DA, Partners Raise Awareness About Sexual Assault, Child Abuse

The Napa County District Attorney’s Victim Services Division is going blue on Go Blue Day observed on April 5. The wearing of blue symbolizes a commitment to ending child abuse and raising awareness during Child Abuse Prevention Month in April. Photo: Lauren Weitz

By Carlos Villatoro
Public Affairs and Media Officer

April is shaping up to be quite busy for the Napa County District Attorney’s Victim Services Division and its community partners.

Aside from Victim Services Week observed April 21-27, the Napa County District Attorney’s Office is teaming up with SAVS (NEWS’ Sexual Assault Victim Services), the Monarch Justice Center, Courage Center, and Cope Family Center to celebrate Sexual Assault Awareness Month and Child Abuse Prevention Month, both observed in April.

It's a month chock full of events dedicated to learning about sexual assault, child abuse, and the rights

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Spring is in the air and with it comes opportunity. For us at the Napa County District Attorney’s Office, this means coming together once again in the spirit of collaboration to recognize two very important issues that our office deals with regularly.

April ushers in Sexual Assault Awareness Month and Child Abuse Prevention Month: both are great opportunities to provide outreach to the community and inform Napa County residents about the signs and impacts of these crimes on victims.

The way the DA’s Office handles these crimes is not unlike the way we come together to plan the outreach we are going to perform in April, which you can read about in this edition of Newsline.

It’s done in a collaboration with our law enforcement and community partners who provide victims a voice in the process and guiding them through an often stressful, traumatic time in their lives.

Never has that been so evident than with the rise of the Monarch Justice Center and its Courage Center. Before the opening of Monarch in 2023, a victim of sexual abuse or intimate partner violence would have to seek services in a piecemeal fashion, going from agency to agency to get help.

This approach proved to be problematic for victims of crime in Napa County because it forced them to re-tell their stories to each individual agency, forcing them to re-live these horrific experiences.

Today, Monarch supports victims of sexual assault, sexual trafficking, stalking, child abuse, elder or dependent abuse, and domestic violence. And it couldn’t be done without the help and support of our partner agencies and sponsors.
of people who are victimized by these and other crimes.

Planning for April’s events began in early March, as members of the Napa County DA’s Victim Services Division met with members of SAVS, Monarch Justice Center’s Courage Center, and Cope Family Center to plan a window display designed to raise awareness about child abuse and sexual assault. The window depicts a neighborhood, symbolizing the collaboration that its designers participated in to make the display.

The way that the designers decorated the window at the Napa County District Attorney’s Office is a metaphor for how they approach victim services in Napa County — with care, collaboration and meticulous planning.

“The national theme for this year’s Sexual Assault Awareness Month is ‘Building Connected Communities,’ and Napa County perfectly embodies this idea,” said Erin Harper, Napa County District Attorney Victim Witness Program Manager. “NEWS, SAVS, the Monarch Justice Center, the Courage Center, the Cope Family Center and the Victim Services Division have been working together – as a connected community - to create a collaborative window display and series of events to bring recognition to the topics of sexual assault, child abuse and victims’ rights. Together, we all work to make sure victims know that justice and healing are possible. Each of our agencies share the same goals – bringing hope to victims and survivors and ensuring the well-being of Napa County.”

While the window is a good beacon for anyone strolling on First Street to gain knowledge of sexual assault and child abuse, it’s but a small piece of the puzzle that defines the team’s outreach efforts in the month of April.

**Go Blue Day**

April is nationally recognized as Child Abuse Prevention Month and Go Blue Day observed on Friday, April 5, signifies a commitment to preventing child abuse. At the Napa County District Attorney’s Office, several staff members will don blue garb to raise awareness about child abuse and will be utilizing the Napa County District Attorney’s Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts to further spread the word. Use hashtag #EveryChildNeedsAHero to post on social media and join in on Go Blue Day.

**Kids Day 2024**

This free family fun event will take place on Saturday, April 13, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., at Oxbow Commons Park, 1268 McKinstry St., Napa.

The event will feature many resources for parents and families, activities and games for children, entertainment, food and festivity.

Stop by the Napa County DA’s Victim Services Division and the Monarch Justice Center’s Courage Center tables to learn about the ways that the Napa County DA’s Office and its partners support victims and witnesses both in and out of court.

**Walk A Mile in Her Shoes**

There’s an old saying: “You can’t understand another person’s experience until you’ve walked a mile in their shoes.”

It’s in that same spirit that men will wear and walk in high heels to raise awareness about sexual violence and gender biases, gender identity, and gender relations.

The Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event will take place on April 14 beginning at Veteran’s Memorial Park in Napa at 1-3 p.m., and only the men are required to wear high heels. Registration is $10 for individuals, $120 for a team of 2-10 people, or $250 for a team/group of 11 or more people.

Registration includes access to red shoes for your walk, a bag of curated goodies from our sponsors and partner organizations, and entry to win door prizes! To register visit the NEWS registration page.

**Victims’ Rights Week**

Victims’ Rights Week is observed April 21-27 and is designed to raise awareness about the impact of crime on individuals, families, and
Kalina Johnson joined the Napa County District Attorney’s Office as a Legal Secretary I in late February.

Born and raised in Southern California, Kalina is committed to making a positive impact on her community and is passionate about justice.

Kalina is currently pursuing her degree in Criminal Justice and has a goal of combining her academic pursuits with practical experience to gain understanding of the legal landscape.

Her academic achievements, coupled with her hands-on approach to learning, make her a valuable addition to the Napa County District Attorney’s team and she looks forward to contributing her skills and enthusiasm to the pursuit of justice and upholding the values that define the legal profession.

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This year’s theme is “How would you help? Options, services, and hope for crime survivors,” and the Napa DA’s Office will be posting several pieces of content on its Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram accounts during the week in observance of Victims’ Rights Week.

Demin Day

Wear denim on April 24 to wrap up the busy month and show your dedication to preventing sexual assault.

Much like the Go Blue Day event, Denim Day urges individuals to don denim to raise awareness about sexual assault and show their dedication to preventing it.
IN THE COMMUNITY

Options, Services and Hope for Crime Survivors

By Alejandra Mendieta-Bedolla, Victim Services Coordinator

Every year, since 1981, communities across our country dedicate a week in April to observe National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW). This year, NCVRW is April 21-27, 2024. The primary goals of NCVRW are to create awareness around victims of crime rights, services available to victims, and to promote safety and justice for victims of crime.

In California, there are 17 rights afforded to crime victims as part of the State Constitution. These were enacted in 2008 and are known as the Victims' Bill of Rights Act or "Marcy's Law." These rights ensure that victims can actively and safely participate in the criminal justice system. Some of the rights included in Marcy's law are the right for victims of crime to be informed of and be present at criminal proceedings, to be heard, to be treated with respect and dignity, and to request restitution from the defendant. Victims also have the right to request confidentiality to prevent disclosure of protected information.

The Napa County District Attorney's Victim Services Division ensures that the rights of victims of crime are observed. Our mission is to “Guide victims of crime and their families through the criminal justice system in a supportive, compassionate, respectful, and culturally competent manner. Our Division is dedicated to providing information, resources and non-judgmental services to our community. We are committed to upholding victims’ rights through education and inclusivity so that their voices may be heard; thereby transforming the lives of every victim we serve.”

To view all 17 victims of crime rights, visit the Office of the Attorney General's website.
“You can’t understand another person’s experience until you’ve walked a mile in their shoes.” That’s the motto that guides Walk a Mile in Her Shoes, an annual event held in April in conjunction with Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM). The movement began in 2001 with a challenge for men to leave their comfort zones and switch out their shoes for a pair of red pumps.

The goal was to get them to experience the difficulty of what it’s like for a victim to seek resources after experiencing sexual violence. This event sparked an international movement for years to come and is celebrated locally at Veterans Memorial Park.

Each year, the SAVS (Sexual Assault Victim Services) department at NEWS, holds the important job to provide outreach to the community. Whether it’s tabling throughout the valley at various schools or partnering with a local restaurant or vendor to reach different audiences. However, in 2023 with the help of the Napa District Attorney’s Office, Napa Valley College, Aldea and NEWS, we were able to bring this important event to Napa. Having had a good turnout for an event that hadn’t been done in years, made us eager to make the next one bigger and better. When the time came to start planning for SAAM 2024, the group naturally came together again. This year NEWS is spearheading Walk a Mile in Her Shoes with the support from the Napa County District Attorney’s Office, Napa Valley College, Soroptimist International of Napa, and Monarch Family Justice Center.

Our goal is to send out the message that everyone, not just one gender, experiences this violence, and is widespread across many backgrounds. Walk a Mile in Her Shoes is a dramatic opportunity to bring this call to action of creating safe and supportive spaces to our community. We want to engage the community and get them talking about gender biases, gender identity and sexual violence. With that, we are inviting a variety of agencies to join us on this big day to provide outreach and information to participants and anyone walking by. We took the name and intention of such an important movement and made it our own to honor all who have been victimized. We had folks of all different backgrounds and ages join us last year. Folks who were not afraid to throw on some high heels and make a statement. Seeing nothing but smiles and laughter and, most importantly, the connectedness of people with different upbringings and stories was inspiring to witness.

In January and February alone, NEWS received about 40 sexual assault victim services referrals for men, women and children. These referrals include those who have and have not reported to law enforcement. These folks still have the right to seek services and having events like this brings awareness to those who may not know about what services are available to them. We encourage all to join us in this walk for hope, for change, and for awareness. We all know at least one person who has experienced sexual violence and change begins within each one of us. Join us on Sunday April 14, 1-3 p.m., at Veterans Memorial Park in Downtown Napa to walk a mile in her shoes. To register for this special event, please visit our registration page.
IN THE COMMUNITY

Out & About

Career Day at Phillips Elementary School
3/13/2024

CSTI Media Spokesperson Training
03/22/2024

Blue Skies Ahead- Gala for Napa Valley’s Mental Health
3/2/2024

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**People V. Benjamin Casas**

Napa County Superior Court Judge Francisca Tisher sentenced Benjamin Casas, age 35, to 214 years to life in prison following a trial in which a Napa jury found him guilty of 18 counts lewd or lascivious acts with a person under the age of 14 years, three counts of oral copulation of a person under 14, and one count of forcible oral copulation with a child 14 or over.

The jury found true the special allegations of sex crime involving a person under 14; position of trust; vulnerable victim; planning sophistication, and professionalism; and lewd and lascivious act against more than one victim.

The sentencing of Mr. Casas, which took place on March 11, 2024, came after several of his victims delivered witness impact statements, describing the way that his crimes affected them.

Napa County Deputy District Attorneys Kecia Lind and Shashawnya Worley prosecuted the case against Mr. Casas on behalf of the People.

**People V. Carlos Cabrera**

A Napa jury convicted Carlos Cabrera, age 59, of sexual penetration of a child age 10 or under, lewd and lascivious act with a child under age 14, and possession of a controlled substance during a trial that took place in mid-March.

The court found true the following allegations which may result in a life sentence for Mr. Cabrera: the defendant was previously convicted of a serious and violent felony; the defendant had previously been convicted of a prior sex offense involving a minor; the defendant had previously served a prison term; and the defendant’s priors and/or sustained petitions have been increasing in seriousness.

The case against Mr. Cabrera was prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Colleen McMahon. The defendant is ordered to return to court on April 11, 2024, 1:30 p.m., in Department 3 of the Napa County Superior Court for a sentencing hearing.
**People V. Yobani Montanez**

A Napa jury convicted Yobani Cesar Montanez, age 40, of driving under the influence of alcohol with a prior DUI, driving while having a .08 percent or high blood alcohol with prior, and providing false information to a police officer.

The jury also found true the special allegation of refusal to submit to a chemical test. The trial lasted three days and was prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Erik Lawrence.

This latest conviction marks the defendant’s fourth DUI since 2003. In this case, in the early morning hours of August 23, 2022, Mr. Montanez was driving north on Highway 29 near Salvador Avenue when he sideswiped a vehicle. He subsequently crashed his vehicle into a power pole in the intersection of Byway E and El Centro Avenue, tangling the vehicle on a power pole guide wire.

During the police contact Mr. Montanez was uncooperative with the DUI investigation, claimed he wasn't driving, and refused all tests.

Napa County Superior Court Judge Scott Young sentenced Mr. Montanez to four years’ probation, 60 days in jail, and to pay the fine of $1,980 and a restitution fee of $150.

**People V. Carlos Gabarrete**

The California Board of Parole Hearings denied parole for Carlos Gabarrete, age 52, who is currently serving a life sentence in state prison for the sexual assault of a former girlfriend.

The Board of Parole Hearings denied the prisoner’s parole for five years after a parole suitability hearing that took place on January 31, 2024, via teleconference at California Correctional Institute.

Gabarrete stands convicted of forcible sodomy, forcible oral copulation, assault with a firearm, and false imprisonment in connection with an incident that took place on September 21, 1999.

On that day, Gabarrete went to the home of his former girlfriend and lured her from her home by asking for help pulling his vehicle out of a ditch. When she agreed to help him, he persuaded her to drive him to a secluded location, pulled out a small automatic pistol and threatened to kill her, and struck her in the face with the gun.

While brandishing the gun, Gabarrete forced the woman to orally copulate him, before ordering her into the passenger seat of the vehicle and forcibly sodomizing her. At some point during the sexual assaults, Gabarrete fired one shot from the pistol. After the sexual assaults, Gabarrete ordered the woman to drive around, pull over and park, and threatened to kill himself. It was only after Gabarrete’s victim agreed to resume their relationship, if he promised to not commit suicide, that he allowed her to drive him to his car and end the incident.

Napa County Deputy District Attorney Rolando Mazariegos, Victim Services Coordinator Alejandra Mendieta-Bedolla, and the victim attended Gabarrete’s parole suitability hearing to argue against his release based on the cruelty and callousness of the sex crimes, his continued lack of remorse or insight into the events of the crimes, his continued criminal activity and ongoing criminal thinking during his incarceration, his refusal of all counseling and coping programs offered in prison, and the extreme danger he presents to the community should he be paroled.
"You can't understand another person's experience until you've walked a mile in their shoes."

We invite you to join and support

**WALK A MILE IN HER SHOES!**

**SUNDAY, APRIL 14, 2024**
**1:00PM TO 3:00PM**
**VETERANS PARK, NAPA**

For more information on **WALK A MILE IN HER SHOES** and to sign up or donate follow the QR code.
"No puede entender la experiencia de otra persona hasta que haya caminado una milla en sus zapatos."

Le invitamos a sumarse y apoyar ¡Camine Una Millar en sus Zapatos!

DOMINGO, 14 DE ABRIL, 2024
1:00PM A 3:00PM
PARQUE DE LOS VETERANOS, NAPA

Para más información sobre Camine Una Millar en sus Zapatos y para registrarse o donar, sigue el código QR