



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE  
**SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION  
AND RESPONSE OFFICE**



## MEET PROFESSIONALS FROM EACH MILITARY SERVICE WHO ARE READY TO HELP SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS

SEPTEMBER 22, 2020

Meet some of the sexual assault prevention and response (SAPR) victim advocates from each military service who are ready to assist sexual assault survivors.

When any Service member or adult dependent reports a sexual assault, a sexual assault response coordinator (SARC) first addresses the victim's immediate safety needs and assigns a SAPR victim advocate.

The SAPR victim advocate provides advocacy and assistance throughout the medical, investigative, and legal processes, as appropriate. Upon determining eligibility, SAPR victim advocates will inform the victim of his or her option to make a restricted or unrestricted report. Those making a restricted report may also consider providing information to the [Catch a Serial Offender \(CATCH\)](#) program.

Below, SAPR victim advocates highlight how they have quickly adapted amid the COVID-19 pandemic to continue providing survivors uninterrupted, timely, professional, and quality support.

### Army



**“Don’t let your current circumstances prevent you from standing up and taking action.” – Amber Holdford**

Amber Holdford, SAPR victim advocate for U.S. Army Garrison, Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG) performed duties in an exemplary and innovative manner. She was the first member within the Army's Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) Resource Center to conduct virtual trainings for SHARP Fit 2 Fight on Defense Collaborative Services. She has successfully trained 269 garrison employees and soldiers as well as APG tenant organizations utilizing this virtual method. She was instrumental in the planning and execution of Team APG's first Virtual SHARP Summit as well. Holdford is fully committed to the

“not in my squad” philosophy and believes that training is one of the best tools available in the prevention of sexual harassment and assault.



**“My biggest concern as a (SAPR victim advocate) once COVID-19 hit, was being able to provide the same level of confidential care to survivors as before the pandemic. Being at a remote location made this doubly difficult, but working as a team we were able to come up with some effective solutions.”**  
– Maj. James Schmitz

During COVID-19 Maj. James Schmitz, a SAPR victim advocate, has provided continuous, exceptional victim support. Even while most of Europe was under lockdown/stay-at-home orders, he facilitated in-person support and coordination with local law enforcement. The virtual intake protocols developed by Maj.

Schmitz helped to establish procedures for providing medical care, forensic exams, and line of duty determinations for soldiers deployed to Joint Multinational Training Group – Ukraine, while he was preparing to redeploy. Schmitz’s dedication to soldiers and the SHARP program is truly extraordinary.



**“Culture is change by way of education, which eliminates the excuses and promotes intervention.”** – Christina Joy McClung

Christina McClung has been serving as a certified SAPR victim advocate since November 2017. She has shown incredible professionalism, dedication, tenacity, and motivation for program improvement. Christina’s primary focus has been on increasing the capability of victim advocates to serve soldiers, civilians, and family members by being attentive to the safety concerns of victims during COVID-19. She provided training to over 1,000 personnel at the first Aberdeen Proving Ground Virtual SHARP Summit and established monthly virtual training for the U.S. Army Training

Center. McClung’s commitment to the SAPR mission has not been slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Marine Corps



**“I seek to be the first step in healing and care for everyone I speak with, and victims of sexual assault deserve the timely and sincere assistance which we as SAPR VAs are here to provide... The pandemic has introduced unexpected obstacles in the provision of services to survivors; however our support team has been integral in ensuring uninterrupted care to our Marines and recruits in need of our services.”** – Capt. Khari Ford

When the pandemic hit and operations continued, the Parris Island SARCs knew Capt. Khari Ford, a SAPR victim advocate, would be instrumental to ensuring services continued because of his experience, knowledge, and dedication. During the two-week reception period where recruit movement was restricted, Ford conducted training, took reports, and scheduled requested services from his assigned tents. Additionally, once the recruits were moved, Ford traveled approximately two hours away to continue to fulfill his victim advocacy duties and support to individuals. Daily, he embraces his role on the SAPR team and appreciates how vital the SAPR

victim advocates, chaplains, Victims Legal Counsel, and SARCs have been to ensure continuity of SAPR services.



**“The SAPR program and our piece in it has truly risen to the occasion of continuously adapting to support victims, given COVID complications. We have found new ways to serve victims, and we must collaborate on those efforts to continue to make the program better. I truly believe great things happen when passionate people come together, and great knowledge can be shared for the benefit of our victims.” - 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Kelsey Fleming**

Despite challenges, 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Kelsey Fleming, Information Group, II Marine Expeditionary Force SAPR victim advocate, has attended three virtual webinars and met with representatives from the

Victims Legal Counsel and the trial counsel to increase capability to better support others. While teleworking, she continues to provide services and routinely accompanies victims to meetings with the VLC, trial counsel, and various other appointments. Recently she was identified as the most capable Marine to fill the SARC position within 2D Marine Logistics Group, a billet that is normally filled by a major or above, until a civilian SARC could be hired full-time. She is currently organizing a support network for the SAPR victim advocates within 2D Marine Logistics Group to discuss insights/lessons learned (non-case specific to protect confidentiality) and resources available to enhance their resiliency and provide the best support.



SSgt Joseph Melendez, a SAPR victim advocate at Marine Corps Base Hawaii, is known as one who never complains and always goes where he is needed. During COVID-19, he went out of his way to ensure that his unit was still receiving annual training, and that victims of sexual assault received the care that they needed day or night. Most notably, he has volunteered to spend 4-5 hours at the emergency room providing support. The installation SARC at Marine Corps Base Hawaii calls him her “go-to” SAPR victim advocate because of his professionalism and reliability while being responsible for a major section with massive military movement and being a full-time college student.

## Navy



**“During this COVID-19 pandemic, we have had to face many unforeseen challenges and I have learned that to be fully available for my clients, self-care is particularly important and the value of a supportive SAPR team is critical. I am grateful every day for my position as a SAPR victim advocate and am extremely thankful for the continued support of my region SAPR team.” – Jessica Burke**

Naval Air Station Whidbey Island SAPR victim advocate Jessica Burke was extraordinarily innovative in developing solutions to respond to victims of sexual assault and provide wrap-around services during the initial months of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic. She field tested the new fillable DD Form 2910 using multiple devices and systems,

identified workarounds based on devices, and developed procedures that were shared with the Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office. These procedures



contributed to the immediate usability of the form Navy-wide, ensuring SARCs and SAPR victim advocates were better equipped and prepared to respond during COVID-19. Her efforts in developing virtual client services protocols had an immediate positive impact on her unit and significant ripple effect DOD-wide.



**“Everyone who has experienced trauma in their lives deserves genuine support, which includes a good listener without judgement. Helping people is second nature to me.” –Petty Officer 1st Class Ashley Smith**

As a SAPR victim advocate, Petty Officer 1st Class Ashley Smith is someone upon whom the Naval Support Activity Mid-South SAPR team can always depend. Through collaboration with the SARC, Smith developed a “drive-thru” style of SAPR watch turnover, all while donning gloves and mask, and sanitizing the duty cell phone and briefcase. During this challenging time for many advocates, Smith is the glue that holds the SAPR duty section together;

everyone knows that she is the “go to” advocate. SAPR victim advocates, recently recruited by Smith, describe her as a Navy leader with a servant’s heart. Regardless of her workload, Smith’s clients know that she is committed to their advocacy day or night.



**“The time is always right to do what is right.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.**

This quotation inspires Petty Officer 1st Class Marvin Harris in his SAPR victim advocate role. As one of 15 unit victim advocates at Southwest Regional Maintenance Center and one of over 250 at Naval Base San Diego (NBSD), he is a championed leader and advocate. During these extremely stressful COVID months, Harris communicates at least monthly with his installation SARCs about related trends and ways to encourage positive, cohesive, and effective messaging to his command and beyond. He also consistently takes steps to inspire the unit SAPR VAs; encouraging

each one to take extra time for client care and support, while also being more vigilant with their own mental health and self-care. His positive demeanor, knowledge, and leadership style is such a pleasure to have on the NBSD SAPR team!

## Air Force



**“We are not only Surviving but Thriving during COVID19.” – Shirley Phillips**

In spite of the numerous challenges associated with COVID-19, Shirley Phillips has continued to provide support to victims and volunteer victim advocates (VVA) at MacDill Air Force Base. Maintaining connection with VVAs proved to be very challenging as the normal VVA monthly “Lunch and Learn” to receive training and updates was not an option. Phillips now conducts virtual sessions at least twice a month to ensure VVA’s remain proficient in their craft, apprised of new policies, and connect with each other as a measure of community support and self-care.

## Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office



At the onset of COVID-19, Mary Ann Lobdell worked with the Ramstein Air Force Base SARC to implement an immediate plan of action to reduce unnecessary contact between VVAs and victims of sexual assault by managing the 24/7 response hotline. She also immediately enacted no-contact monthly VVA training to safeguard the health and wellbeing of all the VVAs, while ensuring they remained up to date with current subject matter and training by providing virtual training sessions. In order to coordinate flawless victim response despite COVID restrictions, she collaborated with Landstuhl Regional Medical Center Sexual Assault Medical Director/Program Manager on response protocol procedures. Finally, once Ramstein began the phased process of reopening the installation, Lobdell created a plan to slowly reintegrate the VVAs back into the 24/7 hotline on-call rotation.



Casey Nichols, a Seymour Johnson Air Force Base SAPR victim advocate, effectively addressed gaps in victim care and support triggered by COVID-19. Nichols recognized the need for additional technology to support virtual operations and was able to secure the capability in their mobile devices that support the 24/7 response. His efforts resulted in new mobile devices to more effectively respond to the needs of victims. Additionally, Nichols supported a local hotline while also maintaining a 24/7 response capability, meeting clients virtually and in-person. He has shown commitment to providing advocacy and support to victims of sexual assault under any circumstances, even in a pandemic.

## Air National Guard



Staff Sgt. Heather Jackson has been a sexual assault prevention and response (SAPR) victim advocate with the 109 Airlift Wing for three years. She is an enthusiastic volunteer and mentor to other victim advocates. Jackson is always willing to assist and provide victim advocacy support at all times, which has been extremely beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring victims will receive any medical, mental health, legal, or chaplain resources they need.



Tech. Sgt. Shavone N. Hinds is a new SAPR victim advocate, having just gained her Department of Defense Sexual Assault Advocate Certification Program (D-SAACP) certification in February 2020. Her dedication and impact has already been exhibited in multiple ways, including during the COVID-19 pandemic by collaborating with a sexual assault response coordinator (SARC) to create and produce virtual First Responders' annual SAPR training emphasizing the Catch a Serial Offender Program. Known as CATCH, the program allows eligible persons making a restricted report of sexual assault an avenue to

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confidentially provide information about the alleged offender and incident to DoD criminal investigators without initiating an investigation.



Senior Master Sgt. Jennifer Gonzalez-Smith balances her duty as a human resource advisor for the 103rd Air Wing with her dedication as a SAPR victim advocate, expertly managing both deployed and home station cases, providing fierce advocacy for victims, and acting as a role model and mentor for other SAPR victim advocates. Gonzalez-Smith has handled difficult and challenging cases in the Connecticut Air National Guard, providing victim support while also coordinating with leadership to ensure the best outcome for both the victim and mission. Her skills and abilities have been an asset during pandemic, as she works with victims and identifies what medical, mental health, legal, and/or chaplain resources they may need.

### Army National Guard

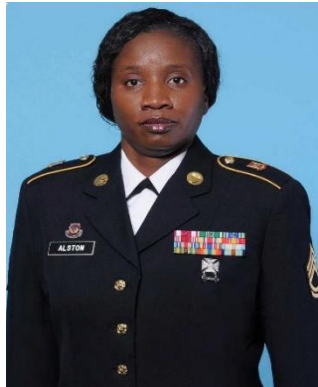


Capt. Ryan Rodriguez demonstrated exceptional service as a SAPR victim advocate to National Guard survivors while assigned to National Guard Bureau's Implementation Team in support of Wisconsin National Guard (WING). From January through June of 2020, Rodriguez worked with Wisconsin SAPR professionals to overhaul the existing program to ensure compliance and seamless care to survivors. His efforts, including during the pandemic, directly contributed to nine new cases being reported with the WING and 10 Line of Duties being submitted. Of particular note are his compassion and advocacy, spending hours after work ensuring victims received any medical, mental health, legal, or chaplain resources they needed.



Staff Sgt. Kenya Shirley has been a devoted and loyal SAPR Victim Advocate (VA) for over two years while currently serving as an instructor with the Basic Leader Course (BLC) with 3rd BN, 218th Regiment (Leadership). His dedication to sexual assault prevention is endless as he spends time volunteering and mentoring young adults through One Touch Transformation to inform them of the signs of sexual harassment. Shirley's dedication to the program has been pivotal, especially during COVID-19 pandemic, as it ensures victims will receive any medical, mental health, legal, or Chaplain resources they need.

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Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class Ursula Alston is a member of 59th Aviation Troop Command. She has served as a SAPR victim advocate for more than seven years. In addition to her duties as the brigade human resource professional, she serves as the brigade's SAPR victim advocate appointed to the Command Management Group and advises the commander on all Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program related issues. She has continued to work during COVID-19 pandemic with victims as they process trauma while providing a calming spirit for them to express their frustration, and ensuring victims receive resources they need to heal. Additionally, she voluntarily meets with advocates from other agencies to share ideas and assist with enhancements of their programs.