

Carlisle Presbytery Peacemaking Award

Sexual Assault Resource and Counseling Center (SARCC) Lebanon and Schuylkill Counties

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The future can be bleak for sexual assault victims. Without caring, professional counseling and on-going support, victims have a much higher rate of alcoholism and promiscuity. They have trouble forming relationships and difficulty maintaining jobs. Coupled with this is loss of self-esteem, and depression. The cost to victims, their loved ones, and the community as a whole can be devastating.

Victims, however, can reclaim their futures with the help of The Sexual Assault Resource and Counseling Center (SARCC.) Since 1983, approximately 12,000 women, children, and men have called on SARCC to help them make the long, difficult journey of healing. This process transforms them from victims to survivors and allows them to believe in a future that is bright.

Before 1983, rape victims in Lebanon County had to travel to Harrisburg or Lancaster for counseling. During that year, a small group of volunteers from the Harrisburg Rape Crisis Center opened an office in Lebanon County. By 1985, it was clear that Lebanon County needed a sexual assault center of its own. Today, SARCC is the 16th largest provider of sexual assault counseling services in the state of Pennsylvania.

The initial staff consisted of one part-time counselor. Today, there is a staff of nine, including full-time trained counselors and a director of education.

The agency continues to provide free and confidential counseling and support to hundreds of new clients every year through the 24-hour hotline, individual and group counseling, support groups and medical accompaniment.

Staff members offer violent free prevention education in schools, from kindergarten through college-aged programs. SARCC continues to recruit and train volunteers who staff the hotline, help with fund-raisers, and advocate for the agency and its services.

SARCC provides its services to all survivors of sexual assault as well as their significant others (i.e. parents, siblings, spouses, and friends.) The largest served population is female adults (about 75%), and one-fourth of the clients are children, who range on average from 18 months to 17 years. The youngest client served by SARCC was four weeks old.

Current innovative programs include the development of a comprehensive outreach for the Latino community and running support groups at the Lebanon County prison to reach sexual assault victims who rarely receive these counseling services. SARCC now offers advanced

training to volunteers who serve as medical advocates for sexual assault victims when they first come to the hospital emergency room.

Recognizing the need for community support in order to reach the 27,000 potential victims in Lebanon Valley, the agency developed a community advisory board and a spiritual advisory board utilizing local clergy who enhance awareness and strengthen community partnerships.

In 2007 SARCC achieved one of its longest-held dreams; a collaboration with the Good Samaritan Hospital to implement a Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (SAFE) program. This program prepares registered nurses with advanced education and clinical preparation in forensic examination of sexual assault victims. The SAFE program is tailored to the needs of any locality or region to provide a victim-sensitive solution to systemic gaps in the medical-legal response to these victims. Lebanon's SAFE nurses have made a profound difference in the quality of care provided to sexual assault victims. They offer victims prompt, compassionate care and comprehensive forensic evidence collection for more effective investigations and better prosecutions.

In 2009 SARCC's efforts to end sexual violence was awarded with an additional contract from the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency to expand current services to survivors in Schuylkill County. SARCC began this new program in July of 2009.

SARCC's approach in counseling and prevention simplistically is a culture of respect, tolerance and empathy, characteristics of peacemakers.