

The Massachusetts Survivors of Homicide Victims Network Report Back

March 2017



Inform, Influence, and Impact Policy

Convened by Louis D. Brown Peace Institute
December 3, 2016





Launching the Massachusetts Survivors of Homicide Victims Network

On December 3, 2016, 150 survivors of homicide victims gathered at Lombardo's to formally launch the Massachusetts Survivors of Homicide Victims Network. The Survivors Network was established so family members of murder victims can work in unity to inform, influence, and impact policy. The Survivors Network is rooted in the belief that through our lived experience and expertise, we can be and already are leaders in creating and sustaining more peaceful communities. As survivors, we know better than anybody about the impact of homicide on individuals, families, and communities and we know best what we need to heal.

The inaugural convening of the Survivors Network was held in December to honor Survivors of Homicide Victims Awareness Month (SHVAM). SHVAM is a month-long effort (November 20-December 20) to educate the public and policymakers about the impact of murder on families and communities and recognize the diverse contributions of the survivor's movement. Many survivors present at the convening were part of the statewide organizing effort to pass state legislation that established SHVAM in 2000. SHVAM is one example of the ways survivors have mobilized to make a difference in Massachusetts.

Our first Survivors Network convening was a celebration of everything we've already accomplished together and the power we have to do even more. Some survivors who attended have been on their healing journey for many years, and some newer survivors came to make connections and receive authentic support.

"The vibe of the room felt like a family reunion. We were understood without having to explain. We gave ourselves and each other permission to cry or not cry, to embrace, to laugh, and to be still." -- Survivor





There was a station for us to try on the healing practice of Peace Play. Peace Play allows individuals and families to express and reflect on their struggles and strengths by creating scenes using miniature figures in a tray of sand. We created sand trays that reflected the courage it took for us to step forward and join the Survivors Network and sand trays that represented our role in the movement. Doing Peace Play together was therapeutic and also symbolic of what we're capable of building when we work together. The sand trays reinforced that each of us bring something unique and special that is needed and valued in the survivors' movement.

Survivors of homicide victims are a substantial yet underserved community in Massachusetts. Sibling survivor and Program Coordinator at the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute Alexandra Chéry shared with us,

My brother Louis was killed in December of 1993. Between 1994 and 2015, there were over 3,500 homicides in the state of Massachusetts. For each homicide victim, research tells us there are at least 10 immediate family members- and that's a very conservative number. This means more than 35,000 people became survivors of homicide victims since my brother was murdered.

While politicians can often quote the homicide rate in their city or town, the Survivors Network aims to hold officials accountable for addressing the survivor rate across the state by making a plan to provide the short-term and long-term services we need to live in peace after our loved ones are murdered.





We also completed a survey to capture the work survivors are currently doing and hope to do as part of the Survivors Network. Survivors are currently educating young people and families on both sides of gun violence, working with women and their families to break cycles of gun violence, creating healing spaces for survivors, helping survivors apply for Victim Compensation, and supporting fellow survivors heal and transform their grief into constructive energy. Many survivors expressed that their work is dedicated to our loved ones, so their lives weren't lost in vain.

Survivors are passionate about working on a wide range of issues through the Survivors Network including: restorative justice, ending homelessness, violence prevention, police brutality, raising funds for burials, engaging and educating the faith community, supporting men's grieving and healing processes, unsolved homicides, and violence prevention. As survivors, we're moving together toward our goal of creating more peaceful communities where all of our families have what we need and all our children are valued.

"Scan the room and make a personal commitment to bringing in those who are not here today in to this statewide community into this survivor movement. I invite you to challenge yourself and others to shift our language. We will not continue to allow anyone to say 'nobody is doing anything; somebody has to do something.' Because we are 150 survivors strong in this room, and there are more ready to stand with us if we ask them." -- Alexandra Chéry



"The Warren Daniel Hairston Project's mission is to support, educate, and serve families on both sides of homicide in order to break the cycle of violence and victimization." -- Ruth Rollins, Survivor



The Massachusetts Survivors of Homicide Victims Network vision for 2017:

1) Outreach and Relationship Building

Please answer the call to connect with survivors in your life and invite them to be part of the Network.

2) Budget Advocacy

At the convening, Chaplain Clementina Chéry announced her vision for increasing the line item for survivors of homicide victims (4513-1098). For years, the Peace Institute has received some funding through this line item. It is not enough and it is always a struggle.

For FY18 the Peace Institute is proposing an increase of the survivors' line item to \$500,000. \$150,000 will go to sustain the Peace Institute's programs and services, including coordinating the Network. \$350,000 will be distributed to members of the Survivors Network through a simple and transparent grant process. This money will be for survivors who are providing services or doing peacemaking work in their communities. Please know, none of this money is guaranteed but if we work together we have a better chance of getting what we need.

Here is how we advocate in unity:

- **Sign a letter of support** from the Survivors Network for the line item increase to \$500,000 (\$150,000 to the Peace Institute, \$350,000 distributed through the Peace Institute to the Survivors Network). You can sign onto the letter here: <https://goo.gl/1nFcXV>
- **Call and email your state legislators** asking for \$500,000 for line item 4513-1098. <http://ldbpeaceinstitute.org/news/fy2018-budget-news>

3) Amend Victim Compensation Statute

We believe that all families of murder victims deserve to be treated with dignity and compassion regardless of the circumstances surrounding a loved one's murder. One of the major burdens surviving family members of victims face is paying for funeral and burial expenses. Too many families in our network have been re-traumatized when they are eventually denied by Victim Compensation because of a clause in the state statute that requires a family's claim to be reduced or denied in the event their loved one "contributed to" their own death.



We want to change that so that nobody else has to suffer. We believe it's a human right to lay your loved one to rest with respect. The Peace Institute wrote legislation to amend Victim Compensation so that no families of murder victims can be denied reimbursement for modest funeral and burial costs. Representative Evandro Carvalho filed the bill, and Mayor Marty Walsh adopted H.742 as one of his legislative priorities.

In the coming months, we will need survivors to come out full force in support of this bill. We will be looking for survivors who have been denied Victim Compensation to write and give testimony, tell your story to the community and to the media, and engage your community to call, write, and lobby legislators.

There's a role for everyone who wants to be involved. We're ready to offer whatever support you need to prepare yourself and your family to participate in advocacy. We are open to all of your creative ideas! If you would like to be involved with organizing, educating the public, or advocating for this bill please contact us.

4) Develop the Network

We are just at the beginning of the beautiful process of building the Network! We're currently working on creating an online forum so we can engage with each other in between convenings. We are also looking to develop a logo and materials. Can you help? If you are a designer and would like to submit a logo, or you have an idea for a powerful image to represent our network, please reach out.

**To get involved and join the efforts of the network please contact:
Alexandra@ldbpeaceinstitute.org or call 617-825-1917.**



Thank you for everything you do in honor of your loved ones and in the name of peace. Together we will inform, influence, and impact policy!

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