

New Directions for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault



Joy D. Ingram is the community engagement program coordinator for New Directions Center on 110 W. Johnson St. in Staunton. New Directions Center is a non-profit organization working to reduce the impact of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and stalking through survivor-centered advocacy, support services, community education, and awareness. *Monique Calello/The News Leader*

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STAUNTON – The young woman knew what it felt like to be alone.

When she was 14 years old, she was raped by someone she thought was a friend. “I did not know what it was that happened to me. I knew it was horrible, but I didn’t have the words to call it rape.”

At 14, she thought that rape was the woman walking down the street at night carrying groceries who gets brutally attacked and raped. When she enrolled in Mary Baldwin University's PEG program, as part of first-year student orientation, the students watched, "But I Said No — Campus Rape," and she came to understand what acquaintance rape was.

"Now, I have a word for it. But what do I do with this word?" she thought. It defined things but not in a comfortable way. It didn't make her feel better, or like she had solved a problem. So, she held on to it, and put it in the place where those memories were. And the word settled down inside her.

About seven years later while at the doctor's office, she saw a brochure for a rape crisis center, and something told her to pick it up. But she didn't call them. Like the word, she "stashed it away."

Not too long after that, she was hanging out at her boyfriend's house, and they were having fun play wrestling on the floor. When he pinned her arms over head, she had a flashback. "Suddenly, I wasn't in the room with him anymore. I was back with my rapist, and I started kicking and screaming and crying. It was almost like I blacked out."

She knew that she couldn't do this by herself anymore.

"After that, I called the rape crisis center, and I really feel like they saved my life."

Hundreds of people call for help each year. They answer.

Joy Ingram has heard countless stories like this one. Stories that come from the women who walk through the doors of New Directions Center hoping to find someone who understands. Stories other people wouldn't believe, didn't want to believe. Hundreds of them each year; over 300 calls came into the center in the first six months of 2022.

Ingram has a peaceful way about her. She smiles warmly while sitting behind her desk at New Directions Center, Inc. in Staunton. A colleague sings to himself as he walks down the hallway. Another one pops her head in to ask a quick question. They rely on one another to answer the domestic violence hotline day or night, ready to drive to a public place to pick up another victim and bring them to shelter.

The nonprofit provides support and advocacy to those affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking and stalking. While its service area is Staunton, Augusta County and Waynesboro, if a domestic violence shelter in a nearby city calls Ingram for help, the priority is getting a victim to safety no matter where they live.

Typically, agencies work together to find space for victims. If the domestic violence shelter at New Directions Center is out of space, Ingram will reach out to Project Horizon in Lexington, She Shelter in Charlottesville or First Step in Harrisonburg to see if any of them can accommodate the victim, oftentimes with children, who need shelter.

It is a collective effort, Ingram said. Domestic violence nonprofits, social services, court advocates, mental health professionals, police officers, homeless shelters, supportive housing and places that give micro-grants to turn on a donated cell phone or pay for a U-Haul so victims can move out. Somehow, it must be pieced together to get victims of domestic and sexual violence and their children to safety.

But it's not enough. The number of people receiving domestic violence and sexual violence advocacy services in Virginia is staggering.

In 2021, advocacy services in Virginia helped over 20,000 adults and nearly 5,000 children who suffered from domestic violence, and over 5,000 adults and 1,700 children were given help after experiencing sexual violence. Over 50,000 calls were placed to the hotline in 2021.



"Powerful Voices: Stories of Survivors" is an art story exhibition created by students at James Madison University to bring awareness to the work of New Directions Center in Staunton, a nonprofit dedicated to reducing the impact of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, human trafficking and stalking. *Courtesy Of James Madison University & New Directions Center, Inc.*

Adequate shelter is desperately needed

Funding for adequate shelter and transitional housing is needed. Agencies must rely on communal living situations which present a multitude of challenges.

Communal living. "You have total strangers, from all walks of life, living in the same house with all of their multiple traumas, their multiple lifestyles, their kids, the ways they raise kids, their addictions, and it can just get more traumatic," said Ingram.

Multi-unit housing for the area's emergency shelter is essential, but the cost of housing in the Shenandoah Valley makes this nearly impossible. And victims need help to move forward, permanently.

In the meantime, survivors must make living in one house work as best they can. Depending on the number of people in the shelter, getting a bedroom to yourself is a luxury.

"When there's a lot of people in shelter, you're doubling up, tripling up in a room with folks that you've never met before," said Ingram.

Staying in hotels only works in the short term due to a lack of funding.

The nonprofit receives some funding from the Department of Criminal Justice Services and Department of Social Services while also applying for grants and fundraising. Volunteers are essential.

Services are free and confidential and include 24/7 hotline, emergency housing, court advocacy, emotional support services, support groups, hospital accompaniment and educational programs to raise community awareness on the issues of violence and abuse.

Ingram's role at New Directions Center is community engagement program coordinator. But she and everyone at the nonprofit wear many hats. She answers the hotline, talks with police on a domestic call to determine the lethality of a situation, arranges to meet victims at a safe place to pick them up and bring them to the shelter (day or night), helps victims who cannot leave yet get their safety planning in place and manages outreach programs to coordinate care. The list is long and often determined by the vast needs in the area, and the individual.

New Directions Center received 459 hotline calls in 2021. Records show they have received 320 calls between Jan. 1, 2022 through June 29, 2022, which marked the end of its fiscal year.

Ingram is passionate about making sure survivors know they are not alone. She knows how essential it is to be understood and supported no matter the situation. Because that 14-year-old frightened teenager — who finally turned to a rape crisis center for help at 21 — was her.

“I want them to always know that they have somewhere to go, they have someone who cares, someone who wants to help.”

In 2016, Ingram saw a table for New Directions Center at an event and decided to volunteer. She had volunteered answering calls for a rape crisis center and thought she could do something similar to help. Over time, she began to work directly with survivors and work on outreach initiatives, eventually becoming the nonprofit’s community engagement coordinator. Ingram continues to do the work because she doesn’t want anyone to have to walk alone, she said.

“Because I walked alone for so long. I don’t want anyone else to go through that.”

Ingram remembers reading about a place somewhere overseas where people can go into a pharmacy and there's a code word that they can say that lets the pharmacist know they're in a domestic violence situation and the pharmacist will hide them in the store and notify the police.

“I was like, yup, my spot would be one of those spots. You come in and order a coffee that's not on the menu or wine that's not on the menu. And from that, we know, and we'll get you help. I'll be doing this work in some capacity for the rest of my life. I'm just that passionate about it.”

For now, her spot is a little more straight-forward. There's a phone number to call for help right away. There's an old brick building on W. Johnson Street where Joy Ingram and her team work. And there's a site you can access, on your phone, to find out how to get help.

New Directions Center is located at 110 W. Johnson St., Suite 102, next to the Wharf parking lot in downtown Staunton. You can reach them at 1-540-885-7273. Visit newdirectionscenter.org to learn more.

Persons receiving domestic violence advocacy services in Virginia

Jan. 1, 2021 – Dec. 31, 2021

- Total adults served: 20,579
- Total children/youth served: 4,526
- Number of domestic violence calls to hotline: 41,749

Jan. 1, 2020 – Dec. 31, 2020

- Total adults served: 19,565
- Total children/youth served: 4,723
- Number of domestic violence calls to hotline: 40,242

Jan. 1, 2019 – Dec. 31, 2019

- Total adults served: 22,230
- Total children/youth served: 5,246
- Number of domestic violence calls to hotline: 39,681

Persons receiving sexual violence advocacy services in Virginia

Jan. 1, 2021 – Dec. 31, 2021

- Total adults served: 5,136
- Total children/youth served: 1,741
- Number of domestic violence calls to hotline: 11,086

Jan. 1, 2020 – Dec. 31, 2020

- Total adults served: 5,408
- Total children/youth served: 1,670
- Number of domestic violence calls to hotline: 10,653

Jan. 1, 2019 – Dec. 31, 2019

- Total adults served: 6,922
- Total children/youth served: 2,094
- Number of domestic violence calls to hotline: 9,555