

# Program Helps Survivors of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault

## Gets New Name, New Staff, New Direction

SAFE of Columbia County (formerly Columbia County Women's Resource Center) celebrated its new name and the re-opening of its emergency shelter, The Starting Place, on August 29<sup>th</sup> after being closed for two weeks of maintenance.

SAFE stands for Support, Advocacy, Freedom and Empowerment. The agency meets the needs of everyone affected by domestic and sexual violence, including intimate partner violence, rape, stalking, elder abuse, childhood abuse, gender-based harassment and unwanted sexual advances, etc. SAFE has been known as Columbia County Women's Resource Center and has been serving Columbia County since 1979. The Board of Directors voted to change the name because domestic and sexual violence are not only "women's issues." Domestic and Sexual Violence affect the entire community in many ways, and many of the people served by SAFE are men and boys. Also, the new name better illustrates the agency's mission, to empower our community to live safe, healthy lives free from abuse. Additionally, the new name and logo are more specific about the kinds of services SAFE provides and the empowerment model it uses in its services.

The Columbia County Women's Resource Center was founded in 1979 by a group of women with the goals of ending domestic violence and sexual assault and providing survivor-specific services regardless of social and economic backgrounds. For the first six years, the Women's Resource Center operated out of personal residences of its founding mothers. In 1984, the city of St. Helens gave the organization office space in City Hall. There, a plan was conceived to establish a permanent shelter to give survivors a safe place to recover and start over. Working with the city of St. Helens, a dedicated group of supporters acquired funding through the Oregon Community Development Block Grant for technical assistance to build the domestic/sexual violence shelter. In 1999, the 22 bed shelter, The Starting Place, was completed and opened to help domestic and sexual violence survivors and their children find a safe haven and begin the healing process.

Thirty-four years after incorporation, the United Way partner agency is still helping survivors of domestic and sexual violence. The Starting Place operates near capacity and offers transitional housing for survivors as well as emergency beds. Men and families with boys older than 13

years who are escaping violence can be housed at alternative safe spaces.

In addition to shelter, SAFE provides legal advocacy, a 24/7 crisis phone line, 24/7 hospital accompaniment and response, community resource navigation, free counseling, and violence prevention education to residents of Columbia County. SAFE is making a continued effort to be more accessible to the community, to expand knowledge about the causes and effects of abuse and to build a coordinated community response for the benefit of survivors.

Leading the agency is Program Manager, Naaman Cordova-Muenzberg. Naaman comes to Columbia County from Spokane, WA. There, he built his experience in crime victim advocacy, organizational capacity building, community outreach, and volunteer coordination for several non-profits. Naaman is joined by two new full-time advocates: a Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Advocate/Volunteer Coordinator, and a Youth Advocate &

Prevention Coordinator. Continuing with the agency are two Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Advocates, a Development Coordinator, and an Accountant.

Due to the small staff size, SAFE relies heavily on the support of its volunteers. New Volunteer Advocate Training will begin September 24<sup>th</sup>. This 40 hour training meets statewide requirements for anyone in direct service advocacy for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Those interested in volunteering can contact Katie Troha, DVSA Advocate/Volunteer Coordinator: (503) 397-7110.

For more information about the organization, contact Naaman Cordova-Muenzberg, Program Manager: (503) 397-7110.

If you or someone you know is seeking services related to domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking, call the 24/7 Crisis Line: 503-397-6161 or (toll free) 1-866-397-6161.

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