

# Helping others

## Crime victim fights for state assistance program

By Janice Brunson  
staff writer

Sheila Mandt was a 19-year-old University of Detroit coed, a self-described child of privilege from Bloomfield Hills, when in January of 1985 she was brutally raped in broad daylight and left on a Detroit street.

Only now, nearly five years later, is she able to confront the savage attack that irreversibly changed her life, emotionally scarring her with continuing terror and straining relationships with family and friends.

"I grew up in a comfortable house," she said. "My father was very successful. I attended private schools. I had anything a kid could ever want. But it was a glass bubble and people in the bubble are com-

pletely unaware of what's really going on in the world."

"It was as gruesome as some as it is," said Mandt, now 24 and living in Birmingham.

Part of Mandt's healing process is fierce dedication to the Michigan Victim Assistance Network, a non-profit organization that provides training seminars for law enforcement officers, members of the judiciary and others who deal with victims of crime.

Because of a recent change in law, the program has lost \$50,000 of its state funding, placing it in serious economic jeopardy.

"A PROGRAM LIKE this needs to be around. With every single crime, there are many people who suffer.

The actual victim may be dead, but there are other survivors," said Mandt, who is fighting to save the network by hosting a fund-raising event on Dec. 13-January. (See accompanying article.)

The Michigan Crime Victim's Rights Act, enacted in late 1985, did not exist at the time of Mandt's rape and she did not seek support assistance elsewhere, either during the ensuing trial of her two assailants, each sentenced to 150 years for rape and attempted murder, or later.

"Fortunately, everybody I dealt with in the criminal justice system was very nice and helpful," said Mandt.

Still, "I didn't want to talk to the police or anyone else about it."

In fact, had the incident occurred closer to home in the suburbs where it would likely have received wider press coverage, Mandt said she would not have reported it.

Talking about it, seeing press reports of it, made the incident more alive. Silence helped block horrify-

ing memories.

Nor did she at first inform her parents, sister or two brothers. They learned of the attack two weeks later. It was discussed briefly and never again mentioned. To this day, few friends are aware it ever happened.

"People tell me I'm lucky. I'm alive and well. But part of me was killed and for a long time I wished I had been blown to pieces. I didn't want to pick up and continue."

"I NEEDED HELP" then, but I didn't realize it."

It was not until a friend noticed her extreme distress at the mention of crime that Mandt was finally able to confront the terror of her experience.

"We were watching the (TV) news when I thought, my God, crime is going on everywhere. I became enraged."

When the friend, a male, asked if she had ever been raped, Mandt at first denied the truth. Then, "sensing

he would not judge me," she told him what had happened. For the first time in more than three years, "I was able to say the word rape."

Tragedy struck Mandt again, a year later, when her father, Edward, 53, died suddenly at home. Mandt discovered the body.

Her father, a successful businessman who was active in the Boys and Girls Clubs of Michigan, had instilled in Mandt a strong sense of social justice, Mandt said.

"I grew up wanting to save the world."

Her fierce devotion to the Network for victims of crime is Mandt's attempt to do her best at something. "When I die, I can say she gave 110 percent to this."

Mandt's rape has shown her that dealing with resulting feelings of guilt, shame and fear is difficult under the best of circumstances. Dealing with it alone is "hell." People may not want to face such things, but they can't be swept under the rug."



Sheila Mandt

## Funding cuts hurt program

By Janice Brunson  
staff writer

During the nearly four years the Michigan Victim Assistance Network has provided service, the organization has received U.S. presidential commendations for its efforts in training some 3,500 law enforcement officers and others in dealing with victims of crime.

Founded by the Michigan Sheriffs' Association, the network "deals with the plight of victims, understanding what the victim or the family is actually going through," said Judy Nichols, director of the Lansing-based organization. Training is provided free of charge upon request.

"Anybody can request it," including ordinary citizens, said Nichols, whose interest in victims' rights stems from the 1983 murder of her son in Denver while he was a security officer in the Air Force.

"I've not seen other law courses of training, ranging in length from four hours to four days each. Training is based on criteria established by the National Organization for Victim Assistance.

"Fifty percent of all crime goes unreported. If people can count on a positive reaction from the criminal justice system, more victims will come forward," Nichols said.

**THE NETWORK** is the result of the Michigan Crime Victim's Rights Act, co-authored by Detroit Recorder's Court Judge Michael Talbot and state Rep. William Van Rogenmort.

Based on the law, a victim must be informed of his or her rights within 24 hours of a crime. The law also provides protection for the victim, guarantees his or her participation in all judicial proceedings and allows for restitution from those who are convicted of the crime. When it implemented the law in October 1985, Michigan was the first state to enact such a comprehensive law, according to Van Rogenmort, who said victim rights are guaranteed as of January 1988 by the state constitution.

"We take care of the victim from the time of the crime all the way through, including notification in the event of a prison escape," Van Rogenmort said.

Until recently, the Network received some \$25,000 annually in grants from the Michigan Justice Training Commission, nearly half of the organization's annual operating budget. However, new criteria has eliminated this source of funding and the Network is now dependent on membership dues and other contributions.

"Training is an obvious aspect, if the language and the spirit of the law is to be implemented," Talbot said.

Van Rogenmort agrees, adding "If training is not properly funded under the law, it should be. I intend to investigate the situation and, if necessary, correct it."

## Abuse programs face drastic cuts

By Mary Rodriguez  
staff writer

Child abuse prevention programs locally and across the state face a perilous future unless administrators can recoup a whopping 62 percent drop in federal funding.

"It's a hell of a mess," said David Mills, director of the Children's Trust Fund. "The last two years we got \$49,000. This year we were notified two days after the fiscal year began (Oct. 1) that we were getting only \$19,000. This was a huge, unexpected cut."

"This cut represents one third of the \$1 million in grants the fund planned to make this year. Established in 1983, the fund is a non-profit agency established as a permanent source of funding for local child abuse and neglect programs. The majority of funding comes from Michigan tax-payers who check off a donation box on state income tax returns. This year \$750,000 was received by income tax check and another \$200,000 by direct donations."

The \$49,000 cut by Human Development, a subcommittee of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services which oversees the national program, translates to a 30 percent cut in Michigan programs.

"We may lose on appeal but we won't lose without a fight," Mills said in an interview from his Lansing office.

WHILE OTHER states were affected, Michigan's budget slash was the most severe.

The state, the national office uses, is that an individual staff member reviews the application against the legislation. The past two years (Michigan) was reviewed by the same staffer.

This year a different staffer reviewed the application and disallowed items that were previously accepted."

Mills was outraged that public health nurses working with high-risk pregnant teenagers was considered inappropriate for federal funding.

"The issue, the issue is hard to debate," he said.

Nevertheless Mills is planning a trip to Washington, D.C., with representatives from trust funds in four

other states which suffered cutbacks. The contingent will meet with Dr. Wade Horn, commissioner for the office of Human Development. The fund has a \$5 million national budget.

"It's a judgment call and they changed the umbrella," Mills said.

Michigan's fund operates six different programs which fall into two categories: local councils (there are 70 grass roots organizations in the state), and parent education programs.

"We believe a concerned knowledgeable citizenry is the best prevention against child abuse," Mills said. "It's built on a simple concept — that parenting is a skill that has to be learned like learning to drive a car."

One program works with women from seven months stage of pregnancy until their child is a year old, helping develop parenting skills and understanding child development.

The fund also supports catch key programs for before- and after-school care for early elementary school aged children. Another program sends theatrical production companies to schools and community groups to teach children about sexual abuse.

NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED family resource centers help stressed out single parents cope with the demands of parenting and also acts as a crisis center.

The trust fund board has decided to take no action until its meeting on Jan. 17, 1990. It will operate its first quarter budget as planned.

In addition to appealing the decision, we have gone to corporations asking for donations and we have gone to the state legislature. We have three months to generate \$300,000."

If the money is not raised in one capacity or another, then cut will be made.

"We could give everyone a 20 percent across the board cut, eliminate 30 percent of the programs or some combination thereof," Mills said.

All of the state's 4.3 million tax-payers gave \$5 a year for two years, the trust fund could get along with the interest, and wouldn't have to raise another dollar, Mills said.

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