SAMANTHA DEAN RISING STAR AWARD
HALEH COCHRAN

Haleh Cochran has been advocating for sexual assault victims since 2008. She spent the last seven years improving outreach and connecting sexual assault survivors including survivors from marginalized communities to support services in and around Plano, TX. Haleh tirelessly educates community groups, medical professionals, and law enforcement agencies on sexual assault dynamics and ways to improve collaboration with other professionals in the Criminal Justice System. Haleh prides herself on consistently identifying innovative ways to improve methods for advocacy and empowering survivors.

During the beginning of her career at The Turning Point, she was told by seasoned advocates that it would be too difficult to change the status quo at their center. Haleh was determined to change the mindset of her local center and took it upon herself to improve the services provided to the sexual assault survivors in her community. Not only is she involved locally by serving in many leadership roles such as Secretary and Vice-President of the Colling County Social Services Association and a member of the White Ribbon Planning Committee, but she is also active at the statewide level. Haleh serves as the Fundraising Chair for the TAASA Diversity Task Force and as a member of TAASA’s Board of Directors. Haleh isn’t even 30 years old yet and watching her grow into a leader in the movement is awe inspiring. She is truly a rising star in the movement to end sexual violence in Texas.

EDITH RUST MEDICAL SERVICES AWARD OF EXCELLENCE
NORMA SANFORD

In 1998, Norma Sanford identified gaps in medical service for survivors of sexual assault presenting at the hospital in rural Lufkin, TX. She met with community partners to explore options and resources to develop a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) and to increase the number of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners. Under Norma’s supervision over 15 Registered Nurses have obtained their certification through the Office of the Attorney General, thereby expanding the resources and available to provide 24x7 coverage. She has also expanded the service area to include Polk County Texas too.

Norma didn’t stop there. She worked with community partners to bring together the Women’s Center and the Children’s Advocacy Center to provide on-site medical and forensic exams to both adult and child survivors directly at the agency. The team developed a protocol to examine survivors entering the shelter for injuries, forgotten medications, and referrals for all survivors of violence seeking help. She is now the Director at a dialysis center. Her work as a SANE has always been her “other “job. When asked about retiring she simply replies “I have no intention of giving it up. I have always worked a second job, and I’m still taking calls every single night.”

Norma’s passion for truth and justice for survivors is not just a second job; it is a lifelong commitment.
CHAMPION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE AWARD
LINDA A. BRANDMILLER

Linda Brandmiller is an attorney based in San Antonio, TX. Linda’s philosophy and more importantly, her work, exemplifies the famous quote by Emma Goldman - “No real social change has been brought about without a revolution... revolution is but thought carried into action.” Linda began her work at various social service organizations. Through her career, Linda discovered the unmet needs unique to society’s hidden populations and became increasingly frustrated by the structural confines impeding social justice to those who needed it most. Her passion for creating social change and provide culturally appropriate services to her clients prompted Linda to create her non-profit. Her work with undocumented communities and immigrant victims of crime ignited a firestorm within Linda as her clients increasingly became caught up in the web of family detention. She has worked tirelessly to fight for the rights of these mothers and children, and though she often colors outside the lines, she has forged strong relationships with people inside the system to benefit these families. Her passion for this topic has no limits and her enthusiasm to advocate for these often forgotten victims, has no bounds. Linda creatively utilizes non-traditional partners and often personal resources to ensure her clients receive the representation and assistance they deserve. Linda’s revolutionary work is a stunning example of the power we each possess in creating social change.

EXCELLENCE IN ADVOCACY AWARD
VIRGINIA RUEDA

Virginia Rueda has worked as an advocate for women, children, and families for over 20 years.

Currently, she is the Sexual Assault Coordinator at the Center Against Sexual and Family Violence in El Paso, TX. As the agency transitioned to provide comprehensive sexual assault and domestic violence services to survivors from El Paso and the surrounding areas, Virginia played an instrumental role in developing inclusive, effective, and trauma-informed sexual assault services. Using a national model, she developed a culturally appropriate support group curriculum tailored to meet the unique needs of every client. Virginia also took the lead in developing the sexual assault advocate training necessary for the agency to become certified by the Texas Office of the Attorney General. In addition to program development, Virginia maintains a heavy case load and continues to go above and beyond to advocate and ensure victim’s rights are always protected. Virginia selflessly dedicates her time and wisdom with co-workers and colleagues across disciplines by sharing the lessons learned and promising practices in reaching and effectively serving all survivors. Her passion and dedication to the work not only improves the quality of life for the survivors she serves but also for the citizens of El Paso, TX and the surrounding areas.
COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AWARD
SHELLI COLLINS

A sometimes overlooked, but much-needed part of our work to end sexual violence is the challenging and rewarding work of community empowerment. To empower a community is to take actions that enable that community to increase control over its existence and path. Clearly that is a difficult task that requires a person with a special skillset and worldview. It requires a person who can simultaneously hold the big picture and the minutia front and center and act in service of both. Shelli Collins is precisely such a person.

Shelli lives and works in Humble, TX, just outside of Houston. Like so many of us in the room, she wears lots of hats. She is a fierce advocate and a passionate preventioneer who fully immerses herself in “the work” in all of its forms. In particular, Shelli developed and implemented an arts-based primary prevention curriculum with underserved youth living in two different apartment complexes in Humble. Knowing that “the work” often means meeting people and communities where they are, she literally took the work to where her clientele live. And when she got there, she was wise enough to know that those young people had pressing, fundamental needs that, if unmet, would occupy the minds and hearts she was hoping to reach. One of many great examples of this is that she would bring in community partners to provide haircuts for the young people in her groups.

Shelli makes every effort to see the people she serves as unique and whole – not just as a group for whom she is funded to provide services. People who know Shelli describe her as compassionate, caring, resourceful, creative, and generous – the sort of qualities that are so necessary for a person who seeks to empower others. Shelli is not only making a difference in the community of Humble; she selflessly shares her expertise and experience with the community of prevention educators across the state. Shelli leads by example and is always quick to support and lift up the communities of which she is a part.

HAROLD COTTLE JUSTICE AWARD
TMPA-SAFVIC PROGRAM

The TX Municipal Police Association (TMPA) launched their Sexual Assault Family Violence Investigators Course (SAFVIC) in 2002. In the thirteen years since that beginning, they have held almost 2000 training events and have trained approximately 32,000 police officers and 3500 telecommunications professionals (dispatchers).

They developed their 40 hour Instructor Course, 24 hour Human Trafficking Course, and 24 hour Course for Telecommunications Specialists with strong collaborative efforts with victim services, prosecutors, and other relevant professionals. The goal of these courses is to help TX law enforcement more effectively investigate crimes such as sexual assault, stalking, domestic violence, and human trafficking. The strong violence against women framework and victim-sensitive approach has elevated the importance of addressing these crimes and helped assure that TX has a skilled cadre of officers responding to sexual assault survivors. TMPA filled a clear void in our state when they introduced SAFVIC and our safe is safer and more responsive as a result.
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AWARD
UTSA POLICE DEPARTMENT

In 2015, The University of Texas San Antonio Police Department (UTSAPD) created a plan of action to bring several departments within the UTSA community together to engage student participation in creating awareness about sexual violence to their peers. The effort gained the full support of the Interfraternity Council (IFC) including participation by all eight fraternities. The UTSA PD and the IFC coordinator worked hand in hand to facilitate and promote bystander intervention through the “IT’S On Us” pledge and program.

Each participating UTSA department and student organization created a table of information that made the sexual violence topic relatable and approachable by other students, faculty, and staff. Each participant received a game piece and was encouraged to gain the knowledge and awareness from the different tables. Students and staff completed the game and voluntarily made pledges at the “It’s on Us” onsite electronic pledging station. Students received teal “It’s on Us” Day of Action t-Shirts. The attendance was overwhelming. The Interfraternity Council provided music that encouraged dance performances between fraternities, which in return brought forth more student participation and exposure to the overall message of preventing and reporting sexual violence. The collaboration between students, organizations, law enforcement, and various departments within the UTSA system demonstrated inclusivity and “minding the gap” by including the varied perspectives that make up the UTSA student body and system as a whole. This event has now set the precedence for future UTSA events along with the importance to promote bystander intervention and zero tolerance for sexual violence by all.

PROGRAM VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR
KATHERINE DAIN

The role of sexual assault advocate is not for the faint of heart. Each case carries with it the energy, passion, and dedication of agency staff and volunteers who assist survivor on their path to healing. Volunteers are the heart of any agency providing services to survivors. To have a phenomenal pool of caring and dedicated volunteer advocates providing emotional support to survivors and families in their time of crisis not only assists the survivor but also uplifts agency staff as a whole. Although the Women’s Shelter of South Texas in Corpus Christi appreciates all of their volunteers, there is one whose efforts stood out. Katherine Dain aka “Kat” is a wife, mother, former educator and coach, business owner, entrepreneur, friend, and tireless volunteer in the Corpus Christi community and to survivors of sexual assault in crisis. Kat continuously goes above and beyond the call of a volunteer advocate. It is not unusual for Kat to sit silently with survivors as they sleep providing emotional support as they periodically wake during the long process of reporting and examination which, as many of you know, can take hours. It is not surprising to hear when Kat instinctively leaves the hospital to grab a hot meal for not only the survivor but also for her companion after learning the survivor had not eaten in three days. This is just one example of many. Kat’s compassionate heart is a beacon of hope during a very dark time for survivors. The Women’s Shelter of South Texas would like to recognize Kat for her unwavering dedication, compassion, and support to survivors of sexual assault.

And on behalf of survivors, thank you, Kat.
Debbie Tucker’s name is often first associated with ending domestic violence. Although this is an accurate reflection of her work, it certainly isn’t the entire picture. Debbie began her work in this movement as a volunteer victim advocate with the Austin Rape Crisis Center in the mid-1970’s. When she left the RCC, it was as the Assistant Director. She went on to work at the Center for Battered Women and eventually was the founding executive director of TCFV. In 1998, Debbie returned to her roots in sexual assault work when she founded the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence. She led that organization as executive director until 2015 and continues to serve this organization as board president.

For more than 40 years Ms. Tucker has worked to meet the needs of sexual assault survivors. Whether working as a SA Victim advocate, or working on the intersections of sexual assault and domestic violence, or being deeply involved in federal policy work as part of the National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, she continues to make a positive impact on the lives of sexual assault survivors in Texas and across the nation.