



The Friendship Center

NEWSLETTER | SPRING 2021

Consent is an enthusiastic yes.

IT STARTS WITH ME.
I Ask. I Speak Up. I Believe.

STOP SEXUAL ASSAULT.  The Friendship Center

Sexual Assault Awareness Month:

Free virtual events throughout the month of April. Register at thefriendshipcenter.org

- Speakers/Panels
- Art/Wellness
- CEUs available

We want to change the tide of sexual violence in our community, one person at a time.

We get it! This is hard stuff to talk about. And that is exactly what we plan to do.

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Join us throughout the month to hear from survivors, heal through art and movement, dive into trauma and

resilience, and learn about how each of us has a part to play, and much more.

The rate of sexual assault experienced in our service area is elevated relative to the entire state of Montana. In 2019, The Friendship Center saw an 85% increase in the number of victims who came to us because they had been sexually assaulted. In 2020, we served 84 clients who identified sexual assault

as a primary victimization.

Additionally, in our area high school students report higher rates of rape and recent sexual assaults, including in the context of dating, compared to all high school students in Montana. In all, approximately three out of every 20 high school students in our service area report experiencing some form of sexual assault or coercion in the past 12 months (Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2019).

Each of us has a part to play. Ask for consent. Speak up when you see a potentially harmful situation. Believe victims.

Register at www.thefriendshipcenter.org to participate in one or all of the free activities in April. 

The Friendship Center is the only DVSA shelter in Lewis and Clark, Jefferson, and Broadwater Counties. Our mission is to be a safe haven for those affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking and to empower our community to flourish in relationships free from violence.



Open to the Public: Monday-Thursday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. | Friday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Location: 1430 Sanders, Helena MT 59601

Call: 406-442-6800 (Anytime) | **Email:** officem@thefriendshipcenter.org

Looking Back, Looking Forward BY Jenny Eck, Executive Director

With spring comes transition, change, and inspired hope for the future. As you may have heard, I will soon be leaving The Friendship Center (TFC) to pursue a master's degree in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia. It has been a longtime dream of mine and an opportunity that I cannot pass up.

It's not easy moving on from this position. My time at TFC has been one of growth and inspiration. I have loved working with such an incredible group of dedicated and compassionate board members and staff. The mission is one that inspires action and resolve throughout our community. I am grateful to the clients we serve who have taught me so much about courage, about speaking one's truth, and about reaching toward the beauty that life has to offer.

We have a lot to celebrate here at TFC, as 2021 marks our 50th anniversary! When TFC was founded in 1971, it served as a homeless shelter and a shelter for women who had experienced domestic violence. Rev. Ray Brown, who was very much involved in the initial opening of Rhe Friendship Center, described how it all came about.

"On June 30th, 1970, a meeting was held in the Old St. Mary's rectory on Gallatin Street in Helena. Rocky Mountain Development Council and several churches were invited. The purpose, to address the problems of domestic violence against women. The Friendship Center resulted. There were little monies, but the old rectory was available. Bishop Hunthausen donated the building to The Friendship Center. The apocryphal story was that the legal advice given him was the he could not do that. Bishop Hunthausen allegedly responded, I already did!

After the Violence Against Women Act passed in 1994, TFC narrowed its mission to solely serve victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Since then, we have recognized that violence does not discriminate, and TFC has

grown in mission to serve anyone, not just women, affected by domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.

Now, 50 years after its humble beginnings in the Old St. Mary's rectory, TFC is a well-established organization serving over 500 survivors of domestic and sexual violence and

providing thousands of nights of safe shelter each year. We are located at 1430 N. Sanders, in the beautiful facility built in 2007, under the incredible leadership of Holly Kaleczyc.

When Holly came on as Executive Director, TFC was located in a 100-year-old, eight-bedroom house, across the street from where we are now. The build-

ing had only 3,800 square feet of usable space for both staff offices and residents. The heating, plumbing, and electrical systems were in dire need of repair and there was no security system.

When asked by a reporter why TFC needed a new building, Holly replied "My dream is to have a facility that matches the services we provide. If you're going to be about hope, you need to look like hope, not 'this is all you deserve'."

Every time I read that quote, I tear up. TFC has always stood for hope and dignity for survivors. We are an organization dedicated to walking shoulder-to-shoulder with those who are seeking new lives, free from violence. As we look back over the past fifty years, and forward to the next, this is a good opportunity to pause and reflect on all that TFC means to this community and the people who walk through our doors.

We have an amazing team of leaders on our staff and board who are dedicated to seeing this organization into the next chapter in our history.

I look forward to continuing to support The Friendship Center in the years to come, and I ask that you join me in that. Thank you for your commitment to this work and to all the ways in which you show your support. 🌍



Sexual Assault Kit Initiative

BY Deb Bakke, Direct Service Advocate

When Mariska Hargitay started playing Olivia Benson on *Law & Order: Special Victims' Unit*, the content of the scripts, as well as the work she did to prepare for the role, opened her eyes to the staggering statistics about sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse in the United States. She received hundreds, then thousands of letters from survivors disclosing their stories of abuse, many for the first time. She wanted to answer



those letters, to address the suffering they described, and honor acts of courage they represented. Her response was to launch the Joyful Heart Foundation in 2004.

In 2009, Hargitay learned about the backlog of untested rape kits in police storage facilities across the country after reading a report from “Human Rights Watch.” In Hargitay’s words, “To me, the backlog is one of the clearest and most shocking demonstrations of how we regard these crimes in our society.” The Joyful Heart Foundation made ending the national rape kit backlog of over 225,000 untested kits the foundation’s advocacy priority.

In September 2016, the Montana Department of Justice was awarded a \$2 million-dollar grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance to assist with tracking

and processing 1,252 untested sexual assault kits in Montana, some dating back to 1995. Of that number, 458 kits were found eligible to be tested. Those kits have been slowly coming back with DNA “hits” from a massive federal DNA database called CODIS. That means that sexual assault cases that were once considered cold are now positioned for finding a suspect.

One of the primary areas of focus for the Montana Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) has been identifying best practices for survivor notification. The project is committed to providing a survivor-centered, trauma-informed notification process to mitigate re-victimization, honor survivors’ experiences, and alleviate the potential for harm. To that end, the notification process includes a trained, community-based advocate in the specific jurisdiction to provide confidential support and connection to long-term support beyond the notification.

A typical in-person notification is conducted by a multi-disciplinary team that includes a MT SAKI Victim/Witness Advocate and/or Coordinator, law enforcement representative, and a community-based advocate. In the Helena area, as a Friendship Center Crisis Response Advocate, I have been

helping fulfill the role of the community-based advocate for in-person notifications. During the pandemic and the increased use of online meeting platforms, MT SAKI has remained aware of the survivor’s comfort level and choices when it comes to notification meetings and has actively engaged survivors in deciding how they would like to meet with the team. Survivors can choose to have an online meeting using Zoom, participate via phone, or the team coordinator can connect the survivor to a detective and advocate in her/his jurisdiction to arrange an in-person meeting.

In 2019 a convicted sex offender was the first person charged with rape under the initiative. A woman reported being raped outside her apartment building in 2015. She underwent a sexual assault exam, and the exam kit was held in evidence by Great Falls police until 2018 when it was sent to a crime lab for testing. The evidence matched the offender’s DNA which was in the CODIS national database following a 2005 sexual assault conviction in Fergus County.

To learn more about the national back-log of untested kits, and how it affected four women as they traced the fate of their kits and re-engaged in the criminal justice process, watch the Emmy-award winning HBO documentary “I Am Evidence,” which Hartigay produced in partnership with HBO.

Friendship Center Mondays

Park Avenue Bakery donates 10% of sales to The Friendship Center on the first Monday of each month



Each Person's Experience is Unique BY Sarah Kamis, Direct Service Advocate

The silence of apprehension. The tears of relief. The breathless sobs of pain. These emotions ring clearly through a phone. These also are some, but by no means all, of the ways a conversation with a sexual assault survivor can start. There is no right or wrong way to go through a sexual assault.

This call starts matter-of-factly.

"I'm reaching out because I was assaulted, and, well, I want to know what my options are. I wasn't really planning on this, but I've been kinda thinking about it awhile. I want to do something, but sometimes I'm not even sure what happened."

As an advocate, in that moment I am there to honor this person's experience and whatever she has to say.

"What matters is how the experience felt to you. It's okay if you aren't sure how to feel about what happened or if how you think about it changes over time. There is no right or wrong way to go through this. That doesn't mean it's an easy process but know that I am here for you. I trust you. I believe you," I tell her.

We want survivors to do what helps them establish a sense of control and wellbeing. That may or may not involve reporting to law enforcement. It may or may not involve counseling. It may or may not mean applying for an order of protection. It may mean blocking the perpetrator from any form of contact such as texting or social media. Or it may mean knowing where the perpetrator works or goes to school so the survivor can know what places will feel safe. What a survivor needs may

change over time, too. I'm here to help this survivor with where she's at right now.

"I'm thinking about reporting to the police, but I'm just not sure yet."

"That's okay," I say. "It's not a decision you have to make right now. If you decide to report to law enforcement, I can work with you on that. You can talk to a detective here at our office and I can be there with you if you want. You will be in control of the situation."

A heavy silence follows. We are honoring that it's okay to be unsure. It's okay to take time to figure this out. I trust her.

"Take as much time as you need or let me know if you need a break. We can pick this conversation up at any time," I assure her.

Her voice waivers and breaks; her sentence turning to tears. The calm determination she held gives way to uncertainty. It can be very common for someone to experience a wide range of emotions during a conversation about a traumatic event. This can also be the case for longer periods of time. One day someone feels confused, the next day they may feel confident, the next day may come with a wave of grief. There is no right or wrong way to experience a sexual assault.

"I don't understand why I didn't fight, why I didn't leave. But I didn't know what was happening. I was confused. I just froze. Was it really an assault if I froze like that?"

"I can't define your experience for

you, but what I do know is that the way it felt to you is the reality of it. I believe you," I say. "Along with 'fight or flight', freeze is a very common response during a sexual assault. This response comes from a part of the brain that overrides our ability to make decisions and move.¹ It is our system's way of trying to protect us. Freezing does not imply consent and it does not mean that what happened was okay."

"Was this someone you knew?" I ask.

"Yeah, we had been kind of dating. We've even had sex before. But this wasn't the same."

Her determination seems to have returned.

Eight out of 10 rapes are committed by someone the victim knew.²

"Just because you dated or had sex before doesn't mean he had any right to do what he did. According to Montana state law, a previous dating or sexual relationship does NOT constitute consent. Saying yes to something in the past doesn't mean you're saying yes to anything in the future. Consent can also be withdrawn at any time."³

"When he put his hand on my chest, I pushed it away."

"That sounds like you made a very

clear show that you weren't ok with that. State law also defines consent or lack of consent as something that can be verbal or through conduct. Do you feel like his actions showed he was respecting the message you were giving him?"

"I pushed his hands away multiple times."

"You aren't responsible for what he did. He is responsible for his actions no matter what. You were making a choice and he was taking that away from you.

How do you feel about your safety and wellbeing right now? Is he contacting you? Is there anything that you want to focus on for your safety? That can mean mental safety as well as physical," I say.

"He hasn't reached out to me. I blocked his number and removed him from social media. I feel okay for now."

"If that ever changes, I'm available to talk through ideas for helping you feel safe," I offer.

"I wasn't really sure what I wanted when I called you. I wasn't really planning it. It just sort of happened. I talked to my sister and she was supportive. She said she believed me and knew that it wasn't my fault. But it really helps to hear that from you too."

"It can be difficult to go through this alone and a lot of people find it helpful to talk to someone. I don't expect you to have all the answers. We aren't born knowing exactly what to do in these situations and we often aren't taught. It can take time to figure these things out.

Would you like info on counseling services, reporting to the police, safety planning, or anything else? You can take your time to think about any of these things. I will be here for you whether that's tomorrow, a month from now or a year from now."

"I'm going to think some more about reporting the assault to police. I might talk to my sister about it again."

"You have time to think about reporting. For the majority of sexual assaults that are reported, there is a delay in reporting to law enforcement. That is 100% ok. That doesn't mean that what happened wasn't a big deal or that you aren't taking it seriously," I assure her.

"I saw a therapist a few years ago who I really liked. I might see if she is available."

"It sounds like you know what feels like the next step. Well, we've been talking for quite a while about something pretty intense. To me that shows a lot of power. That doesn't mean it should feel easy, but please just know I see a lot of power in you. Is there something that you would want to do when we get off the phone that will bring some comfort or help your body work through any tension you might be feeling?" I ask.

"I might just watch a movie. I need to give my brain a break."

"That makes a lot of sense. Do what you need to and know that you can reach out to me at any time," I say.

We exchange goodbyes and hang up the phone. I don't know if I'll talk to her again. Some people reach back out for something; others don't. Either way is okay, because there is no right or wrong way to go through a sexual assault.

Although this story involved a woman, sexual violence can happen to anyone, and The Friendship Center is here to serve you regardless of your gender identity. 🌈

¹<https://tinyurl.com/SAAMTFC2> • ²<https://tinyurl.com/RAINNTFC> • ³<https://tinyurl.com/SAAMTFC1> • ⁴<https://tinyurl.com/SAAMTFC3>

Volunteers Needed

The Friendship Center is hosting a Crisis Line Advocate training this spring. The training will be a total of 38 hours. Contact Gina or Sarah at 406-442-6800 for more information.

Training Schedule

Saturday, April 17 • 8:30-5:00
Sunday, April 18 • 8:30-5:00
Wednesday, April 21 • 5:30-7:30
Thursday, April 22 • 5:30-7:30
Saturday, April 24 • 8:30-5:00
Sunday, April 25 • 8:30-5:00
Wednesday, April 28 • 5:30-7:30
Thursday, April 29 • 5:30-7:30

Recommended Reading: *Know My Name,* by Chanel Miller

"I opened *Know My Name* with the intention to bear witness to the story of a survivor. Instead, I found myself falling into the hands of one of the great writers and thinkers of our time. Chanel Miller is a philosopher, a cultural critic, a deep observer, a writer's writer, a true artist. I could not put this phenomenal book down."

-Glennon Doyle

Read it for a book club or just read it to deepen your understanding of the obstacles victims of sexual violence face in seeking justice and reclaiming their lives.

Montana Book Co. will donate proceeds from this book to The Friendship Center during April. Order a copy by e-mailing montanabookco@gmail.com.

People, at the Heart of What We Do

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: MIKE VANNATTA

I believe the most important part of living a good life is our impact on other people we meet along the way.

I work in education and impact many young lives every day. It is incredibly rewarding. 2020 was very isolating for me. I missed interaction with adults, and I wanted to do something positive and important that would also be rewarding.

I have been keenly aware of the privilege being a man has afforded me and the violence and pain inflicted in our society and communities. People in my life have often found emotional support and safety with me, and I enjoy

being there for them.

I started working with The Friendship Center to broaden my positive impact and provide support to those in my community who were most vulnerable and hurt.

I believe hearing a man's voice on the end of the crisis line might be a small part of healing for our predominantly women clients. It is emotionally taxing work, but it is extremely important work.

I am very proud to be a part of such a compassionate team as we strive to assist victims of violence in our community. 🌍



Volunteer Mike Vannatta

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: APRIL WHITAKER, Program Support Assistant

I have spent most of my life in Helena. It is where I met my husband of 15 years and had my two beautiful children who now tower over me. I have always enjoyed our beautiful scenery, camping and spending time in our great outdoors with my family. I also enjoy almost all things art, whether it is admiring others' art, creating my own, making food art, or writing poetry.

One thing I have always struggled with is figuring out where I wanted to be and what I wanted to do, but one thing I knew was I wanted to be able to help others and continue to learn and gain new experiences. I think I have finally found the best opportunity to do just that.

Growing up in Helena has also allowed me to see the many changes of our beautiful city and community. Amongst those changes I got to see was The Friendship Center. I remember when I was a child and The Friendship Center was still a homeless shelter across the street from where we are now. Back then I would've never thought I would be a part of that organization and get to see how far they have come, but I am very honored to now be a part of the team.

As the Program Support Assistant, one of the great things I get to witness is our caring and giving community. I cannot express just how much it warms my heart to see so many wonderful people coming together to help those who are in need. This community of ours truly has a big heart! 🌍



In addition to being a cheerful presence in our front office, April also is a talented artist.

We Trust You When You Say You're Afraid

BY Chelsea Nottingham, Direct Service Advocate

I met Andrea* in the waiting area of The Friendship Center. She was shaken and clenching a large stack of paperwork. After years of being stalked and harassed by an acquaintance, she was at the end of her rope.

She reported to police, and they pointed her in our direction. She wanted help filing an Order of Protection as a final effort to obtain some peace.

For years, she's changed phone numbers, emails, deleted social media, even bought a new vehicle and relocated, trying to keep addresses confidential, but nothing stopped him from finding her. He went as far as to contact her friends, boyfriends and family members. The stress it was causing her was overwhelming. His behavior was threatening her current relationship and her sobriety.

Unfortunately, the Order of Protection was denied. With all the proper paperwork, documentation and endless copies of threatening texts and emails, it still wasn't enough.

Andrea was devastated and felt betrayed by the system. Months later, unwanted contact persisted, and she mustered up the courage to report again to law enforcement.

Finally, some relief. After a long interview, going through more than 50 letters she'd been sent, and recounting painful memories, law enforcement decided to charge her offender with felony stalking. Andrea refiled for an Order of Protection, testified to the trauma she endured, and it was finally granted.

Andrea was overcome with emotion and relief. She said, "I couldn't have done this without The Friendship Center. I would have given up, but you made me feel believed when everyone else made me feel crazy. I can't thank you enough." 🙏

*Name has been changed to protect the identity of this person.

A "New" Car Can Be A Lifeline

BY Jaime Gabrielli, Direct Service Advocate

A client and her three children came to The Friendship Center for safe shelter and supportive services while fleeing an abusive relationship. She has worked incredibly hard to rebuild and create a better life for her family.

Since coming here, she has enrolled her children in school and daycare, obtained gainful employment, and connected with various social service agencies in the com-

munity for help and support.

Her vehicle began to break down, and she discovered the repair costs were greater than its worth. Without reliable transportation, she faced losing her job and not being able to take her kids to school and appointments.

After weeks of searching for a car in her price range, she couldn't find anything suitable. That changed when TFC staff reached out to John Elliot, CEO of The Dealership Alternative. John immediately

If you can donate a reliable car or RV, please reach out. These donations are tax deductible.

Officers Awarded for Victim-Centered Approach

BY Eric Parsons, Outreach & Education Coordinator

Two local police officers were awarded for their outstanding work handling domestic violence and sexual assault cases in February.

Helena police officer Dakota Becker and Lewis and Clark Sheriff's Deputy Matt Kultgen were recognized as Officers of the Year by the Helena Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault (DVSA) Working Group.

Law enforcement officers that respond to domestic violence calls are asked to perform duties that will increase victim safety and offender accountability.

"It is so important to recognize the officers in our community who have shown extra dedication and care in serving victims of domestic and sexual violence. These officers have shown compassion and understanding of trauma that is so important to this work," said Jenny Eck, executive director at The Friendship Center. 🙏



Becker and Kultgen receive awards from DVSA working group.

set to work finding the right car at the right price and within days found the perfect solution. When the car arrived and John discovered it did not have snow tires, he found her a set and put them on for no charge.

She was overjoyed and grateful for John's assistance, and this experience has restored her faith.

Because of John's generosity and dedication, this client can now reach her goal of living independently and free from violence and abuse. 🙏

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The Friendship Center

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The Friendship Center's newsletter is a membership benefit for those who support our mission. If you value the work we do and would like to continue to receive our newsletter, please donate today.



Donate **TODAY** to support ending domestic and sexual violence in our community:

Use the **ENVELOPE** enclosed in this newsletter

Visit thefriendshipcenter.org and click on **DONATE NOW** in the upper right corner

Make a **RECURRING GIFT** from your credit card or bank account.

Make a **PLANNED GIFT** to take advantage of the Montana Endowment Tax Credit

Give through **SECGC to #3707** if you're a Montana state employee

The Friendship Center

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Bringing Healing to Helena



*"You decide what your power is.
You decide what your power means."
-Vanessa German*

On April 10, join us to make a Power Figure.

The class will be held virtually as part of our Sexual Assault Awareness Month Activities. Register for free at www.thefriendshipcenter.org.

Kits are available for purchase for \$5 at The Holter Museum.

 The Friendship Center

The Friendship Center is a safe haven for those affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking and empowers our community to flourish in relationships free from violence. A victim-centered, trauma-informed approach guides our work. Clients have access to individualized case management, emotional support, group classes, along with many other wrap-around services.

 **HOLTER**
MUSEUM of ART

The Holter Museum of Art, with local healthcare organizations, brings artwork and free or low cost art activities into patient care and community environments. Our mission is to make the healing power of art available to community members and their families while they are in the hospital, other healthcare facilities or community support organizations.