DAVID**

Assault by Contact/FV (2)  
 Assist EMS (1)  
 Check Welfare (1)  
 Death Notification (1)  
 Deceased Person (3)  
 Family Disturbance (1)  
 Traffic Fatality (1)

**OTHER AGENCIES**

Assist Jonestown (1)  
 Assist Lago Vista (1)  
 Assist Lakeway (2)  
 Assist Westlake Hills (1)

**March 2018 Stats—Day and Time**

**ADAM**

**SUN (3)** 12p-4p (1)  
 4p-8p (1)  
 8p-12a (1)  
**MON (2)** 12p-4p (1)  
 8p-12a (1)  
**TUES (2)** 12p-4p (1)  
 4p-8p (1)  
**WED (2)** 4p-8p (1)  
 8p-12a (1)  
**THUR (2)** 4p-8p (1)  
 8p-12a (1)  
**FRI (1)** 8a-12p (1)  
**SAT (2)** 4p-8p (1)  
 8p-12a (1)

**CHARLIE**

**SUN (3)** 12a-4a (1)  
 4p-8p (2)  
**MON (0)**  
**TUES (2)** 4a-8a (1)  
 8p-12a (1)  
**WED (0)**  
**THUR (0)**  
**FRI (5)** 12a-4a (1)  
 8a-12p (1)  
 4p-8p (1)  
 8p-12a (2)  
**SAT (0)**

**BAKER**

**SUN (9)** 4a-8a (3)  
 12p-4p (3)  
 4p-8p (2)  
 8p-12a (1)  
**MON (6)** 12a-4a (1)  
 4a-8a (2)  
 4p-8p (1)  
 8p-12a (2)  
**TUES (4)** 8a-12p (3)  
 12p-4p (1)  
**WED (8)** 12a-4a (3)  
 4a-8a (1)  
 12p-4p (1)  
 4p-8p (3)  
**THUR (3)** 4a-8a (1)  
 8p-12a (2)  
**FRI (3)** 8a-12p (2)  
 8p-12a (1)  
**SAT (7)** 12a-4a (1)  
 8a-12p (1)  
 12p-4p (3)  
 4p-8p (1)  
 8p-12a (1)

**DAVID**

**SUN (3)** 4p-8p (2)  
 8p-12a (1)  
**MON (0)**  
**TUES (3)** 12p-4p (1)  
 4p-8p (1)  
 8p-12a (1)  
**WED (2)** 12a-4a (1)  
 4a-8a (1)  
**THUR (1)** 8a-12p (1)  
**FRI (2)** 4a-8a (1)  
 8a-12p (1)  
**SAT (1)** 4a-8a (1)

**TCSO VICTIM SERVICES UNIT**

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 Fax: (512) 854-4719

**Victim Services Staff**

**Amy Durall, Director**

**Heather Dooley, SSPC**

**Victim Services Specialists**

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 Tony Switzer  
 Huitzi Valdez  
 Sonya Villarreal

**Interns**

Jamila Davis  
 Shelby Myers  
 Chelsea Priem  
 Francisca Ricardo

<https://www.tcssheriff.org/victim-services>

**Got News?**



If you have newsworthy items or announcements for the newsletter please pass them along to

Heather  
 Heather I. Dooley  
 @traviscountytx.gov

**TRAVIS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE VICTIM SERVICES**

**MISSION: WHY WE'RE HERE**

To enhance the response of law enforcement, Travis County Sheriff's Office Victim Services provides crisis intervention, advocacy, and access to resources that reduce the impact of trauma on individuals and the community.

**VISION: WHERE WE'RE HEADED**

Travis County Sheriff's Office Victim Services envisions a community in which individuals experience compassionate support of choices, effective utilization of resources, and enhanced outcomes through collaborative services delivered with integrity and respect.

**VALUES: WHAT WE BELIEVE IN**

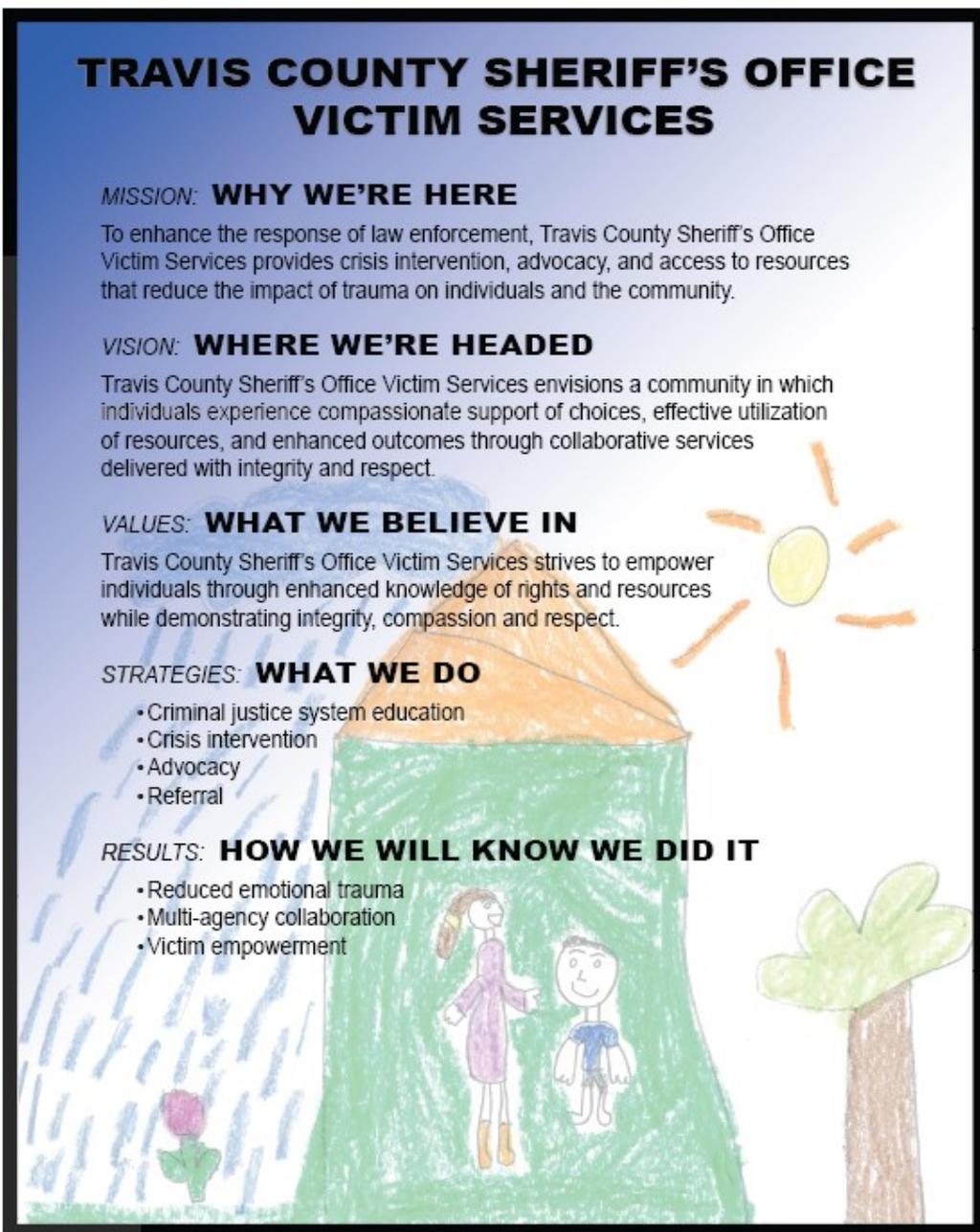
Travis County Sheriff's Office Victim Services strives to empower individuals through enhanced knowledge of rights and resources while demonstrating integrity, compassion and respect.

**STRATEGIES: WHAT WE DO**

- Criminal justice system education
- Crisis intervention
- Advocacy
- Referral

**RESULTS: HOW WE WILL KNOW WE DID IT**

- Reduced emotional trauma
- Multi-agency collaboration
- Victim empowerment



*I've learned that people will forget what you said,  
 People will forget what you did,  
 But people will never forget how you made them feel.  
 ~Maya Angelou~*