



L: Sarah Weakley is the Director of Development for the Haven. R: Ruth Micklem, Program Director for The Haven, led a training session intended to decrease and eliminate the cycle of disbelief of sexual assault claims.

Sexual assault awareness starts with believing

The Haven has launched a task force in the hope of eliminating the cycle of disbelief in sexual assault claims

BY KAREN REYNOLDS

Every two minutes, someone in America is sexually assaulted, 80 percent of them are under the age of 30. An overwhelming percentage of those assaults (80%) are committed by someone the victim knows- a family member, date, neighbor, co-worker or family friend. Date or acquaintance rape is just as serious as stranger rape, but it less likely to be reported

by the victim.

The "Start by Believing-Northern Neck Task Force" has launched a public awareness campaign in an effort to decrease and eliminate the cycle of disbelief of sexual assault claims. By educating the public and changing its response to sexual assault reports made by individuals, a victim's recovery process can begin sooner.

In 2014, The Haven in

Warsaw provided advocacy services to 62 sexual assault survivors, 56 of whom were women and 6 were men. Social scientific research using community samples suggests that only about 5 to 20 percent of victims report the crime to law enforcement. That translates into out of 100 forcible rapes, approximately only 5 to 20 of them will be reported. Because perpetrators attack an average of six times, one failed response can equal five more victims and the cycle continues.

Ruth Micklem, Program Director of The

SEE BELIEVING, page A7

Believing

continued from page A1

Haven, led a training session for interested citizens on Thursday, February 11 at Rappahannock

Community College. This session was the second in a series of public forums, with the goal of seeking volunteers to serve on various committees that include survivor support, media/marketing, fundraising/events and training and outcomes.

"There's not a lot of resources, now, in the Northern Neck for sexual assault victims," Micklem said. "With this campaign, we are seeking help from the community to change this fact providing more support for victims which in turn will encourage the silent victims to come forward."

Julie Sichol, Commonwealth's Attorney in Westmoreland County was present at the training session. Sichol said that seeking health care services after an assault does not automatically result in charges being brought against the perpetrator.

"It is so important for victims to receive health care after an assault," Sichol said. "Many vic-

tims are afraid to come forward, not wanting to involve the law."

In the aftermath of a sexual assault, victims make a variety of decisions, including whether or not to seek help. Most victims seek help from family or friends. When loved ones react negatively, the damaging effect on the victim can be over and above the traumatic impact of the sexual assault.

Statements such as "I told you not to go there, were you drinking, what were you wearing, are you sure that is what happened, do you really want

to report this, maybe you were asking for it," all serve to discourage the victim from taking action and beginning the healing process.

The next training session for the Northern Neck Sexual Violence Coalition will take place on March 26 at 10 a.m. at The Art of Coffee in Montross. For more information about the "Start by Believing" campaign can be found online at www.havenshelter.org/startbybelieving and on facebook at www.facebook.com/startbybelievingnnc/ or by calling 1-800-22HAVEN.

PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

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