

HelpLine and SARNCO Collaboration spans multiple counties – widening our reach and offering a stronger network of support

By Nancy Radcliffe, Sexual Assault Services Director

On March 20, 2013, the Ohio Attorney General announced a plan to increase comprehensive rape crisis services across Ohio. This plan grew from a survey which was conducted in 2012 and found “... that only 36 Ohio counties offer comprehensive, direct sexual assault services. According to the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence, a county with comprehensive, direct services offers a 24-hour crisis hotline, criminal justice advocacy, hospital advocacy, community outreach, crisis intervention services, referral services, and agency collaboration.”

(<http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/>) Central Ohio is fortunate that it has two organizations which provide comprehensive rape crisis services to three counties; HelpLine’s Sexual Assault Response Network (SARN) and OhioHealth’s Sexual Assault Response Network of Central Ohio (SARNCO). Due to our combined efforts, those who’ve experienced sexual assault in central Ohio have a better likelihood of getting the support that they need and deserve.

In the past, SARN & SARNCO collaborated to offer professional trainings, share volunteer training opportunities, and worked on a case-by-case basis to assist survivors who may live in one county but work in another or vice versa. In 2011, an additional step was taken as HelpLine’s SARN program worked with SARNCO to put on a support group for survivors (i.e. Write to Heal) and began to look for more ways to combine our services/efforts.

In 2012, in order to better serve survivors of sexual violence in central Ohio, SARN & SARNCO staff came together to discuss how we could combine our advocacy programs. With southern Delaware County growing rapidly, both programs saw the need to collaborate to ensure that advocacy was provided to anyone presenting for a sexual assault evidence collection exam at the two emergency departments which serve both Franklin and Delaware counties (located in Westerville); Mount Carmel St. Ann’s and OhioHealth’s Medical Campus. It was agreed that, at each location, the patient/survivor would be asked if they were a resident of Delaware or Franklin County. Depending on the answer, either SARN or SARNCO would be contacted. If the person presenting at either location is a Delaware resident, SARN’s volunteer advocates will be dispatched and follow-up assistance will be offered and provided by the SARN Coordinator. Likewise, if the patient/survivor is a Franklin County resident, SARNCO will be the agency providing advocacy at the emergency department, while also providing follow-up assistance and, if needed, criminal justice advocacy. This protocol was formalized in November of 2012.

As part of this increased collaboration, in 2013 SARN and SARNCO are coordinating some key aspects of our volunteer trainings, planning in-services for volunteers, and sharing resources (e.g. books and therapeutic workshops) in order to establish consistent standards and share resources. Both agencies are also discussing how staff can support each other’s work, providing assistance with shared tasks when needed. For example, SARN staff helped out with SARNCO’s two recent volunteer trainings. This allowed SARNCO staff to attend fewer days of training and allowed HelpLine to send people interested in volunteering for SARN to attend this valuable training for free.

By establishing a strong partnership, not only do we anticipate being better able to serve sexual assault survivors in 2013, we should be able to offer more experience for our dedicated volunteers as well as use our limited resources more efficiently and effectively. Eventually, any interested volunteer advocate can become qualified to provide advocacy at any emergency department in Franklin, Delaware or Morrow Counties.

By SARN and SARNCO sharing our resources and planning together, we are ensuring that there is no duplication of service but a more seamless process to provide quality, comprehensive, and efficient services in central Ohio. Another shared goal for both agencies is the desire to support neighboring counties that are interested in bringing comprehensive rape crisis advocacy services to their residents. This collaboration allows us to discuss how, working together, we can support growth in other counties and the shared vision for our state; that of an Ohio where comprehensive rape crisis services are available to all.