



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HelpLine Promotes the Importance of Believing Survivors During Sexual Assault Awareness Month in April

Delaware, OH – April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) and HelpLine Sexual Assault Response Network (SARN) is promoting the message, “**Start by Believing**” (SBB), through providing education on appropriate responses to sexual assault disclosures. Affirming responses lead to improved access to support resources for Survivors while ending the cycle of silence.

Created by End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI), SBB challenges the victim-blaming messages which lead to feelings of guilt, shame and isolation for Survivors. Instead, SBB paves the way for Survivors to pursue healing and justice, coupled with support from their loved ones and their communities.

“There are so many critical steps and decisions that a Survivor may have to take and each step is a link in the chain of support,” said Lauren MacDade, HelpLine Sexual Assault and Victim Services Director. “Like any chain, one weak link can compromise the strength of the others.”

MacDade continued to say that when a friend or family member doesn’t believe the Survivor it may leave them feeling isolated from support. Further, when systems do not believe Survivors, their case may not be investigated, or they may feel they cannot reach out for help, resulting in a lack of access to the support and justice they seek.

“A single negative response at any point could mean that the whole chain of support falls apart,” said MacDade.

As few as 1 in 5 sexual assaults will be reported to law enforcement and less than 3 percent of these will result in a conviction. Survivors are more likely to disclose to someone they know and trust, such as a friend or family member. This makes it critically important to create a community where Survivors are believed and receive compassion, support, and justice they deserve – which all starts by believing Survivors.

HelpLine, in cooperation with local community partners, will provide therapeutic events for Survivors, families and friends to learn, connect and heal. Due to the continued pandemic, many of the following SAAM events are virtual:

- **SAAM Social Media Campaign** - HelpLine will feature a month-long social media campaign on its Facebook, Instagram and Twitter channels – @helplinedelmor and @HelpLinePrevention – and highlight resources, information and actions you can take in support of SBB.
- **HelpLine SARN Journaling Workshop, Tuesday, April 20, 6 p.m.** (note: location disclosed upon registration)

The City of Upper Sandusky will proclaim April as Sexual Assault Awareness and Child Abuse Prevention Months at their city council meeting on **Monday, April 19 at 7:30 p.m.** The SARN team is also actively working with city councils in the City of Delaware, Village of Mount Gilead and City of Bucyrus to proclaim the months during their regularly scheduled council proceedings in April.



Beyond SAAM, HelpLine leads a wide range of initiatives and services to support Survivors of sexual violence, mainly through its trauma-informed SARN programs offered in Delaware, Morrow, Crawford and Wyandot counties. Available to all Survivors, SARN offers one-one-one crisis Intervention and advocacy – regardless of when the assault occurred – healing workshops, peer support groups, and an annual retreat. Additionally, trained SARN advocates are available to assist Survivors at the hospital and with law enforcement immediately following an assault, and connects Survivors to resources at HelpLine and in the broader community. SARN is also actively seeking volunteer advocates to support these services and programs.

In 2020, HelpLine supported 248 Survivors and 42 co-survivors – which are friends, family members, partners, and/or other supports of the Survivor – through SARN services and the 24-hour rape crisis hotline and text line. During this same period, SARN volunteers spent 5,165 hours on call in support of Survivors.

While MacDade envisions a world where sexual violence is eliminated, she hopes to change the community response to sexual violence when it happens so that Survivors are supported and believed.

“Collectively, we can minimize the barriers that prevent Survivors from coming forth, one response at a time.”

To learn more about SAAM events, visit <http://helplinedelmor.org/saam/>. If you or someone you know has been sexually assaulted, contact SARN on our free, confidential 24-hour support, information, referral line at **1.800.684.2324** or text **helpline** to **898211**.

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About HelpLine

As the community’s only 24/7 resource, we are the go-to for supporting and empowering change. Our highly trained specialists offer compassionate support to help meet the needs of anyone in crisis, connecting them with the right resources and empowering them to thrive. Our prevention programs address suicide and depression, sexual assault, child sexual abuse and family violence to influence change in our community. These programs are rooted in our relationships with local non-profits and agencies, giving us the connections and knowledge to get community members the support, education and volunteer opportunities they’re looking for.

HelpLine is a contract provider of the Delaware-Morrow Mental Health and Recovery Services Board and Partially funded by SourcePoint. A United Way Partner, HelpLine is accredited by the American Association of Suicidology, National Alliance of Information & Referral Systems and certified by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. For more information, visit: www.HelpLinedelmor.org.

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