Take Back the Night is an annual international event in which participants march and rally to end sexual violence and combat the culture of rape. On April 1st, 2015, over 200 people marched on the University of Florida campus to express our community’s voice against sexual violence. The number of people who attended the event spoke volumes as to how many survivors and supporters are actively seeking change for the residents and survivors of Gainesville. The total number of people who came was over a 100% increase compared to the population from last year, reflecting the impact of this year’s attacks on our campus and a growing awareness of the significant problem interpersonal violence is for men and women across the globe. On this night, members of the Gainesville community—college students, high school students, local residents, and alumni—came together to empower and humble one another in a fight that goes unseen by many. Survivors and supporters marched, rallied, and shared their stories amid candlelight—all to give healing to a voice of this epidemic we so often consider a distant problem.

The Office of Victims Services collaborated with other UF organizations such as U Matter We Care, STRIVE, and Women’s Student Association to plan and host the march and rally. Additionally, No Southern Accent, one of UF’s a cappella groups, performed before and after the march to set an uplifting tone for the participants. There was a sense of solidarity and strength as we marched on campus, gaining support of the passing cars who would honk as they drove by. Marchers carried signs that resonated with the purpose of the event, sharing comments and statistics to continue to voice the emotional appeals of participants and provide education to onlookers. Everyone there encouraged one another with their presence and their shouts. We marched to shatter the silence and end the violence.

"A Victim of rape experiences many forms of pain. Shame should not be one of them"

Unshame.org is a web application that connects victims of Sexual Violence with a supportive community through providing messages of hope, resilience and compassion. The objective of Unshames.org is to end the shaming and blaming that is directed at rape victims. It is dedicated to the belief that there is no shame, and no disgrace in being the survivor of sexual assault. One of the most damaging emotions that a victim of sexual trauma experiences is shame, a word often conjoined with blame. Shame is a particularly powerful factor in that it often prevents survivors from disclosing and seeking help. Whether directed at victims or internalized by victims of sexual assault, shame is a key factor in silencing victims, and often results in attributing rape to the victim as in, “I am responsible for everything that happened.” That makes the trauma of rape all the more devastating.

Through Unshame.org, you and I can show victims and survivors around the world what compassion, inspiration, advocacy and counseling feels like. What it looks like. For the person who has felt anxious or fearful about speaking to someone about rape, your message might give them a reason to take a risk and experience what support feels like. I invite you to inspire survivors through your compassion and creativity. Please say "YES!" to add your voice to reach people through your actions and words. If you are interested in volunteering your time or giving financially to the success of Unshame.org please contact Gretchen at Gretchen@unshame.org.
**Summer reading @ OVS**

In recent months, the University of Florida had the privilege of hearing from President Jimmy Carter regarding his wife, First Lady Roslynn Carter’s, newly released book *Within Our Reach*: a commentary on the history and current status of mental illness and resources in America.

OVS had the opportunity to join in a book review and discussion with Santa Fe College, local representatives from the National Alliance on Mental Illness and members of the healthcare community to discuss how profound this deep and yet accessible work is in identifying the chasm that exists for the members of our community struggling with depression, anxiety and the aftermath of trauma—and other mental illness. Alachua County is bountiful with resources for those suffering from mental illness, both diagnosed and undiagnosed, and yet Mrs. Carter asks thoughtful questions about how beneficial our current system proves to be.

We, at OVS, highly recommend you add this to your stack of summer reading as a thoughtful engagement of our national and local care for those in need of support.

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**The Search is On:**

**Growing The Peer Advocate Program**

The UFPD’s Office of Victim Services is actively seeking student leaders for the Peer Advocate team! This team is comprised of UF Students interested in developing Victim Services on UF’s Campus. Peer Advocates will have the opportunity to educate peers in on-campus presentations, develop training programs related to victim services, and assist in the coordination and implementation of community outreach events. Applicants should be at least 18 years of age, have an interest in topics relevant to victim services, and a desire to advocate on behalf of fellow Gators.

For more information, you may contact Annie Carper or Naomi Phineas at 352-392-5648 or e-mail your resume and letter of interest to anniekcarper@ufl.edu and nphineas@ufl.edu.

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**Who Are We?**

The Office of Victim Services (OVS) assists all victims of crime including, but not limited to, sexual assault, battery, intimate partner violence, stalking & or harassment.

Advocacy services we provide include: crisis intervention, accompanying victims to criminal justice/Student Conduct proceedings, obtaining financial reimbursement for losses/expenses, filing for Injunction for Protection Orders & advocating for students with professors if special accommodations are necessary.

The role of the victim advocate is to inform victims of crime on what options are available, and support or assist them in whatever option they choose. Victim Advocates are a free and confidential resource, available 24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week.

Additionally, OVS is available to make educational presentations covering a broad scope of topics.

For more information or to receive services, please call 352.392.5648 from 8am-5pm, or 352.392.1111 after hours.