

City of Alexandria, Virginia

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9-9-03

MEMORANDUM

DATE: AUGUST 28, 2003

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER *PS*

SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF GRANT AWARD FROM THE ECHO (EMPLOYEES CARING AND HELPING OTHERS) PROGRAM OF AOL TIME WARNER AND THE FRIENDS OF THE ALEXANDRIA COMMISSION FOR WOMEN FOR THE OFFICE ON WOMEN'S SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE AND AWARENESS (SARA) PROGRAM

ISSUE: City Council approval of a grant award received on August 4, 2003, from the ECHO (Employees Caring and Helping Others) grant program of AOL Time Warner and the Friends of the Alexandria Commission for Women in the amount of \$500 for the Office on Women's Sexual Assault Response & Awareness (SARA) Program.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Approve the \$500 award received on August 4, 2003, from the ECHO (Employees Caring and Helping Others) grant program of AOL Time Warner and the Friends of the Alexandria Commission for Women that made possible the beginning of a special outreach project by the Office on Women's Sexual Assault Response & Awareness (SARA) Program to the African American community of Alexandria; and
- (2) Authorize the City Manager to execute all documents that may be required.

BACKGROUND: This grant was available through AOL Time Warner's ECHO Program, which was designed to help AOL Time Warner employees receive company support for their community-based activities. Sheena Chawla, committed volunteer for the Sexual Assault Response and Awareness (SARA) Program, is a full-time AOL Time Warner employee who applied for the funding on June 30, 2003, to be awarded to the Friends of the Alexandria Commission for Women to benefit the SARA Program. She volunteers for SARA as a hotline companion or crisis counselor to aid victims of sexual violence and their families in Alexandria. This grant would enable the SARA Program to do special outreach in the African American community in Alexandria to make the SARA Program mission and free services better known and to create awareness of sexual violence. The mission of the SARA Program reads: "The Alexandria Sexual Assault Response and Awareness (SARA) Program is dedicated to raising awareness and fostering social change in the community. SARA advocates for and provides support to all those affected by sexual violence." The SARA Program is currently the only

program providing comprehensive services to victims of sexual violence in the City of Alexandria.

DISCUSSION: Sexual assault remains a pervasive and severely under-reported crime in the United States. According to the National Women's Study (1992), it is estimated that 683,000 American women are raped each year. It is also estimated that 12.1 million women have been the victims of rape in their lifetime. Sexual assault often has a devastating impact on the quality of victim's lives. Research indicates that sexual assault survivors can experience considerable psychological trauma that often results in depression, suicide attempts, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, and feelings of helplessness and powerlessness (Levy, 1991). The fear and anxiety, loss of self esteem, and physical injury caused by sexual assault can affect every aspect of the victim's life, creating impediments to forming and/or sustaining healthy relationships and interfering with the ability to sustain a healthy and meaningful life. Sexual assault impacts not only the primary victim, but also diminishes the quality of life of parents, coworkers, friends, partners, and children. Given the significant potential impact on victims, it is essential that comprehensive services are not only available to assist survivors with healing from sexual trauma but known in the community.

In addition, in her book *I Will Survive: The African-American Guide to Healing from Sexual Assault and Abuse* (2003), author Lori Robinson states that Black women are more likely to be victimized than White women, and are less likely to seek help. She says, "Because of African Americans' unique history of racist and sexist victimization, the Black community has an even harder time than others dealing with rape. This prevents survivors from getting help and our community from addressing the issue effectively." These statements combined with other research and experience explain the need to increase outreach efforts in the African American community of Alexandria.

FISCAL IMPACT: The budget for this one-year grant is \$500, with no matching funds required.

GRANT PERIOD: September 1, 2003 - August 31, 2004.

ATTACHMENTS: None. The grant may be reviewed by contacting the Office on Women after August 20, 2003.

STAFF:

Lisa Baker, Director, Office on Women
Melissa Schmisek, Coordinator, SARA Program
Carol Moore, Acting Deputy Director, OMB
Idania Padrón, Budget/Management Analyst, OMB