

Beyond the Headlines – Domestic Violence Panelist biographies

Barb Fischer, Executive Director

Ms. Fischer joined Advocates of Ozaukee as Executive Director in 2004 with over 30 years of non-profit management, board development, and fund development experience. During her tenure the agency has significantly expanded to meet community needs: the number of clients has grown from 203 victims served in 2002 to over 900 annually. Staffing has more than doubled, and funding has more than quadrupled. The children's program has grown to include a full-time staff person and a legal advocate position has been created based on client needs.

Client services have also grown under Director Fischer's leadership to include a "Beyond Trauma" human trafficking victims group, legal advocacy, additional sexual assault services, bi-lingual advocacy, and transitional housing programs. An electronic data base has been implemented to track services and clients and a trauma informed care approach adopted. Additionally, partnerships have been formed to identify and prevent escalating violence: six local police departments and the Sheriff deputies all perform a lethality assessment at each call for domestic violence; and Advocates is present at the Lakeshore Regional Child Advocacy Center for forensic interviews of children.

Advocates has been the successful beneficiary of numerous state, federal and local grants written by Director Fischer, funding many of their new and innovative programs, as well as the expansion and renovation of their facilities. As the former Executive Director of the Child Abuse Prevention (CAP) Fund in Milwaukee, Barb oversaw the statewide distribution of \$6,000,000 in grants to create and implement programs to prevent child abuse. Advocates is a 2022 Impact100 Grant recipient.

Ms. Fischer currently serves on the Governor's Council on Domestic Violence Budget Committee: the state long-range planning committee for domestic violence; and the Leadership Council for End Abuse Wisconsin's Future of Services initiative.

Sheriff Christy Knowles

A 20+ year veteran of the Ozaukee county sheriff's office, Christy Knowles started in 1999 as a Deputy-Jailer. She was promoted to Deputy-Patrol in 2001 and spent the next six years there, also acting as a field training officer. In 2007 she was promoted to Detective. She worked as a general investigator, though specialized in sensitive crimes, drawing on her passion for helping victims.

Sheriff Knowles served the community five years as a detective and was then promoted to Patrol Lieutenant in 2012, a position where she acquired valuable experience responding to personnel issues. In 2015 she was further promoted to Operations Captain where she helped develop several programs that partner with the community. Sheriff Knowles was appointed to the position of Undersheriff in 2019 where she gained knowledge and preparation in the key functions of the Sheriff's Office. In 2022 she was elected as the first female sheriff in Ozaukee county.

Knowles attended college at Marquette University and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She is a graduate of the Northwestern University-Police Staff and Command College and also of the elite FBI National Academy in Quantico, VA. Sheriff Knowles is a certified Defense and Arrest Tactics Instructor providing instruction at Waukesha County Technical College law enforcement recruit academy.

In addition, Sheriff Knowles is directly involved as the coordinator of the Crisis Intervention Team of Ozaukee County committee and is a participating member of the Coordinated Services Team of Ozaukee Family Services. Knowles played an integral role developing Ozaukee County's Critical Incident Debrief Team and Peer Support Team.

Sheriff Knowles believes that community engagement, especially with our youth, is critically important to build strong relationships with law enforcement. She is directly involved in the Sheriff's Office community outreach programs and has been a long-time community youth volunteer, scout leader, and coach.

Dr. Debbie Lassiter

Dr. Debbie Lassiter is the Executive Director and Co-Founder of The Convergence Resource Center in Milwaukee. A panelist, presenter, and trainer raising awareness to human trafficking, she initiated the HEMAD (Human trafficking Educators working with Men and boys Against the Demand) project to address the demand side of the commercial sex trade-reaching over 45,000 men that now take a stand against human trafficking.

In 2012 Dr. Lassiter launched the Human and Sex Trafficking Support Initiative and began hosting community awareness events. In 2013 she led the collaboration to present The Epidemic and The Game – an annual community awareness event focusing on human trafficking highlighting a specific topic. Dr. Lassiter was honored in 2014 by the Department Of Justice with the National Crime Victims Award for her work with Human Trafficking Survivors and again in 2016 by the Department of Corrections. She continues to receive many recognitions for her trauma informed care and work with ex-offenders and in human trafficking and was named one of the 2016 fifty heroes of Fortune 500.

With a Doctorate in Divinity from St. Thomas Christian College (Jacksonville, Fla) Dr. Lassiter is a licensed Associate Minister at the New Testament Church of Milwaukee where she leads the Judah Praise Team. She hosts TRIUMPH Rising – a weekly radio show that shares information on human trafficking and provides encouragement. Dr. Lassiter is also a Certified FASD Educator, an Ending The Game Facilitator, and one of only three Ending The Game Trainers in the world. Ending the Game is the first intervention-based curriculum for women exiting the commercial sex trade.

Dr. Lassiter has provided support and mentorship to men and women rebuilding their lives after trauma for over 40 years. She delivers the hard truths with humor and humanitarianism.

Dr. Dominique Pritchett

Dr. Dominique Pritchett is a therapist, mental health advocate, speaker, and wellness consultant and coach. Her mission is to create opportunities for people to be seen, supported and safe in every space. As a presenter she shares thought provoking stories, relevant data, and actionable steps to advance goal attainment and learning.

With over 15 years of experience in the mental health field and 10+ years of clinical experience, Dr. Dominique specializes in culturally sensitive and responsive therapy interventions. A majority of her research has been focused around centering the lives of Black women and girls through equity and belonging. Areas of focus include depression, anxiety, trauma, and adjustment stressors. She received her Psy.D. degree from Capella University-Minnesota and a Master of Social Work from Loyola University, Chicago.

Dr. Pritchett created the Beloved Wellness Center in Kenosha to support Black women and teen girls who are first generation trauma disruptors-not used to taking care of themselves-learn to elevate their voices and navigate life without sacrificing their identity. In addition, Dr. Pritchett speaks on trauma, emotional intelligence, psychological safety, stress management, effective communication skills, workplace and community culture, and self-advocacy at conferences, in corporate settings, and through various media outlets worldwide.