



Area law enforcement and agency leaders (above) signed the Start by Believing proclamation. Photo by Sarah Weakley

Deputy Attorney General Bryant helps launch Start by Believing

by Madison Franks

WARSAW—On April 1, the national public awareness campaign, Start by Believing, was launched in the Northern Neck with guest speaker Virginia Deputy Attorney General Linda Bryant.

Start by Believing is an awareness campaign by End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI) to change the way people respond to sexual assault in communities. The Northern Neck Sexual Violence Prevention Coalition is leading the campaign in this area.

The local effort was launched Friday at the Richmond County Courthouse where several speakers discussed the campaign and the situations that make the campaign necessary.

Speakers included former sexual assault prosecutor Kenneth Kunkle, an associate at Terry, Hubbard and Brit in Irvington; The Haven Shelter and Services program director Ruth Micklem, executive director Ellen Yackel and development director Sarah Weakley.



Virginia Deputy Attorney General Linda Bryant endorses the sexual violence awareness campaign. Photo by Sarah Weakley

“The aim of Start by Believing is for all communities to come together and foster a safe and trusting environment where victims will be encouraged to tell their story without fear of being judged, and that is what helps their own healing.”

—Kenneth Kunkle, former sexual assault prosecutor

“We want to educate the community and raise awareness of this issue,” said Kunkle. “The aim of Start by Believing is for all communities to come together and foster a safe and trusting environment where victims will be encouraged to tell their story without fear of being judged, and that is what helps their own healing.”

Bryant said she has dealt with so many crimes and was always led back to sexual assault crimes due to what needed to be done with the law in these particular cases.

“Those types of cases were the most difficult, and nowhere do you learn more about how to deal with scared, reluctant witnesses and victims than

in domestic violence or in the area of sexual assault. For me that is my passion,” she said.

Bryant began researching protocols and found a senator who seemed to know the criminal justice field and the lethality assessment protocol. This protocol, for first responders in a sexual assault or domestic violence call, mandates questions that need to be asked and shelter information and resources that must be provided. The senator was Mark Herring and when he was elected Attorney General, he hired Bryant for his public safety division.

“Start by Believing is what I call a best practice and it is very exciting to see this going on here. This is a fundamental

culture shift that is really needed, and the fact that you are leading the way here is fantastic,” said Bryant.

The event concluded with a signing of a proclamation by local law enforcement representatives who pledged to support the Start by Believing initiative. Officials who signed the proclamation include Lancaster Commonwealth’s Attorney Jan Smith, Northumberland Commonwealth’s Attorney Jane B. Wrightson, Richmond County Commonwealth’s Attorney Elizabeth Tribble and Westmoreland Commonwealth’s Attorney Julia Hutt Sichol.

Others are Lancaster Sheriff Patrick McCranie, Northumberland Sheriff James R. “Doc” Lyons, Richmond County Sheriff Stephen B. Smith, Westmoreland Sheriff C.O. Balderson, White Stone Chief of Police Clifford R. Dawson, Town of Kilmarnock Chief of Police Michael S. Bedell, Town of Warsaw Interim Chief of Police Joanie Kent, and Colonial Beach Chief of Police Daniel Plott.