

*Support—Heal—Educate—Prevent: Helping the Community STOP Sexual Abuse*

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## LIFE CHANGING DECISION

Carol Lentz, Therapist

**I**n the fall of 1995 and spring of 1996, I was a therapy intern for the Sexual Assault Center of Pierce County. I was working on my Master's degree in counseling and wanted to do an internship outside the world of the university where I worked. It was a life changing experience for me and I wanted to find a way to get back to actually working at the agency.

In January of 2000 Stephanie Sacks hired me as a part-time therapist. As I soon discovered, being the intern had been the "easy" part. Being a paid therapist scared me to death. I thought, "What if I do something wrong?" "What if I say something to a client and they're angry or frustrated with me?" "What if Stephanie decides she has made a horrible mistake in hiring me?"

Well, six and a half years later I'm not as scared as I used to be. And I have discovered, clearly, that I am not perfect and do (and will) make mistakes. I sometimes do say things that anger and frustrate my clients. And we talk about it.

My clients are some of the most amazing people I know. They have taught me a

lot about myself, the nature of therapeutic relationships, and relationships in general. They have shared their deepest fears, deepest shames and deepest joys. We have laughed together and we have sat in silence when the subject matter became too tough for words.

Here are some of the things I have learned:

- The grooming process of perpetrators. My clients tell me that they feel they have some kind of mark on them so that people can tell they are vulnerable and have been assaulted or manipulated before.
- I am no longer surprised by what people will do to another person. I don't mean I condone it or am not able to hear it, but my rose-colored glasses are permanently gone.
- I have developed a stronger sense of skepticism about people's intent and that has helped validate my clients and their experiences.
- I have learned that other people really want to believe that victims of sexual assault lie to get attention, particularly child victims.
- The work we do can really

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## WOMEN OFFERING EMPOWERMENT SKILLS

### (W. O. E. S.)

Kathy Ward, Education Coordinator

**F**or the past year I have been going to Washington Correction Center for Women at Purdy. Initially I had one group of women, but it has since expanded to two; one for the old-timers and one for the newcomers. The program has been named **W.O.E.S. (Women Offering Empowerment Skills)** by the inmates.

One goal of the group is to offer support and a safe place to come and share the pain and tell their story in a setting that is JUDGMENT FREE! Another goal is to have a PLAN for those women who will be transitioning back into the community. A plan

“We both belong to the sexual assault group and the other woman tried to deal with her abuses and was unable to make a break-through until she came to the group. She broke down and cried, finally on her way to healing.”

that will be a change from the life that has led them into their current situation.

The women are mentoring each other and for many it is the first time in their

lives they have experienced or felt such pride and accomplishment.

The women who attend the group meetings are victims of childhood sexual abuse and their stories are bone-chilling. This task has been the most challenging one I have experienced in the nearly seven years of working at SACPC. The vicious cycle of abuse is heartbreaking, and the scars of trauma and the sense of worthlessness among these women are overwhelming.

It astonished me to hear a grown woman try to convince me that she was to blame for the sexual abuse she experienced at the age of four at the hands of her father.

It astonished me to watch this particular female hyperventilate, weep and shake while telling me that at four years old she should have stopped him! This is what this woman has lived with the entire 40 years of her life. Are you really surprised that she is a drug addict?

Are you surprised that a woman is a drug addict when at age five she is raped by her mother's boyfriend? Or, when

she tells her mom, the mother beats her with an iron and calls her a liar? Are you surprised when these women end up in violent relationships? Are you surprised that their children are at high risk to experience sexual abuse also?

“Kathy [Ward] has helped me to put [an] end to my silence and shameful secrets. She has taken time to help women such as myself who lived a long life in a lie and full of shame and guilt that isn't ours to claim any more.”

While I don't justify any criminal activity, it certainly is easy to understand why someone would want to numb themselves and forget such devastation. I think we need to take a good look at the cycle of abuse.

The effects of sexual abuse can be life-altering. The effects of sexual violence are devastating and traumatizing. It affects all that the victim is or could be. It affects her self-worth, personal safety, trust, relationships, and motherhood. It destroys any goals and dreams of joy for the future.

Imagine feeling that you are not important to ANYONE! Not even your children. The is-

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### W. O. E. S.

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sues become complex because in the years after the abuse, most of them lived lives that society deems shameful, such as prostitution and drugs.

“I have learned positive ways to deal with my past abuse. I also am able to help other survivors by being able to share my story and show them we can get through it. I enjoy knowing that once I’m released I don’t and won’t need or use drugs to deal with the pain.”

Then these elements make them feel different, as though they don’t belong. During these times most of these women have lost their children to the state, so they have THAT guilt and shame to live with also.

I often ask myself, “Would these women's lives have been different IF they **had been** believed by the people **who** should have been loving and protecting them?” The answer of course is YES! So what now?

“My childhood was destroyed by those predators. Help me figure out it is not my fault. I have very little trust [in] anyone no matter how close they are to me. Please help me become a strong person mentally [and] emotionally stable for the first time in my life.”

“I want to learn how to forgive myself for not seeing what I couldn’t see! How to deal with my younger children being raped by their brother and my older children being raped or molested by their step-father. Because I married him not knowing and put him in my children’s life.”

It occurs to me that female inmates are throw-away human beings. Did you know that **only two percent** of female inmates get visitors or receives mail? People often ask me if I think these women can assimilate back into the community, to which I answer, “Yes, it's not an option. They HAVE to.” ✓

### Life Changing Decision

(Continued from page 1)

- **make some people uncomfortable and on the other hand is a relief to others.**
- **It is quite a risk for our clients to talk about their sexual assault history because often they have not been believed and people have asked them too many questions. I have had several clients tell me that I am the first person who has believed them.**
- **How deep the sense of shame is that many survivors carry.**
- **Survivors of sexual assault are incredibly resilient.**

I wondered when I first started working as a sexual assault therapist in 2000 whether I was meant to do this work. As I leave the agency, I know I was. I will miss every one of my clients, present and past. I will miss my colleagues. I will stay involved with the issues around sexual assault and not betray the great wisdom and insight I have gained. Working for SACPC was the best decision I ever was given to make. And I thank all of you.

[Carol Lentz has accepted a promotion to become Assistant Director of Academic

Advising at the University of Puget Sound. We know she is an asset to the UPS experience and community, but we will miss her professionally and personally. We are grateful for her dedicated service. —Ed.] ✓



## SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTER OF PIERCE COUNTY

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# MEN WERE CHALLENGED TO “WALK A MILE IN HER SHOES” AND THEY DID!

Carolee Wynhoff, Executive Director

**T**he weather was beautiful on April 28<sup>th</sup> when more than 100 participants gathered at the Washington State History Museum to stand up against rape, sexual assault, and gender violence. Sixty-four men wearing women’s shoes boldly walked a mile through the main streets of Tacoma and were joined by 36 women.

The walkers got into the spirit of the event and wore some outrageous shoes! Others, unable to buy shoes large enough to fit their feet, spliced them open and duct taped them to their feet. Many lost heels and caved-in arch supports. Since the “Walk a Mile in Her Shoes,” the Men’s March to Stop Rape, Sexual Assault and Gender Violence® took place during lunchtime, our walkers were greeted and cheered by all who were enjoying their lunch outside. We don’t know who had more fun—the men, the women, or the spectators.

Students from Gray Middle School sang and performed a skit for walkers before the WALK began, and their band played from a street corner midway through the WALK—

they were all great and added so much to the day! Our event attracted the support of many community leaders, including First Gentleman Mike Gregoire; Pierce County elected officials, such as Gerald Horne, our County Prosecutor; Tacoma City Councilman Mike Lonergan; plus judges, mayors, attorneys, police officers, fire fighters, members of the military, students, local businessmen/women, and other concerned citizens. They all contributed to make our WALK an overwhelming success.

We thank them and their families and friends who made pledges to help raise over \$20,000 to support the work of our agency, along with the following sponsors of the event: Ben Bridge Jeweler, Copiers Northwest, Crystal Springs, DaVita Inc., RE/MAX Town and Country Gig Harbor, Tacoma Rainiers, The Excel Company, and the Washington State History Museum. Not only did they raise much-needed funds, they raised community awareness about the issue and prevalence of sexual violence.

The day was full of emotions. One gentleman walked in

honor of his wife, who is a rape survivor. Together, he and his wife, arm in arm, walked down Tacoma’s Pacific Avenue, he in her high heels. Another walker disclosed that he had been sexually assaulted as a child and had never told anyone, not even his wife. Each participant indicated the reason they were willing to walk—“to protect their children, their grandchildren, their wife, sister, mother or friends.” Their purpose/reason for involvement had been written out by their hand and was clearly on their minds as they embarked on their mile.

We will hold another WALK next year and hope that our “charter members” will return to not only walk, but also help us plan the “ultimate event.” Keep those shoes, guys, if they’re salvageable or start shopping for next year’s pair! As an agency that works hard to prevent sexual assault and abuse, while advocating for and supporting/treating victims, our hearts were touched by this involvement on the part of our citizens. It was also great to have some fun! Thank you so much for coming out, taking a stand,

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## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

We have opportunities available for many kinds of volunteers in advocacy, education, therapy and

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administration. Please call (253) 597-6424 ext. 19 to find out more. Thank you! √

## *and they did!*

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and supporting our agency's work. See you next year!?!)

[Heidi Herrin, our former Fund Development Manager, brought this WALK to our agency. We thank her for this event and her service within our organization. We miss her terribly and wish her all the best in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as we welcome our new Fund Development Manager, Michael Smith. —Ed.] √

## INTRODUCING . . . MICHAEL SMITH

**T**he Sexual Assault Center of Pierce County is pleased to announce that Michael Smith has joined us as our new Fund Development Manager. Michael brings over twenty years of event sponsorship and fund development experience to our agency.

After graduating from the University of Puget Sound with a degree in business administration, Michael started his own sports marketing firm working with professional athletes negotiating their endorsement contracts. "Working with professional athletes was a very exciting business," says Michael. "The guys were very easy to work with and frequently my work with them became much more involved than just negotiat-

ing their endorsement deals. I found myself setting up non-profit foundations for many of them as a way for them to satisfy their desire to find a way to give back to the home town communities that had given them so much."

That introduction into the world of non-profit organizations stuck with Michael. After stops at the Market Foundation as their Director of Education and as the Executive Director of the Washington Restaurant Association Education Foundation, Michael has found a new home at the Sexual Assault Center and we are glad he's here. "Carolee and everyone here at this agency have made me feel comfortable from the first moment I walked in," Michael stated. "I'm very excited about the opportunity to

work towards increasing the public's awareness of both the Sexual Assault Center itself and the great work done here as well as helping the staff and board achieve their goals. So next time you're in the neighborhood, please take a moment to stop by and say hello. I'm looking forward to meeting you!" √



## SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTER OF PIERCE COUNTY

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### ON BEING AN ADVOCATE

Melanie P., On-call Advocate

**M**y name is Melanie, and I would like to share with you about my experiences as an advocate. I came to the Sexual Assault Center of Pierce County (SACPC) in the fall of 2005, with an interest in gaining some baseline experience to integrate massage therapy into victims' recovery process. As a newly Licensed Massage Practitioner (LMP) I was contemplating the direction in which my massage business would take. I was interested in using massage therapy, a safe touching to assist survivors in reintegrating touch into their lives.

When I completed the Basic Sexual Assault Awareness

Training (BSAT), I realized that even with my degree in criminal justice, how little I really knew about the facts and statistics of sexual assault. I had no problem wrapping my brain around the fact that it's never the victim's fault, that it's about control, domination, and violence using sex as a weapon, or that victims need support, love and help to get through the aftermath of their assault. What surprised me, was the fact that only about 15 percent of all rapes are perpetrated by strangers; at least 85 percent are perpetrated by someone the victim knows at least casually, and in most cases, the victim knows well and trusts not to hurt them.

Being an advocate has been one of the most challenging, and gratifying experiences of my life. I've learned how to provide information and support to people at what is often the most traumatic period of their lives. I've been given the opportunity to educate, validate and advocate for the vulnerable, underserved, and often, those who have no one else to turn to for help when they need it the most.

When I considered writing this piece for contribution to SACPC's newsletter, I really had no idea what I wanted to share, but kept getting jumbles of lines in my head that seemed to become a poem. This is what became of my random thoughts:

#### On Being an Advocate

We wait on call to respond to crisis needs  
Well trained and informed, to plant our seeds  
Unconditional support is a seed of hope  
When a victim feels they're drowning, we are a lifeline rope  
Sleepless nights, rushing to a hospital call  
We are quick to assist and protect them from all  
The uninformed, unintentional trauma that can arise  
From even loved ones who can't help but question why  
Why did this happen, will it destroy their life?  
Of my daughter, my son, my lover, my wife?  
We know there's no answer to resolve this quest  
But assure them it's not their fault, and unquestioning love is best  
We slay dragons with information and offering a hand  
Sometimes they take it, sometimes we simply stand  
We encourage, educate and when it's all said and done  
We've convinced our clients they're never alone.

## On Being An Advocate

(Continued from page 6)

All of the advocates I know had full and busy lives before taking on the position of advocate. It takes an empathetic and emotionally generous individual to do what we do. But, we can't imagine not doing it, and do everything in our power to stay fully informed and active in our pursuit of standing up for the rights and needs of others. If you are considering becoming an advocate, I challenge and commend you. If you are already an advocate, I believe you are one of the most wonderful, beautiful, courageous, and amazing individuals the world has ever been blessed to know. ✓

## VICARIOUS TRAUMA AND YOU A Three-Hour Workshop

**I**f you work with a high caseload of traumatized individuals, this workshop is for you. We know that trauma impacts the clients we serve, but how does witnessing, helping with or hearing about trauma day after day affect you personally and professionally? What is the impact on the organizations we work in? Come and find out what the "occupational hazards" are and find out what you can do to minimize the risk to yourself and your organization.

This workshop is suitable for social workers, mental health therapists, residential counselors, case managers, medical personnel, law enforcement, fire fighters, CPS workers, and foster parents; anyone who has had repeated exposure to trauma through work or volunteer activities. Administrative personnel at agencies who focus on trauma or supervise direct line staff are especially encouraged to attend.

- When:** Thursday, January 11, 2007
- Time:** Check in at 8:45 a.m.  
Workshop 9:00 a.m.—12:00 noon
- Where:** Sexual Assault Center of Pierce County offices  
633 N. Mildred, Suite J  
Tacoma, WA 98406
- Cost:** \$35 per person pre-registered by January 3, 2007  
Special group rate of \$25 per person for three or more from the same organization registering together by January 3, 2007  
\$45 per person after January 3  
CEUs available with advance notice and additional fee

### Registration Form

Vicarious Trauma and You – Please Register by January 3, 2007

Sorry – No refunds after that date – Substitutions permitted

Please register \_\_\_\_\_ from our agency/organization @ \$\_\_\_\_\_ per person

Total \$\_\_\_\_\_ enclosed or charge card expiration date \_\_\_\_\_

Card number \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name (s) \_\_\_\_\_/Title(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Address/City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Mail or fax registration to SACPC, 633 N Mildred Suite J, Tacoma, WA 98406-1725  
(253) 597-6424 – Fax (253) 597-6443



**Sexual Assault Center of Pierce County**

633 N. Mildred Suite J  
Tacoma, WA 98406-1725  
Administration (253) 597-6424  
Fax (253) 597-6443 \* TTY (253) 274-0448  
Crisis, Information and Referral  
Line (253) 474-7273 or  
(800) 756-7273

<http://www.sexualassaultcenter.com>

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