

TRAUMA, from page 4

psychiatrists have been using since the dawn of modern psychology into a program that teaches criminal investigators how to interview trauma victims. It's called the Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview, or FETI. The technique can be broken down into three basic steps designed to enable the officer to collect as much forensic psychophysiological evidence as possible.

The first step is genuine empathy, as Strand explains that victims should never be treated as witnesses to their own crime. The second step is this question: Help me understand what you are able to remember about your experience.

And finally, shut up and listen.

As Mason explains it, a trauma victim's memory is "like a jigsaw puzzle that's been thrown into the air. The puzzle pieces land all over the place." He says it's up to the detective to collect the pieces from the victim as they are disseminated, sorting out the important pieces that help reveal the story.

"It's taking a disjointed story and translating it into a report that makes sense," he says.

Investigators in the U.S. Army have fully adopted the FETI approach, and it's quickly taking hold in other branches of the military as well. According to David Markel, one of the nation's foremost FETI experts, it's made a big difference in the military.

"What we're getting from our field agents in the military is that this manner of approach in interviewing victims of trauma is having a phenomenally good affect on how these cases are investigated," says Markel. "It's also having a great effect on how they're prosecuted and how they're perceived by other soldiers and other military personnel. We're actually getting fewer complaints from victims about how they are treated by investigators because this is a much more empathetic approach."

According to Sgt. Peter Mahuna, who leads PPB's Sex Crimes Unit and has already taken a course on FETI, exhibiting signs of the neurobiology of trauma can make a victim appear more believable. Markel says these signs can then aid the prosecution, serving as psychophysiological evidence that the victim actually experienced a violent attack.

Markel served as a lead investigator at the Lafayette Police Department in Colorado for 18 years and worked as a law-enforcement training consultant before he began working with Strand to train Army investigators on the FETI technique. Now that it's been implemented in the military, he's turning his attention toward training civilian law enforcement and has taught investigators in Ashland how to conduct this style of interview. He says officers who have received this type of training make up a very small percent of law enforcement across the county, putting officers in PPB's sex crimes and domestic violence units ahead of the curve.

But most of PPB's 950 police officers have not received this training, and they are the officers who ultimately handle the bulk of the department's domestic violence cases. Mason says it would cost about

\$800 to train each officer through Strand's program, but Mahuna says he is exploring ways of extending a shorter and less-expensive form of this training to the rest of the bureau, hoping it might eventually be worked into its annual weeklong in-service training.

PPB spokesman Pete Simpson says that,



Sgt. Ronald Mason

"only a few people have been through the FETI Training and there is still a long way to go before it would be proposed as a standard for the entire organization."

To date, only one Multnomah County sheriff detective, who is also a member of PPB's domestic violence team, has taken a class on FETI. But the sheriff's office is reportedly considering using the principles she learned during the course she took with DVERT for the future training of its first responders and other uniformed units.

Martha Strawn Morris, director of Multnomah County and city of Portland's Gateway Center for Domestic Violence, works closely with DVRU officers in her work. First responders to 9-1-1 calls give survivors information about her center, and many times women will



Martha Strawn Morris

follow up with her office the next day to connect with resources. Sometimes a police officer will meet a survivor at the center to either write up a report or to take down follow-up information.

Strawn Morris says she has

noticed a difference between the way officers in Portland's domestic violence unit interview a survivor and the way patrolmen from East Precinct, who are summoned when a DVRU officer isn't available, interview a survivor.

"The DVRU is less likely to victim-blame and is more sensitive to the dynamics of domestic violence. They're just better trained on this particular topic. I've come to believe, working with domestic violence survivors over the last four years, day in and day out, that victim blaming is the default position for all of us. It's not just police officers," Strawn Morris says. "I've heard patrol officers really emphasize the fact of (the survivor's) intimate relationship — 'Well, he was your boyfriend

right?'" She says the implication is that the survivor chose him, knew what he was like, and therefore invited this.

"And unfortunately, many survivors hold those same beliefs," Strawn Morris says. "And then the cop comes along and

enforces that same belief."

"Amanda," who also asked that we not use her real name, didn't feel as if she was being heard after multiple attempts to involve law enforcement in the aftermath of an abusive relationship she had ended. At one point she says her ex-boyfriend forced his way into her home,

and fearing for her life, she called 9-1-1. She says the two officers who responded to her call seemed to be indifferent about her situation. At the time, she says, her whole body was shaking and her mind had completely shut down.

"I couldn't advocate for myself or answer any of their questions," she recalls. She says her ex-boyfriend "was sitting right there intimidating me, and right before the police got there he was chasing me around the house threatening to kill me."

According to court documents, that scenario ended in the police asking her ex-boyfriend to leave, which he did.

After filing pre-restraining and pre-stalking orders, Amanda eventually sought the help of the Gateway Center. It was there that she was connected with DVRU and FETI-trained Officer Dan Romanowski. She says he appeared to genuinely care about her situation. "I felt like he really believed me," she says. "He seemed to go out of his way to help me."

Once she adjusted from the shock of her alleged attack, Becky also decided to press charges. She went to the Gateway Center, where advocates connected her with an officer to start processing her case.

Markel says that since FETI's adoption in the U.S. Army, victim complaints about how investigators handle their cases have drastically decreased. It took about four years for FETI to become standard practice in the military, and FETI programs are currently being developed to teach officers how to interview perpetrators too, because they often identify themselves as victims.

But law enforcement can be slower to adopt new ways of doing things, says Markel. He says it can be difficult for most police officers to wrap their heads around a concept that puts the interview in the hands of the victim.

"It's so ingrained in us, as law enforcement officials, that we have to be in control of all our interviews," Markel says. "But once they truly understand it and start to see it work, it becomes easier and easier."

emily@streetroots.org

'Options' program a new approach to sexual assault

The police department in Ashland has implemented an innovative new approach to handling sexual assault cases. The You Have Options program puts decisions about how to move forward with an investigation into the hands of the victim. The program's creator, Detective Carrie Hull, says that since its adoption in 2013, the number of sexual assaults reported each year has more than doubled. The department has also seen a drastic increase in positive interactions with law enforcement, Hull says.

"The techniques that we use are not complicated and they are not new to law enforcement. We just have formalized them so survivors understand that these actually are options at the police departments that offer them," Hull says.

She says the real difference between this program's approach and the traditional way of conducting an investigation is time. When a person's home is burglarized, the residents may be traumatized, but they want the burglar caught and want police to move forward with an investigation right away, she says. They may feel bad about leaving their front door unlocked, but the police are not likely to chastise them for that mistake. But with a sexual assault case, says Hull, the victim is more likely to internalize mistakes he or she made, and is going to need a lot more time to process that decision. For that reason, she says the Ashland Police Department is ready to listen when the victim is ready to talk.

The program also gives victims the option to stay anonymous, have someone else file the report for them, decide whether or not investigators will contact the person who assaulted them and include them in other decisions about the investigation.

"There are evidentiary problems that can come from that," Hull says, "but the alternative is, if they never come in, we're never going to get to a place where we are potentially turning a case over to a DA where those evidentiary considerations will come in."

In 2014, Sgt. Peter Mahuna, head of PPB's Sex Crimes Unit, attended a weeklong training on the You Have Options program. A main component of the program is the Forensic Experiential Interview (FETI). Mahuna says he likes the program and may implement aspects of it. He says it would be difficult for a department the size of Portland's to sign on officially considering that to be a recognized member, all 1,100 people who work in the bureau, including nonsworn staff, would have to undergo the training.

— Emily Green