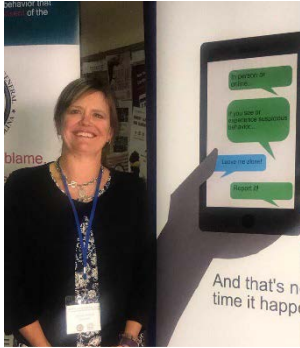


National Stalking Awareness Month: Looking Forward, Looking Back

Interview with Debbie Riddle, one of NSAM's Founders

"Every time I go out and speak on stalking, people are like, 'oh yeah I know what that is.' But, in reality, they don't. People have experienced it, but they aren't making the connection" says Debbie Riddle.

Debbie's youngest sister, Peggy Klinke, was brutally murdered by a stalker on January 18, 2003. Less than 6 months later, Debbie – in collaboration with members of Congress and the National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC) – successfully launched National Stalking Awareness Month.



Advocate Debbie Riddle

"Knowing Peggy's personality, she would have been on her cell phone at my funeral trying to take action," Debbie says, "trying to make something good come out of something so tragic."

Peggy was murdered by Patrick Kennedy, an abusive ex-boyfriend who stalked Peggy relentlessly after she left him. Patrick's behavior ranged from making phone calls, showing up and following Peggy, spreading vicious rumors, threatening her family and friends and committing arson. Peggy documented Patrick's stalking behavior, reported the incidents to police, moved across the country and had a confidential address – but Patrick was still able to track her down, assault her and kill her before killing himself.

A month after she lost her sister, Debbie was watching *The Today Show* when the program featured guest Tracy Bahm, Director of the (previous) Stalking Resource Center at NCVC. She sent an e-mail and Tracy responded.

"She asked me what I wanted to see happen," recalls Debbie. "I told her 'I want funding for every law enforcement agency to have a stalking task force.'"

In July 2003, NCVC, in partnership with Representative Heather Wilson (R-NM) and Lifetime Television, told Peggy's story at a Congressional briefing on Capitol Hill focusing on strengthening law enforcement's response to stalking. That same day, Rep. Wilson introduced a Congressional Resolution to support National Stalking Awareness Month.

Fifteen years later, Debbie continues to speak out on stalking and assists with graphic design for the new Stalking Prevention, Awareness and Resource Center (SPARC), a project of AEquitas. While she believes there is more interest and action around stalking than there was once, she feels there's still a long way to go.

Debbie shares, "I think the most important thing that people need to understand about stalking is that it is a *crime*. People think that it's not a big deal, take it for less than what it truly is, don't report it and don't really talk about it." Most law enforcement agencies still lack training and/or task forces on stalking.

SPARC is honored to continue NSAM and work with Debbie and other incredible advocates working to end stalking. Visit www.stalkingawareness.org to learn more about the crime of stalking and for resources to spread awareness in your community.



Peggy Klinke (1970-2003)