

By Chippewa County Sexual Assault Response Team
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Chippewa County Sexual Assault Response Team represented at DOJ Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners' Expert Witness Training

SAULT STE. MARIE, Mich. — The Chippewa County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) was recently represented at the U.S. Department of Justice's National Indian Country Training Initiative, in partnership with the International Association of Forensic Nurses, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners' Expert Witness Training held at the National Advocacy Center in Columbia, S.C., from Aug. 5-7, 2014.

The U.S. Office of Legal Education was responsible for the review and selection of nominations while giving priority to submissions that involved communities working on sexual assault cases arising in Indian Country. Awarded for full scholarships were Chippewa County SART team members Catherine M. Castagne, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Prosecutor; James Robinson, Chippewa County assistant prosecutor; and Wendy Jamros, War Memorial Hospital nurse practitioner and certified sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE).

Sexual assault nurse examiners specialize in forensic nursing and are used by prosecutors to provide expert testimony during sexual assault trials to educate the jury on the characteristics of sexual assault victims and to inform the jury why there may be an absence of physical injury. One of the most prolific myths surrounding sexual violence is that there must be some type of physical injury to evidence an assault. In fact, the absence of physical injury following a sexual assault is common. Even in cases of forcible sexual violence, there is often no physical injury and the lack of identified injury does not disprove sexual assault.

This training was designed to enhance the successful use of SANE nurse expert witness testimony in sexual assault and domestic violence prosecutions and consisted of mock court hearings involving intensive prosecutor and defense attorney questioning and cross examination allowing for both SANE nurses and prosecutors to advance skills necessary in criminal trials.

The Chippewa County SART team is a multidisciplinary body made up of members from the tribe's Advocacy Resource Center, Prosecutor's Office and Law Enforcement; War Memorial Hospital, Chippewa County Prosecutor's Office; Chippewa County Sheriff's Department; Diane Pepler Resource Center; Michigan State Police; City of Sault Ste. Marie Police Department; Bay Mills Indian Community; and Chippewa County Department of Human Services. This collaborative team is dedicated to ensuring victims of sexual assault are provided with the best possible medical care, advocacy and social supportive services and criminal justice processing to increase successful prosecutions allowing for victim justice and enhanced community safety.

The Chippewa County SART team is currently in the process of developing a protocol for handling sexual assault which involves each agency on the team coordinating their individual agency procedures into a comprehensive guide that is intended to ensure that all sexual assault victims in Chippewa County seeking assistance will receive a consistent, knowledgeable and compassionate response.

For more information about the Chippewa County SART, sexual assault reporting, education or advocacy, please contact the Sault Tribe Advocacy Resource Center (ARC) at (906) 632-1808.