

PASSAGES, INC.

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Stories and Bravery

By Tia DeShong

Last summer, I was at an event designed to introduce community members to various social service agencies. My usual routine with such events is to tread lightly; if I start lecturing some unwitting community member about sexual violence when they just want to learn about free blood-pressure screening in their area, they tend to spook easily and the importance of my message is lost. So when a man, probably in his early-thirties, approached my booth, I began with my tame introduction. "Hi I'm from PASSAGES, Inc. Have you heard about us?" The usual retort to that question is "no," but at least it gives me a good opening to gently explain the importance of sexual violence advocacy and prevention in our area. To my surprise, however, the man answered, "yeah, I've heard of you." I noticed at that moment that the man seemed a bit nervous, glancing around him. He flushed when he spoke, but he said the words clearly, "You guys helped me when I was a little boy. I really admire the work that you do."

I've never seen such bravery than in moments such as that.

It is no easy thing to confess to being a survivor of sexual violence; so much guilt, blame, and stigma is socially-attached to the idea. Although most people, statistically, know someone who is



Our Spring 2018 graduates of SAC Volunteer Training from Clarion University

a survivor of assault, seldom are they aware and they do not always respond in victim-centered ways. A survivor told me recently that she was visiting her local doctor's office when the news of Bill Cosby's conviction broke. The receptionists gathered around the television in the waiting room, muttering to themselves about the victims in that case waiting too long to come forward and Cosby being wrongly accused. Then one of them turned to the survivor and said, "all right sweetie, come on back."

The point is, it's hard navigating the world as a survivor, not just in terms of dealing with the immediate effects of the assault, but also in regards to having constantly protect yourself,

emotionally, from our society's misunderstanding about the issue. To live every day as a survivor is exceptionally brave.

Within the pages of our spring newsletter, you will read two survivors testimonies that speak both to the struggles survivors face, but also their eventual road to resiliency and healing. You will see that hope is possible and that there are so many people out there who want to help support you on your journey. And you'll be reminded of the most important thing: that you can get through this. That you are brave.



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A Survivor Speaks

By Anonymous

Remembering can be such a burden. Waking up each day and recalling what happened. Feeling defined by one moment that has seemed to change your entire life. Fighting blame, depression, anxiety, stress, anger, sadness, nightmares, hyper-arousal, and fear. Shall I go on? You are exhausted and want it to go away. I understand. I remember going through it too.

I remember everything. The bright lights in the hospital during my exam. The sound of the nurse breathing as she scraped my finger nails and the clicking of the camera as she took pictures of my bruises. My advocate smiling warmly at me and touching my hand, "You will get through this," she whispered. I can still feel the tears running down my cheeks, wetting the scratchy pillow.

I remember the police asking questions that I didn't want to answer. Being embarrassed and feeling blamed. Waiting on justice that never seemed to come. I remember wishing I

would have never reported. I remember the day I was told there would not be charges against my perpetrators.

I remember not getting out of bed for days. Being too tired to cry anymore, being too sad to talk, and being too afraid to confront the feelings that brewed inside me. I remember pushing people away and refusing help.

I remember my rape.

But do you know what I also remember? The moment I decided there needed to be a "Day 1." A turning point. A change. No one could make that decision but me. That is where I found my power.

Day 1 has turned into Day 1,767. And you know what? I am what I never thought I would be. A survivor. I became a survivor the day I decided to not only continue surviving, but living. Making an effort to move forward with life and making it my own again.

Whether you choose to tell, get a rape kit, pursue an investigation, or not, healing is possible. It is up to you. Your life is just that, **YOURS**. Take time and allow yourself to go on your own journey of healing. No one can say what that will be but you. Reach out for help when you need to, look for joy, and find love for yourself. You can do this. There are others out there who understand. Believe me when I say, you are never, ever alone.

If you are ever feeling broken or damaged, please remember that broken crayons can still color. When you are ready, you can melt and mend back together. Maybe changed, different, shaped by suffering, but strong. Stronger than you will ever know. Take care of yourselves, my friends.



*Scenes from our Dubois 2018
Walk a Mile March*



Scenes from our Clarion 2018 Walk a Mile

Dear Survivor

By Danielle Brock, PASSAGES Counselor

Dear Survivor,

First of all, I want you to know that I am so very proud of you. Writing this was a bit of a struggle because I wanted to give you the perfect words of comfort and strength. I realized, however, that the perfect words do not exist. What I can tell you is that while your journey will not be easy, you will find your way.

While on your journey, you will encounter heartbreak and there are times when you will wonder if you will make it through. There are times when you will feel alone. Please know that you are not alone. There are many people who care about you, love you, and want to help you. I wish I could make all of your pain and despair go away, but I can't. You must face these emotions. It won't be

easy, but when you do you will be stronger than before.

The trauma that you have suffered can't be undone. Something has been taken from you. While I can't promise that you'll get it back, I can promise that your life has meaning and value even if you can't see it that way right now. You will feel pain and anger, grief and betrayal, loss and doubt. You will want to hide from what has happened like I did for many years, and it almost destroyed me. I learned that I had to face, head-on, the thoughts and feelings that scared me the most. I never gave up on myself.

Remember that it is not your duty to punish the people who have hurt you. It is your duty to heal and live your life to the fullest. That is what perpetrators hate the most--seeing that you have not been bro-

ken by their selfish and careless choices. My dear, you are not a victim anymore, you are a survivor. You have been empowered. You are now armed with the knowledge and bravery to go on. You are a warrior and a hero to the rest of us.

The work that has gone into, and continues to go into, my survival will always be something I am very proud of. So too shall it be for you. We are survivors, you and me. I will forever send you prayers of strength and hope. May peace be with you on the journey ahead.



Third Loop, a community knitting group based in Jefferson County, stopped by the Brookville office to deliver handmade comfort blankets and stuffed animals for survivors in honor of Sexual Assault Awareness Month.



If you or someone you know needs to speak with a counselor, we are available 24/7.

Call us toll-free at:

1-800-793-3620



We participated in the Clothesline Project at Penn State Dubois to help spread the word about supporting survivors.

Sexual Violence Prevention for Teens and their Parents

By Tia DeShong

Summer is a carefree time of the year, especially for teenagers out on summer break. But there can be a dark side to these carefree feelings. Did you know that 1 in 5 women will be raped in her lifetime, and a third of those were assaulted between the ages of 11-17? It's time we stand up for the young people in our lives and empower young people to protect themselves.

There is no sure-fire way to eliminate the chance that something may happen, but you are not powerless either. There are strategies that can help keep you and your loved ones safe:

1. If you're a parent, talk to your teen about sexual violence and assault. Many parents fear bringing up issues regarding consent and sex can put ideas in a teen's head, but rest assured that the rest of the world is already well ahead of you. You may not be able to control all of the messages your teen

receives, but you can help them navigate this new, confusing landscape. These conversations are best started young and had frequently as your child ages and develops. If you're unsure of how to have these conversations, PASSAGES, Inc. can help.

2. Know what consent is and what it looks like. Consent is about communication regarding sexual activity and it should happen every time you have sex. Giving consent once does not mean you've given consent for future encounters, nor does being in a relationship automatically mean you've consented. Consent can also be withdrawn at any time; if someone initially consents, but then expresses discomfort, you should back off. Consent best practice is "verbal and enthusiastic." It's not enough that someone doesn't say "no," be sure they are saying "yes." Remember that someone under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or someone who is too young, cannot consent.

3. Be a good bystander. If you're a teen, help keep your friends safe by learning how to intervene in a way that helps keep you safe and reflects your comfort level. You can do what you can to disrupt a potentially-dangerous situation ("This party is lame, want to have a sleepover at my house instead?"). If you think someone is in danger, ask them directly if they are okay and don't be afraid to keep checking in. You can also enlist the help of bartenders, security guards, and even other people around you. It's always appropriate to say, "Your friend looks like she has had a lot to drink. Can you check in on her?" And, as always, you can call 911 if you are really concerned.

PASSAGES, Inc. offers many programs designed to help parents and teens address these issues and more. To learn more about these prevention services, or to speak with a counselor, please contact PASSAGES at 1-800-793-3620.