

February Newsletter

VAWA and Teen Dating Violence

Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month is upon us again, and this year some current events may have a big impact on our teens and their safety.

Perhaps you have heard of VAWA in recent news reports? The Violence Against Women Act of 1994 was the first federal law intended to end violence against women. And it made huge strides toward this goal, drawing attention to the issues of domestic and sexual violence, and stalking; it provided numerous protections for survivors of these types of violence, as well as establishing the Office on Violence Against Women within the Department of Justice. The grants administered by this office fund the work that we do here at Response.

Over the years, VAWA has been reauthorized three times, each time bringing more protections for survivors, expanding the scope of these protections, and providing continued funding for numerous programs.

In 2000, the VAWA reauthorization included provisions for elder abuse and abuse of those with disabilities, as well as including dating violence as one of the focus areas of the act.

The impact of this inclusion on youth and teens has been huge; it allows for awareness and prevention programs in public schools and universities, as well as direct services to this population.

In 2018, the reauthorization act was introduced by Representative Sheila Jackson Lee and includes several important protections for our youth:

- Provides a definition of technological abuse to include sextortion, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, and other forms of cyber abuse that affect teens disproportionately, as they are active users of social media.
- Expands funding for the Rape Prevention & Education Program which addresses the correlation between bullying and dating abuse, directs funds to improve local mandatory reporting policies for peer-to-peer violence, and expands training for campus health centers.
- Updates the SMART Prevention program which; reduces dating violence by providing education, training, and skills development to youth; engages young men as leaders in preventing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking; and provides healing services to children exposed to domestic violence.
- Closes the “boyfriend loophole” by prohibiting those convicted of dating violence from possessing firearms.

Unfortunately, VAWA 2018 was not passed in time before the partial government shutdown occurred, despite two extensions this past fall. At the current time, VAWA funding is not in danger, but we do need reauthorization of VAWA to ensure future funding and to enact the additional protections discussed above. When the government gets back in business, we hope that the reauthorization goes through in order to meet the needs of our teen survivors and direct service providers.

Special Dates

- Feb 4 -Volunteer meeting—4pm
- Feb 5 -Volunteer and Board hours due
- Feb 1– Feb 28—Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month

Current Needs

- Walmart and Sheetz gift cards
- Tall kitchen and ESPECIALLY 33 gal trash bags
- Plastic food storage containers
- Canned ravioli, SpaghettiOs, etc.

Survivor Story

Brittney Henderson



Young love. It sounds so sweet and innocent, and we would like to keep that image in our heads when we think about teenage romance. Young love certainly can result in a healthy relationship, but all too often there is abuse, even in teen relationships.

Brittney Henderson knows now that what she experienced in her relationship that began as a high school freshman was abuse, but at the time, she thought it was exciting and very normal. At age 16, she began dating an older, popular football star, and was so thrilled that he had picked her to be his girlfriend; this background set the stage for Brittney to accept her boyfriend's later actions as a way for him to show his love for her.

She remembers that he was a fun-loving, goofy guy who showered a lot of attention on her, but that attention gradually turned into more aggressive and controlling behavior within months of the beginning of their relationship. It began with him critiquing her appearance, reminding her that other kids questioned why he would date someone like her; at one point he even put her on a diet. He began requiring her to spend more time with him, making her miss out on participating in activities with her other friends and family. He expected her to spend an inordinate amount of time on the phone with him; he made her stay on the phone with him as he was driving home and would call her again after they were each ready for bed, becoming verbally abusive if she fell asleep as they were talking late at night.

When Henderson got a summer job, her boyfriend became jealous of the time she spent there, so he tried to sabotage the job; locking her keys in his car trunk, soaking her work uniform so that she had nothing to wear, and slashing her tires were all attempts to keep her from going to work.

Throughout the relationship Henderson never thought of these actions as abusive, until one time when her boyfriend misinterpreted her laughter as being directed at him; that day, he pinned her up against the wall by her throat. Even then, although she knew that it was not ok, she did not interpret his pattern of behavior as an abusive one.

Her family and friends knew that the relationship was not a healthy one, and saw Henderson's personality changing, but at that time (2007-2010) information about dating violence was not widespread. Her father stepped in and tried to get her to end the relationship, but it was not until Henderson attended a lecture about dating violence on her college campus that she knew that she had been a victim of dating abuse. She finally ended the relationship after realizing the danger that she faced.

Because of her experience, Henderson feels strongly that young people need to be educated about healthy relationships and the signs of dating violence; she has worked at the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline and has spoken on the topic at schools in order to help teens learn what dating abuse looks like and what they can do to get help. She encourages teens to visit www.loveisrespect.org to learn and to get support through the numerous resources found there.

Henderson's message to teens everywhere is, "You deserve to be treated with respect, and you deserve to be in a relationship that empowers you." Let's spread that message as far as possible as we recognize Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month.

Recap of events

Pantry Organization

I realize that not everyone gets as excited about organizing projects as I do, but just take a look at our pantry! After several hours of checking dates, labeling, and organizing many cans and boxes, our volunteer, Christine Mann, whipped our pantry into shape. Now we can see what we have and easily access food for our shelter clients! Thank you for your help!



“Moving Beyond” Group



Did you know that we have an on-going support group that takes place at the shelter each week?

“Moving Beyond” is a group for those trying to move beyond domestic violence or sexual assault; the goal is to empower survivors to cope with and find support in order to live a healthier and more fulfilling life. The current group began in the fall and we have had many sessions thus far. We have discussed

boundaries, safety planning, power and control, self-esteem, goal setting, communication, and so much more. Each week we do some fun activities and also cover some more serious topics. Regardless, our clients leave feeling the support around them and are empowered to move beyond whatever situation they are facing. The group is open to members of the community, even if they are not currently a client at Response; if you know someone that may benefit from this support group they may contact Stephanie Heishman-Litten at 540-459-5599.

Upcoming Events

Spring Fashion Show

Yes, spring will be here before you know it, so this is just a reminder to save the date of April 7 for our Spring Fashion Show! So get your friends together and plan to have a great time from 2-4 pm on April 7th in the banquet room at the VFW in Edinburg!



Celebration of Hope

Celebration of Hope is back this year! So mark your calendars for October 12 and plan to be at Cave Ridge Vineyard as we rock to the sounds of The Foundry Street Project! Watch our Facebook page and website in the months ahead for more information and tickets.