

Advocacy group steps up

Trained volunteers sought to assist sexual abuse victims

Iowa News Service and The Gazette

IOWA CITY — Trained volunteers who can advocate for sexual assault survivors are needed now more than ever, following a recent rash of assaults by strangers in the Iowa City area, Tara Wood, volunteer coordinator for the University of Iowa Rape Victim Advocacy Program, said.

RVAP is beginning a 32-hour Advocate Training Program on Sept. 10 to prepare female volunteers to provide support and assistance to victims and survivors of sexual assault. Classes are limited to 12 people and the registration deadline is Aug. 30.

"The training is for folks doing direct services, being present at evidence-gathering exams, so we're looking for women" ages 19 and older for this specific training program, Wood explained. "Mature experience is important in the work we do."

Volunteers who are bilingual in Spanish and English are especially needed, Wood said, adding RVAP wants to increase the level of services offered to Spanish speakers.

RVAP also serves male clients, Wood noted. "One thing people may not know about us is that we definitely have full services for male sexual assault victims and for the significant others, family members and friends of victims."

Crisis lines, one-on-one counseling and in-person advocacy are offered, she said, and if family members

RVAP

■ **Training:** To apply for the RVAP Volunteer Program, call Tara Wood at (319) 335-6001 or e-mail

volunteer-coordinator-rvap@uiowa.edu

■ **RVAP location:** 320 S. Linn St., Iowa City

■ **Information:** www.rvap.org Web site provides information about statistics, education, victim services and resources.

■ **Rape Crisis Line:** (319) 335-6000. The 24-hour number offers free and confidential information, support, advocacy and counseling to victims/survivors of sexual assault and their partners, friends and family members.

Trained sexual assault advocates provide information, phone counseling, in-person medical and legal advocacy and resources and referrals.

■ **Iowa Sexual Abuse Hotline:** 1-(800) 284-7821.

are at the scene and upset, volunteers call staff advocates for assistance.

"With all the stranger assaults in the community — both the recent ones and some assaults from May 2007 that are related — we've had a lot of women wondering what they can do to feel safe as well as help others," Wood said. "Becoming an advocate is a great way to empower oneself and help others."

During the training program, volunteers will be taught all aspects of sexual assault including sociological and cultural factors of a "rape culture"; victim impact (physical, psychological, spiritual); helping significant others; offender typology (grooming

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Rape Victim Advocacy Program Volunteer Coordinator Tara Wood stands in front of a cork board with photos of volunteers at the RVAP office in Iowa City. RVAP is seeking to train more volunteers to provide support and assistance to victims and survivors of sexual assault. A 32-hour Advocate Training Program for women ages 19 and over begins Sept. 10.



The University of Iowa Rape Victim Advocacy Program is housed in this office on South Linn Street in Iowa City. The program offers such services as crisis phone lines, one-on-one counseling and in-person advocacy for sexual assault victims and for the significant others, family members and friends of victims.