

Advocacy for Black Survivors

*An Article of the OVWA Monthly Highlight Series
in collaboration with CeCe Norwood*

Introduction

As advocates, our primary focus is serving victims of crime to the best of our ability, and focusing on specific populations is something we care deeply about at OVWA. Our statement on the homepage of our website “*OVWA acknowledges and honors the fundamental value and dignity of all individuals. We pledge ourselves to maintaining an environment that respects diverse traditions, heritages, and experiences*” is not just boilerplate, we try our best to live our lives, both professionally and personally, by these same values. We all bring different levels of both life experience and professional experience to our roles as advocates, and being able to recognize our limitations is as important as our level of advocacy skills and strengths. OVWA as an organization consists of three advocates hoping to bring awareness of privilege and assistance in advocating for survivors in the Black community, but we are not experts nor can we speak for any population. We strive for cultural humility in the work we do. We are aware that the following information may not represent the experience of **all** Black women, children, and men but hope that it provides guidance and prompts further discussion about privilege when advocating for victims of crime. We hope this article is received with the intent and honor that it was created with, because the more we know, the better advocates we become.

How can we begin to take steps as advocates in understanding how privilege impacts our ability to provide advocacy? Education and training are important, but recognizing each survivor as an individual with their own background and life experience, that is more often than not completely unlike our own experiences, is a start. If we begin at that basic level, which is also a foundation of trauma responsive care, honoring the clients life experience with acknowledgement and honor of their cultural identity, having an openness to an understanding of how society looks from their perspective, then and only then can we begin to advocate from a place of cultural humility rather than privilege.

Our work as advocates requires us to have a working knowledge of the issues facing our clients. While there has been much work to eradicate racism by large groups and collectives throughout history, the insidious thread of racism is still visible and very active today. A 2018 report by the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino, found that hate crimes reported to police in the 10 largest cities in America increased by 12.5 percent in 2017, marking the fourth consecutive annual rise in a row and the highest spike in more than a decade. In 2017, anti-black crimes were among the most common in the nation’s 10 largest cities, according to the study.¹

¹ <https://www.csusb.edu/sites/default/files/2018%20Hate%20Final%20Report%205-14.pdf>

The Anti-Defamation League's Center on Extremism found white supremacists and far-right extremists accounted for 59 percent of all hate and extremist-related fatalities in 2017, an increase of 20 percent from 2016, according to an ADL report released this year.²

We may find ourselves the advocate for a member of the Black community experiencing one of these hate crimes, or we may advocate for Black survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault. In order for a survivor to be *heard*, they also must be *seen*. We must **see** what is happening to those in our Black communities so that when we provide advocacy, we are aware of the weight of the many factors in their life experience in order to provide the best possible services.

This month we are profoundly grateful for the help of CeCe Norwood, Founder of Nirvana Now! an organization dedicated to the eradication of all forms of sexual violence. Nirvana Now! facilitates survivor SPEAK OUTs! publishes articles, maintains a speaker's bureau, and provides consultation to organizations committed to developing diversity competent practices for engaging and assisting diverse survivors. CeCe is a featured national speaker on child sexual abuse and rape in the Black community, recognized workshop trainer, Life Coach, author of numerous articles and her book [There Is Happiness After Incest and Child Sexual Abuse](#).

Prior to founding Nirvana Now! CeCe worked in domestic violence shelters answering phones and providing case management services. She has also worked in chemical dependency treatment. Because of the intersections of domestic and sexual violence, Nirvana Now! often assists survivors who are experiencing both forms of violence in addition to being chemically dependent.

Ms. Norwood is founding Board President of the Ohio Alliance To End Sexual Violence (OAESV), past Interim OAESV Executive Director and founding principal of the Sexual Assault Prevention, Awareness, Treatment, Healing (SA PATH) Coalition of Northwest Ohio. The primary mission of both organizations is to work toward eliminating all forms of sexual violence, advocate for the rights and needs of survivors/co-survivors and provide professional development opportunities.

CeCe is an approved trainer for both the Ohio Human Services Training System and Ohio Child Welfare Training Program. She is a certified Bridges Out Of Poverty trainer and co-developer/trainer of the Ohio LGBTQI+ Task Force Safe Zone training. Additionally, she sits on the Board of the Ohio Network Of Child Advocacy Centers (ONCAC) and the Lucas County Bridges Out Of Poverty Steering Committee.

CeCe has volunteered as an education surrogate parent and has been a juvenile court guardian ad litem since 2007. She received the Lucas County Court Appointed Special Advocate Rising Star Award which recognizes CASA volunteers for their contribution to the lives of abused and neglected children. She has been recognized by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority for her years of sexual violence community activism and the Lucas County Child Abuse Task Force for the work

² <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/adl-report-white-supremacist-murders-more-than-doubled-in-2017>

of the SA Path Coalition. In 2019, she received the Ohio Attorney General Special Courage Award for her advocacy work with survivors.

We discussed many different ideas and ways of collaborating for this monthly highlight with CeCe, and she has graciously shared information with OVWA in the format of the article which follows. We have included resources for further education and assistance at the end of this article.

Black Survivors Need Assistance Too

CeCe Norwood, MA, Founder, Nirvana Now! Choosing Inner Peace for You

It's rare I am asked about effective methods to assist Black survivors of trauma. This rarity has always been puzzling considering individuals and organizations will enthusiastically state that they provide services to everyone. But often their numbers are slight when it comes to servicing Black trauma survivors. If considering only Black women, we know "Black women are almost three times as likely to experience death as a result of DV/IPV than White women. And while Black women only make up 8% of the population, 22% of homicides that result from DV/IPV happen to Black Women, making it one of the leading causes of death for Black women ages 15 to 35... We experience sexual assault and DV/IPV at disproportionate rates and have the highest rates of intra-racial violence against us than any other group".³

After decades of activism and advocacy for sexual and domestic violence survivors, I have come to the conclusion there are two primary reasons I'm rarely asked about the nuances of Black survivors: 1) most advocates believe they already know how; after all they're survivors, right? and, 2) the false belief that because they possess the appropriate educational credentials, or maybe they are a survivor themselves, they emphatically "know" how to assist survivors of trauma so they can't be the reason Black survivors don't seek out or complete their services . Well, I emphatically assert that often the "helpers" (aka: advocates, mentors, coaches, etc.) are the very reason Black survivors are underserved throughout State and private systems that are designed to help survivors of traumatic experiences. Now, understand that I'm not in any way suggesting that "helpers" don't want to help. Rather, I'm stating they often don't know how to approach Black survivors in an appealing way and as a result, Black survivors continue to be underserved (aka: still suffering).

Because I know people in helping professions chose their career because they truly want to help people and make a difference in their communities, I offer, in no particular order of importance the following ideas and thoughts, some of which are personal and others organizational:

³ Feminista Jones, "Why Black Women Struggle More With Domestic Violence" <https://time.com/3313343/ray-rice-black-women-domestic-violence/>

Some Foundational Thoughts:

- First, know that some of the things that follow can be true of other racial and cultural groups. I offer this clarification because without fail, whenever I do a presentation, invariably a couple of participants in the room will write on their evaluation the statement I just made or question why I only talked about Black survivors when all survivors need assistance. When I read whatever the similar statement or question is, I'm automatically certain, it was not written by someone Black or even a person of color. Why? Because we rarely hear about our trauma experiences. I always wonder if the individual(s) heard anything I said. I'm forever hopeful they did, for the sake of Black survivors.
- Second, you may have noticed that I'm a person who speaks openly. My intent is not to hurt anyone's feelings or cause anyone to lose confidence in their abilities, lose hope or feel disheartened. Rather, my sole objective is to inspire advocates (and people who hold similar meaningful positions) to really, really assess their personal diversity competence and that of their organization to ensure they are providing diversity competent services.
- Third, I know in the victim services world, individuals receiving services are often referred to as the "victim". I personally prefer, as do many others, to use the words survivor or thriver when providing direct services or when referring to individuals who sought out services, as both terms are considered more affirming. Therefore, these are the terms I'll use throughout this article. Note: If a survivor refers to themselves as a "victim" I defer to their preference.
- Fourth, there is not a "national spokesperson" for all Black survivors. Therefore, the thoughts and ideas I offer are based on this Black person's personal and professional experiences. Suggestion: Get to know more diverse Black people so you can learn other perspectives; you'll find some will agree with my perspective and some less so.

Now Some Thoughts and Ideas:

- Black or African American? Which is it? Answer: It's whichever your survivor identifies with. You won't know by looking at them, you ask. Personally, I prefer Black, with a capital B. The preference is simply political.
- Know there is no "one way" of working with Black survivors. Just because individuals share the same race, you cannot automatically assume they share the same culture. Meaning, in brief, that someone may identify as Black, grew up middle class, raised in a two-parent household with siblings, went to college, etc. This individual experienced a markedly different Black culture environment than a Black individual who has had the opposite life experience. Therefore, your advocacy approach must be based upon the

individual in front of you and not the fact they're Black. Seems basic, doesn't it? Unfortunately, I've noticed too many times, this basic understanding is missing.

- How diverse are the people in your personal world? Do you have any Black friends? (Notice the plural usage of friend). You can take all the trainings and classes your heart desires, but you will never truly understand a cultural group unless you immerse yourself in their daily lived experiences...over time.
- I have been amazed over the years how many good intentioned, White organizations (often a grant recipient for underserved or marginalized communities), seeking to provide services in Black communities try to do so without utilizing a Cultural Guide. A Cultural Guide is someone OF the community who can assist you with identifying best practice approaches for various sectors of their community. Have you ever considered the reason your advocacy efforts were not as fruitful as desired was because you didn't have a Cultural Guide? If you didn't, that's "organizational privilege". (The Oxford dictionary definition of privilege is: "a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group.")

Often individuals and organizations who have privilege instinctively dive into the project at hand without ever considering they may not be the best person for the job nor do they consider asking the people they plan to service what assistance they need and what is the best way to provide it to them. These considerations should be discussed prior to the grant being written. But, if you didn't, there's still opportunity for an organization to intentionally make a careful and critical examination of the conscious and unconscious ways in which organizational privilege has compromised their ability to reach the very people they set out to serve. Is your organization ready to have the necessary open, honest and direct conversations? Doing so will require staff members individually assess their personal privilege, which may be unsettling to some. Know that having these conversations the right way requires: 1) having a Cultural Guide to facilitate the conversations, and 2) having intermittent, formal "check- up" opportunities where discussion about individual and organizational progress can be had and next steps can be establish (diversity competence is an ongoing experience, not an event.)

- If a Black person came to your office today, would they see themselves reflected in your office décor, brochure, website, staff? Is anyone on your board Black? If not, why not? Resist the visceral response "we don't have any Black people in our community." Go deeper in your analysis. Understand this and other visceral responses suggests all Black people look a certain way and it suggests that the people who don't "appear" Black won't have connections to Black people who could use your services.
- When considering the need for guidance or assistance with intimate matters like housing, intimate partner/domestic and/or sexual violence, finances, mental health concerns,

advocacy, etc., unless coerced, Black people prefer to talk with individuals who have a basic understanding of the daily, lived experiences of Black people. Generally speaking, that person is usually another Black person. Could you or your organization oblige a survivor request that a Black advocate be assigned to their case?

- Some Black people cuss, speak louder than others or may express themselves through various hand gestures. It doesn't mean they're being aggressive. There is often no need to call security or document their behavior as aggressive versus passionate. If you feel uncomfortable, consider it an opportunity to re-evaluate how diversity competent you truly are. Or maybe take time to seek guidance from your personal Cultural Guides.
- I know as Advocates we want to offer resources to people. Resources are important. Resources are vital. We offer resources from housing to health to legal and more. When talking with a Black survivor, always ask if what you are suggesting is viable for them. You should know the experiences of Black survivors with the resources you suggest before you use them. It would definitely be a bonus to provide the survivor with the name of the person, at the resource, who you know to be especially diversity competent. Also, offer nontraditional resources such as Life Coaching vs counseling or massage, Reiki, etc. as "Generalized or Eurocentric treatment approaches may not easily align with the core values of Black culture, such as family, kinship, community and spirituality."⁴
- "For Black women, a strong sense of cultural affinity and loyalty to community and race renders many of us silent, so our stories often go untold. One of the biggest related impediments is our hesitation in trusting the police or the justice system. As Black people, we don't always feel comfortable surrendering "our own" to the treatment of a racially biased police state and as women, we don't always feel safe calling police officers who may harm us instead of helping us. And when we do speak out or seek help, we too often experience backlash from members of our communities who believe we are airing out dirty laundry and making ourselves look bad in front of White people"⁵
- If you are a White advocate offering services to Black individuals, expect that at some point in your career, you will be called a racist. When called a racist, don't defend. In fact, more times than not, if you try to defend yourself, it just escalates the situation. Rather, step back and listen to what is being said to you. Seriously consider you may have said or done something that was not diversity competent. Of course, it wasn't your intent to come off racist but understand that the Black survivor experienced the impact of

⁴ Steven Stark, MD APA Black Caucus Of Black Psychologist: <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency/education/best-practice-highlights/best-practice-highlights-for-working-with-african-american-patients>

⁵ Feminista Jones, "Why Black Women Struggle More With Domestic Violence" <https://time.com/3313343/ray-rice-black-women-domestic-violence/>

what you said or did, nonetheless. Know that when someone is called a racist, the underlying message is that the individual they are interacting with does not feel heard or respected. By stepping back and listening versus defending, you'll learn something that will help you from that point on.

I'm hopeful what I have delineated provides additional considerations to be aware of, as an individual advocate or organization, when assisting Black survivors. It's important that we competently assist all survivors, including Black survivors.

What will you aspire to do differently?

Relevant Articles

Questioning Bias: Validating A Bias Crime Victim Assessment Tool In California And New Jersey, Summary Overview (July 2018) NIJ-Sponsored, Grant, 29 pages, NCJ 252010.

This study investigated the experiences of hate incidents, crimes and factors affecting underreporting among youth and adults in LGBT, Hispanic, Black, Muslim communities in New Jersey and Los Angeles. Based on the research findings, the Vera Institute of Justice developed an assessment tool, the Bias Crime Assessment Tool, to improve the identification of hate crime victimization, better reflect victims' experiences, increase confidence in the reporting process, and help to record more accurate data.

<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/252010.pdf>

At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power

Review from WCSAP – Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs

Excerpts from this book can help show the intersections between racism and sexual violence in U.S. History for new and experienced advocates and managers to deepen their anti-oppression learning.

https://www.wcsap.org/sites/default/files/uploads/resources_publications/research_advocacy_digest/Book_Review_Dark_End_of_Street_2019.pdf

Ogawa, Brian. D. (March, 2010). **Cultural and Spiritual Competence in Victim Services.**

<https://ce4less.com/Tests/Materials/E077Materials.pdf>

Sered, Danielle. (December, 2014). **Young Men of Color and the Other Side of Harm Addressing Disparities in Our Responses to Violence.** Retrieved from

<https://www.vera.org/publications/young-men-of-color-and-the-other-side-of-harm-addressing-disparities-in-our-responses-to-violence>

Ba, Aissata. (n.d.). **The Intersectional Identities of African American Women and Domestic Violence,** Retrieved from

https://www.nyscadv.org/file_download/f44eb56c-c342-4a8e-9658-4bb779f3cdb3

West, Carolyn, Johnson, Kalimah. (March, 2013). **Sexual Violence in the Lives of African American Women: Risk, Response, and Resilience.** Retrieved from

https://vawnet.org/sites/default/files/materials/files/2016-09/AR_SVAAWomenRevised.pdf

Reese, Frederick. (June 15, 2017). **Sex Trafficking's True Victims: Why Are Our Black Girls/Women So Vulnerable?** Retrieved from

<https://atlantablackstar.com/2017/06/15/sex-traffickings-true-victims-why-are-our-black-girlswomen-so-vulnerable/>

Bastomski, Sara, Zweig, Janine (April 4, 2018). **Addressing dating violence for young girls of color in the #MeToo era.** Retrieved from

<https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/addressing-dating-violence-young-girls-color-metoo-era>

5 Part Blog Series on Intersectional and Movements (August 23, 2016). Retrieved from

<https://movetoendviolence.org/blog/movements-mosaics-call-practice-intersectionality/>

Black & African American Communities And Mental Health (n.d). Retrieved from

<https://www.mhanational.org/issues/black-african-american-communities-and-mental-health>

DiAngelo, Robin. (April 9, 2015). **White Fragility: Why It's So Hard to Talk to White People About Racism.** Retrieved from <https://goodmenproject.com/featured-content/white-fragility-why-its-so-hard-to-talk-to-white-people-about-racism-twlm/>

DiAngelo, Robin. (n.d.) **White Fragility and the Rules of Engagement.** Retrieved from

<https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/diangelo-white-fragility-and-the-rules-of-engagement.pdf>

Pope, Lucille. (2009) **White Privilege, State Intervention, & Anti-Violence Against Women Programs.** Retrieved from <https://wocninc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Chapter-2-White-Privilege.pdf>

NASP National Association of School Psychologists (n.d.) **Understanding Race and Privilege** Retrieved from <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/diversity/social-justice/understanding-race-and-privilege>

Collins, Cory. (2018). **Understanding Race and Privilege.** Retrieved from <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2018/what-is-white-privilege-really>

OVC Archives (n.d.) **Serving Ethnic and Racial Communities African-American Victims** https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc_archives/sartkit/focus/culture-erc-a.html

Resources

Nirvana Now!

<https://www.mynirvananow.org/>

Nirvana Now! prides itself on the quality and diversity competent educational, professional development, and skill building child and adult welfare trainings offered for professionals, caseworkers, managers, teachers, social workers, counselors, day care providers, clergy and foster, adoptive and kinship care providers.

Nirvana Now! Trainers are also experts in the development and implementation of child sexual abuse and rape survivor SPEAK OUTs! and providing Life Coach services to survivors.

SCESA National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault

<http://sisterslead.org/>

- Supporting and Enhancing Leadership
- Technical Assistance and Training
- Policy Advocacy

NO! The Rape Documentary

<https://notherapedocumentary.org/home>

NO! The Rape Documentary is the 2006-released, Ford Foundation-funded, groundbreaking feature length film that explores the international atrocity of rape and other forms of sexual assault committed against women and girls by men through the first-person testimonies, scholarship, spirituality, activism, and cultural work of Black people in the United States. *** In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its' devastating economic impact, NO! The Rape Documentary is available for streaming rental in several languages for \$1.00 for 72-hour rental periods through April 30, 2020, the end of Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

Women of Color Network

<https://wocninc.org/>

WOCN, Inc. is a national grassroots initiative dedicated to building the capacity of women of color advocates responding to violence against women of color.

- Training
- Resources
- Public Policy
- Mentorship Blue Lips Campaigns
- STOP Toolkit

Women of Color Caucus – Ohio

<https://www.oaesv.org/about/inclusion-equity-diversity/women-of-color-caucus/>

The WOCC is a group of diverse women concerned about the violence against women of color. We are committed to developing leadership in women, community education, and efforts that will influence policy and systems to more effectively respond to and improving the lives of all women.

Download the WOCC Brochure (with membership form) [HERE](#)