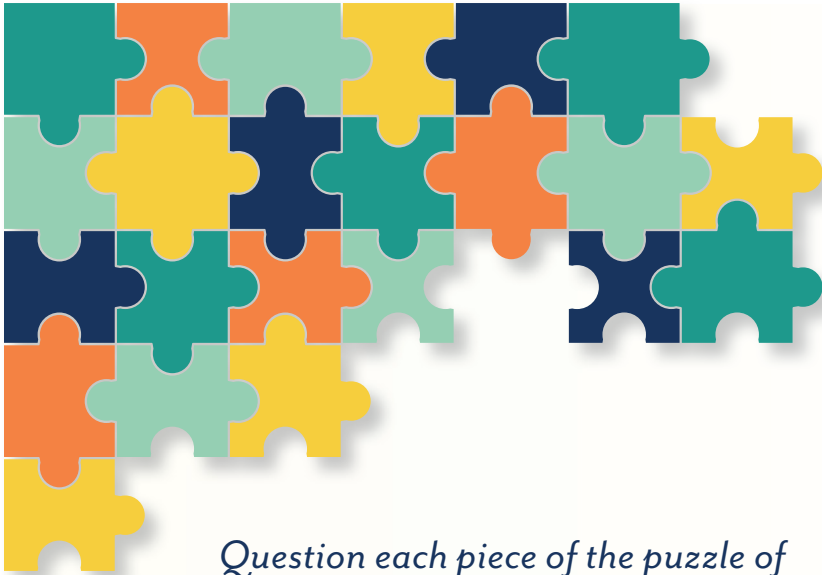




The Friendship Center

NEWSLETTER / **SPRING 2022**



Question each piece of the puzzle of damaging myths about sexual violence to build an accurate portrayal of these crimes, help victims, and hold perpetrators accountable.

Read more on pages 4-5

TO VICTIMS/SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT:

What happened to you is not your fault.

You deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Your feelings (all of them) are valid.

You are not alone.

You matter.



APRIL IS SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH.

In this issue of our newsletter, we highlight the role each of us can play in breaking apart a culture that normalizes sexual violence, contributes to victim blaming and prevents victims from getting help. As we question false narratives that perpetuate sexual violence and replace them with accurate information, we create a safer, more just, and kinder society.

We also highlight some of our community members helping us support those who have experienced domestic

violence, sexual assault, and stalking, as well as working to prevent this type of violence. There are so many pieces of our community that must come together to ensure the most vulnerable among us can find hope, safe haven, and support, not only to escape violence, but to rise above their pasts and rebuild their lives.



Thank you for being a piece of rebuilding a more beautiful picture.

THE FRIENDSHIP CENTER IS THE ONLY DVSA SHELTER IN LEWIS AND CLARK, JEFFERSON, & 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: 9AM – 5PM MONDAY – THURSDAY / 9AM – 4PM FRIDAY / **Location:** 1430 Sanders, Helena, MT 59601
24-Hour Hotline: 406-442-6800 / **Email:** officem@thefriendshipcenter.org / **Fax:** 406.430.0114

CHANGE THE NARRATIVE:

Seeing The World As Just & Orderly Undermines Victims / by Jenny Tu

HAVE YOU EVER heard someone say that “she was asking for it for dressing like that” or “he deserved it because he was drinking irresponsibly?”

There can be a tendency to believe that people deserve what comes their way, and that it is somehow their fault. We receive an underlying message in our culture through many channels, including fairy tales, movies, and even many religions, that good is rewarded and evil is punished. While the intent of those messages is often to teach morals and values, it can lead to a mindset called the Just World Hypothesis.

As humans, we like to see the world we live in as orderly and just; there is the need to trust that the universe has its balance, what goes around comes around. We are constantly seeking an explanation when bad things happen. We don't like the discomfort of seeing others suffer, and we don't want to see ourselves as susceptible to the same kind of suffering. To maintain our own well-being, we explain and justify those situations as people get what they deserve.

This thinking results in victim blaming. It is easier for us to blame those we cannot help by dehumanizing them. When we learn about a situation with a terrible outcome, it is less burdensome to say what others **should have** done rather than understanding that the incident is unjust. This helps us feel safer in what can be an unpredictable and unsafe world.

This is evident with victims of sexual assault and beyond. People facing homelessness may be considered lazy. Individuals struggling with drug addiction should be punished. Those experiencing intimate partner violence should just leave their abuser. Often, assault victims have been accused of “asking for it” because of the way they dressed, what they have consumed, or how they have acted. The Just World Hypothesis touches on the psychology behind victim blaming,

and it also reveals a simple way to overcome it. Getting out of the victim blaming mindset can simply be fixed by changing the focus of the narrative.

Rather than blaming “Jane” for her sexual assault because of how she dressed or that she was drinking alcohol, change the point of view. We should frame the story so the focus is on the perpetrator. “Jon hit on Jane at the bar. He bought her a drink, and he spiked it with drugs. He assaulted her later that night.” A simple fix in the language we use could switch our attitude completely and allow us to become more empathetic. No one deserves to be sexual assaulted. Period.

The sense of safety garnered by buying into this type of “justice” is a façade and does not make us safer. However, when we adopt a new narrative, we will help the victims of these crimes beyond measure.

Time and again, we are faced with convincing our clients that what happened to them was not their fault. What if our society didn't suggest that it was their fault? Would more people seek help for the crimes committed against them? Would more people seek the medical services they need and deserve after experiencing these crimes? Would we stop giving rapists an excuse for their choices and behavior? Would we change how the justice system treats these victims? The results of a simple change in narrative could have a ripple effect for thousands of people in our community alone.

Even though we may feel helpless when someone we know has been assaulted, we can still provide support by believing them and holding the perpetrator accountable.

This April, Sexual Assault Awareness Month, join us in changing the narrative of how these crimes occur. 🌍



“Rather than blaming “Jane” for her sexual assault because of how she dressed or that she was drinking alcohol, change the point of view.

ADAPTING TO THE NEXT PIECE

A letter from our Executive Director,

Gina Boesdorfer

IT HAS BEEN my pleasure to work at The Friendship Center for nearly seven years. In that relatively short time, I have seen some pretty big changes in the needs and barriers of our clients. When I first started working with our shelter residents, people were often able to find solutions to many of their barriers; getting into housing within a few months, connecting with a counselor, finding work, problem solving transportation, etc.

As demand changes and increases in our community, resources have not been able to keep pace. Clients living in the more rural parts of the tri-county area experience even more barriers than those living in the Helena area.

It is often like a real-life version of Tetris. Someone is able to get a job and childcare, but a sneaky long block appears; they cannot find reliable transportation, thereby losing the job and childcare. Or someone may have transportation and a job, but then the zigged block comes and doesn't turn in time; they cannot find an available childcare spot in time and start all over again.

When additional challenges with stable mental health and/or addiction are also present (often a direct result of the trauma experienced), the Tetris puzzle gets more complex and challenging.

At times the challenges seem overwhelming and insurmountable, both to clients and staff. But we are determined to be creative, to work with our community partners, and to walk with our clients as they trudge forward.

We see so many clients accomplish their goals, sometimes after years of effort, and are reminded of the strength, courage, and resiliency of the incredible people we serve. It is important to be aware of the barriers, to understand the complex and challenging circumstances our clients face. Yet our clients are able to not only survive but often thrive despite the violence they have experienced or live with.

Your role in helping us weave together the complicated Tetris grid cannot be overstated, either. It is with your support that we can adapt to the next piece that comes into play, as well as proactively plan to meet the new demands we see coming our way.

We can come together as a village, as the community we are, and keep supporting those who need it most, keep working towards our goal of a community free from violence.

Gina



we are determined to be creative, to work with our community partners, and to walk with our clients as they trudge forward.

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DISMANTLE THE DAMAGING PUZZLE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE MYTHS / by Jamie Gabrielli

FEW REALMS OF criminal violence are as generally misunderstood and fraught with misconceptions as sexual assault. Society's normalization of rape and other types of sexual assault leads to widespread misinformation about the nature of sexual violence and glaringly reflects a lack of social understanding about consent, gender, sexuality, oppression, and power.

Many common myths promote the falsehood that sexual assaults are, at least partially, the survivor's fault, preventing victims from getting the help they need and deserve. Misleading theories also make it easy for perpetrators to escape criminal prosecution because they serve to excuse sexual violence, create hostility toward victims, reinforce criminal justice system bias, and undermine judges' and jurors' ability to objectively assess facts. As a result, **out of every 1,000 sexual assaults reported to law enforcement, 975 perpetrators will walk free.**

Myths about sexual violence also lend false perceptions of security, especially to women, because we feel safer if we can imagine the victims did something wrong to cause their attack, and we can therefore protect ourselves and loved ones from being victimized by avoiding certain situations and behaviors. In reality, no one is immune from being harmed by sexual violence. Sexual abuse is never caused by a victim's choices or behavior, personality, or responses; it is caused *entirely* by the abuser.

Separating myths from facts is critical to stopping sexual violence and finding ways to best support victims/survivors of sexual assault and abuse. *When we break apart the "puzzle" of damaging myths about sexual violence by educating ourselves and others about the facts and challenge misconceptions, we can rebuild a society that is more just and beautiful.*



MYTH: Women often "cry rape" or lie about being sexually assaulted.

REALITY: False reports are dramatically overestimated and sensationalized in the media. Evidence-based research estimates the percentage of false reports to be about 2-8%. This is the same rate for false reports for other crimes. Misconceptions about false reporting rates contribute to why many victims don't report sexual assaults. When it comes to lies and sexual assault, the one that women are most likely to tell is the one they tell themselves: That they did something wrong and deserved to be violated.

MYTH: A "real" sexual assault survivor always reports immediately

REALITY: Rape is the most under-reported crime; 63% of sexual assaults are not reported to police. Only 12% of child sexual abuse is reported to the authorities. Reasons for lack of reporting include fear of retaliation, shame, self-blame, confusion, and inaccurate information about legal rights. Other victims don't

want to get the perpetrator in trouble or fear there is not enough evidence to prove what happened. Many do not come forward because they fear they will not be believed, or worse, will be blamed for their assault.

MYTH: Most rapes are committed by strangers in dark, isolated locations.

REALITY: Most sexual assaults happen during the day, at home, and by someone known to the victim. Studies show only 19.5% of assaults are committed by a stranger; 8 out of 10 victims know their assailant - be that a friend, partner, service provider, family member, employer, or acquaintance.

MYTH: Women cannot be raped by a boyfriend, partner, or spouse.

REALITY: Sexual assault can and does happen in long-term relationships. According to Montana law, a current or previous dating, social, or sexual relationship does not "determine or prove consent." It is important to remember consent needs to be explicit and must happen every time, regardless of relationship sta-

tus. Just because someone has given consent in the past does not mean it is implied or ongoing in the future.

MYTH: If the victim is high or drunk, they put themselves in a position to be sexually assaulted.

REALITY: Due to the predatory nature of sexual violence, assaults often occur when victims are intoxicated. Alcohol is the number one tool used by perpetrators in drug-facilitated sexual assault because it quickly and effectively increases the vulnerability of their victims. Being mentally or physically incapacitated, whether due to alcohol, drugs, or another vulnerable condition prevents a person from being able to legally consent to sexual acts. It is a crime to have sex with someone who is highly intoxicated, also true when the perpetrator is intoxicated. **Being drunk or high is never an excuse to commit sexual crimes or harm someone else.**

MYTH: Women who wear revealing clothes are “asking for it.”

REALITY: No one ever asks or deserves to be sexually assaulted. Montana law clearly states the way a victim is dressed does not establish consent. Women have the right to dress

however they choose without fear of being raped. If we blame the victim for being sexually assaulted because of the way they were dressed, we excuse the behavior of the perpetrator and imply they are not responsible for their actions.

MYTH: Sexual violence is a “women’s issue.”

REALITY: Sexual violence does not discriminate; anyone can be a victim. 1 out of 6 men experience sexual violence in their lives. Most male sexual assaults happen under the age of 18 and most perpetrators are men. These predators choose to assault both gay and straight men because **rape is an act of aggression and domination**, not of sexual desire. Most male sexual assault victims never reveal it, even to people they know and trust. They fear being disbelieved, ridiculed, shamed, accused of weakness, ignored or, in the case of heterosexual men, being perceived as gay.

MYTH: If someone didn’t really want it, they would fight back.

REALITY: Despite what you might see on TV, most people do not scream or fight during a sexual assault because they freeze. It is a common and auto-

matic response for victims to become *immobilized with fear* during a sexual attack, unable to move, speak, or fight back. For that reason, Montana law states, “Resistance by the victim is not required to show lack of consent. Force, fear, or threat is sufficient to show lack of consent.” Attackers will sometimes use weapons or threats of violence to prevent a physical struggle or take advantage of someone who is not able to consent, because they are intoxicated, incapacitated, or asleep. Just because someone does not have visible injuries, did not say the word “no,” or did not fight back, does not mean they were not sexually assaulted.

MYTH: Men sexually assault others because they are sexually frustrated or cannot control their impulses.

REALITY: It is a disservice to men to assume they are incapable of controlling their own bodies. The media bombards us with harmful stereotypical messages of what it means to “be a man,” and normalizes dominant, violent sexual behavior. The truth is, regardless of gender, we are all sexual beings. A lack of control over sexual impulses and actions has nothing to do with the nature of

KEY REMINDERS

By engaging in victim-blaming attitudes, society allows the abuser to perpetrate sexual assault while avoiding accountability for his/her actions.

No one chooses or deserves to be the victim of sexual violence.

Sexual assault can happen to anyone.

Sexual assault is about power, aggression, and control; it is not about sexual attraction or impulse.

The perpetrator is 100% to blame for the assault. A victim/survivor is never to blame.

Every one of us is affected by sexual violence directly and indirectly.

It is on all of us to end victim blaming, challenge misinformation, and hold perpetrators accountable.

sexual violence. Perpetrators of rape are often serial criminals who are motivated by power, aggression, and control; they strategically plan their attacks and intentionally choose vulnerable victims. 🌀

REDUCING YOUR TAXABLE INCOME: DONATE FROM YOUR RETIREMENT ACCOUNT



DID YOU KNOW if you are 70 ½ or older, you could be eligible to donate to a charity and reduce your taxable income, regardless of whether or not you exceed the standard deduction?

Friendship Center champion Kathy van Hook wants to get the word out about this opportunity, so she called us from her camper in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, where she had paused her travels with her partner and dogs to share why she uses her required minimum distribution from her retirement account to support agencies like The Friendship Center.

The mission of The Friendship Center and the success of the organization in providing support to those who have experienced domestic violence is what drives Kathy's support each year.

"The Friendship Center succeeds spectacularly in meeting its mission," said Kathy.

When she hit the age that she was required to take a minimum distribution from her retirement savings, Kathy learned about Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCD).

According to the IRS, your required minimum distribution is the minimum amount you must withdraw from your account each year. You generally have to start taking withdrawals from your retirement plan account when you reach age 72. This income is then considered taxable. However, if you do not need the funds, you can consider a QCD.

To be a QCD, the check must be sent directly from an IRA to a charity. This brings your otherwise overall taxable income down. You must be at least 70½ years old at the time you request a QCD.

"I want the decision about how my money is spent to be made by me, not the federal government," said Kathy. And she wants others to know this option exists.

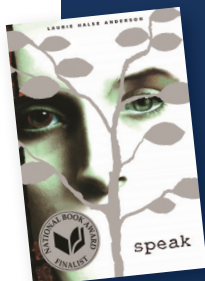
Kathy recommends sitting down and really digging into your values list and determine what you would like to support if you had the funding to do so. Then talk with your investment advisor or accountant about your goals.

"I wrote down what matters most to me in the world, and then I looked for an organization that matches," she said. "It makes me happy to contribute, and I want others to know about this opportunity."

READING RECOMMENDATION / SPEAK LAURIE HALSE ANDERSON

There are many reasons why it is difficult for victims to speak up about their sexual assault, whether it is the trauma they have experienced or the myths and messages we all receive as a part of our culture.

"Speak" is an award-winning young adult novel that tells the story of a teenager who stops speaking after experiencing a sexual assault. The book was inspired by Anderson's own experience of being raped as a 13-year-old child and the 23 years it took her to begin speaking about what happened to her.



Booklist says, "Melinda's voice is distinct, unusual, and very real as she recounts her past and present experiences in bitterly ironic, occasionally even amusing vignettes. . . . Melinda's sarcastic wit, honesty, and courage make her a memorable character whose ultimate triumph will inspire and empower readers."

For those choosing to read this selection for a book club, Montana Book Co. will give you 10% off your purchase. You can order a copy by emailing montanabookco@gmail.com

PEOPLE, AT THE HEART OF WHAT WE DO

Volunteer Spotlight: *Julianna*

“HELLO. CRISIS LINE, THIS IS JULIANNA.”

For one or two weekends in a month, you may hear my voice on the other end of The Friendship Center crisis line.

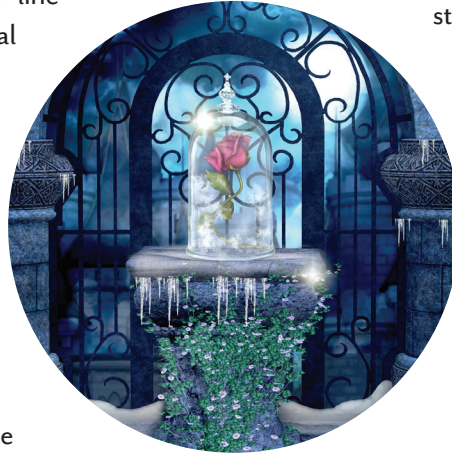
There’s an anonymity about the crisis line — something that makes it feel personal enough to share your problems without the invasion of facing your neighbors. It provides the space to divulge personal details without the threatening infringement of people you know gossiping. It’s a confidential safe space, providing callers the control to hang up and end the conversation without further pressing, questioning, or even identifying while also offering the promise of open listening and immediate response.

That anonymity works in reverse, too. Rarely do callers anticipate that the person filling out their in-take form has been, for nearly two years, sitting on an extra-long twin in a Carroll College single dorm room. The person actively listening to their struggles at night spends her days listening to lectures instead of handling case files.

When I share that I volunteer for The Friendship Center, I receive a lot of mixed reactions — usually along the lines of “Wow, that must be taxing.” Or, “How can someone your age handle stories like that?” Finally, the revelatory statement of “Wouldn’t that give you nightmares?” These last few weeks, I’ve been thinking about why the crisis line haunts me, but it’s not the reasons one would think.

The stories I’ve heard testify the undying determination to be safe and loved and successful when there is no promise of safety, love, or success. The clients claim control when there is little to be found. They pursue listeners when they’ve been shut-up. And, they seek shelter when basic human dignity has been deprived.

In their struggles, these determined people have taught me that deprivation is not the same as silencing, that struggle is not the same as failure, and that even when they have no resources to claim as their own, they still have something worth defending.



While my Biochemistry-Philosophy double major has taught me a lot about the composition and capacity of humanity, these stories have provided testimonies of the pain, trial, and strength of this community who, for better or for worse, fare the bitter winters of their lives in hopes of blossoming before the end of their tumultuous tale.

Their experiences will forever be impressed upon my memory, experience, and education. I am thankful to actively listen to the loving concern of fatigued mothers, brave vulnerability of sexual assault patients in the emergency room, and unfettered will of those so close as the other side of the phone. These anonymous voices preach of something more damning than death but more hopeful than safety — Resilience. 🌱

“...struggle is not the same as failure, and that even when they have no resources to claim as their own, they still have something worth defending.”

HOPE

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