

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

September 19, 2019

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**NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE FOR MURDER VICTIMS:**

**LOCAL SUPPORT GROUP AVAILABLE FOR THOSE IMPACTED BY HOMICIDE**

*County of Albemarle and City of Charlottesville:* Many days you can listen to or read the news and learn about a murder in your community, around the state, or in another area of the country. In 2017, there were over 17,000 homicides in the United States, including 455 in Virginia<sup>1</sup>. Although these crimes are tragic, to many untouched directly by homicide, it may just be one of many news headlines. However, for victims' families, the impact is far reaching and long lasting.

When a loved one is murdered, surviving family members suffer an unimaginable loss, and require significant support in their interactions with the criminal justice system. Survivors of homicide will

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Center for Health Statistics – Stats for the State of Virginia  
<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/states/virginia/virginia.htm>

often say they belong to a club that no one ever wishes to join. Author and survivor Bill Jenkins wrote in his book, *What to Do When the Police Leave (2001)* “A violent death takes out everyone around it....Those left behind are grief-stricken, stunned, and caught up in a system they are neither prepared for or understand.”

September 25 is the 12th annual observance of the National Day of Remembrance for Murder Victims (NDoR). This is the day in 1978 that 19-year-old Lisa Hullinger was murdered, and her parents subsequently formed Parents of Murdered Children, a grief support organization. Congress designated this annual date to honor and remember homicide victims and the devastating impact their tragic deaths have on families, friends, and communities. Its purpose also includes focusing on ways to support and help survivors.

What can you do to help a survivor? Experts say that listening without advice or judgment, sharing memories and stories, and allowing survivors’ intense pain to be expressed without pressure to “get over it” or “just get on with life” are some positive ways to direct your care and concern.

Support groups can also provide an excellent forum for healing. The Virginia Victim Assistance Network (VVAN), a nonprofit organization with a mission to be a voice for crime victims and the professionals who serve them, will have 18 homicide survivor support groups in operation around the state by the end of October 2019.

Locally, two support groups are offered in Charlottesville and welcomes participants from neighboring localities as well. The County of Albemarle and the City of Charlottesville Victim/Witness Program is partnering with VVAN to help make referrals and coordinate the group. There is a group is for adults who have lost a loved one to homicide and a group for teenagers ages 12-17. The City of Commonwealth’s Attorney Joe Platania adds, “The Charlottesville Commonwealth’s Attorney’s Office is pleased to recognize and fully endorse the important work of the newly formed Homicide Survivor Support Groups. As prosecutors, we have witnessed the long lasting and traumatic effects on those left behind in the wake of violence. Mothers and fathers not being able to say goodbye or children waking up to learn that their parent is no longer with them. The physical and emotional impact on survivors of a homicide is well documented. Our hope is that this support group will foster healing, build resilience, and provide coping skills for families and loved ones who have suffered these unspeakable tragedies.”

Albemarle County Commonwealth's Attorney Robert Tracci commented, "Behind every crime is a victim who deserves justice. It is neither compassionate nor appropriate to ignore victims of crime. Rather, it is our obligation to give victims a voice in our criminal justice system, and to ensure they receive the justice, fairness, and compassion they deserve."

Albemarle County Victim/Witness Director Susan Painter added, "Having been a victim advocate for many years, I have often thought about the fact that we meet people at the worst imaginable time in their lives and I am amazed at the strength demonstrated by those who have lost loved ones through acts of violence. It is a privilege to assist these families and, while our office tries to do all we can to provide information and resources and to give support to crime victims, I am grateful to VVAN for offering a safe place for family members of homicide victims to come together to share their experiences and gain strength and support from one another."

VVAN's Homicide Support Group Coordinator, Dina Blythe, notes that, "We are so pleased to be offering this important resource to help survivors. Support group services are free, and transportation assistance is available. All groups are facilitated by licensed mental health providers with experience in trauma and grief. Most meet in the evening once per month and others are offered weekly." The groups are funded by a grant from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services and private foundation support.

Blythe also notes that, "Current group participants are expressing immense gratitude and finding tremendous benefit to meeting with a group of people who share the pain of traumatic loss and grief. In an anonymous evaluation, one participant wrote that, "...just coming together has had a positive impact for me. I don't feel as alone. I trust another survivor more than anyone else, they have no agenda other than sharing their own suffering."

Readykids, a local organization, is coordinating the teenager group and Katie-Anne Padalino, LPC, can be contacted there for more information at 434-296-4118 x 260. Dave Lewis, LCSW, facilitates the adult group and can be reached at 434-264-7711 for more information.

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The **Virginia Victim Assistance Network** (VVAN, also referred to as the “Network”) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that has assisted crime victims across the Commonwealth for over 38 years. Its mission is to be a voice for crime victims and those who serve them in Virginia by:

- Diagnosing, assessing, and advocating for the needs of victims and their families;
- Promoting policies and legislation to protect the rights of the victims of human tragedy;
- Producing professional development and encouraging collaboration to ensure the continued growth of our members; and
- Fostering accountability through the criminal justice system.

For more information, please visit VVAN’s website at <http://www.vanetwork.org>

