

## Surviving Sexual Assault

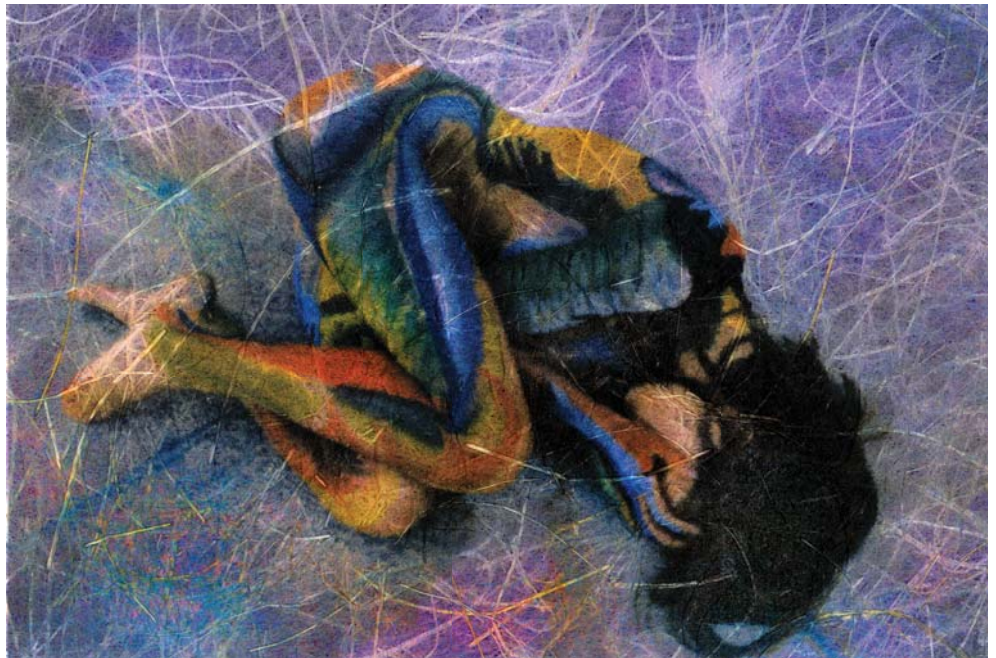
"Frankie," 19, woke up one Sunday morning. She felt something was wrong but she wasn't quite sure. Her clothes were off, and that was unusual, especially as she had been the designated driver the night before. She tried grasping at her last memory. She had been at a party with her college friends, but she remembered feeling hot and sick. She had stepped out to get some fresh air, and one of the guy's at the party had come out to help her. She felt dizzy, and he suggested that they go back inside and find her friends. She didn't remember anything else.

Lying in her bed, her body felt bruised and foreign to her – enough so that she thought she had been sexually assaulted. She called a friend who took her to the hospital. Shortly after checking in, a Women's Resource Center Emergency Advocate arrived as well. While at the emergency room, Frankie underwent a forensic exam and was interviewed by police. The Emergency Advocate – a WRC staff or volunteer who goes to the hospital to be with victims of sexual assault – sat with her, brought her drinks and tissues when necessary and provided information and support. Both medical staff and police believed she had been drugged and sexually assaulted. Frankie was devastated.

A WRC staff member from the sexual assault team followed up with Frankie the next day and set up a counseling appointment. Over the next several months, Frankie continued seeing the counselor as she helped Frankie work through issues of HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infection testing, self blame and guilt, including the guilt she felt about not telling her long-time boyfriend about the assault.

Frankie is just one out of the 650 adults and 178 children counseled by WRC staff in fiscal year 2007 for sexual assault. Here's what the WRC Sexual Assault Team knows:

- One in four women will be a victim



of rape or attempted rape by the time they graduate from college.

- 86 percent of women raped are raped by someone they know.
- One in eight men will be sexually assaulted by the time they are 18.
- The Rape Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) reports that someone is sexually assaulted every two minutes in the United States.
- One in four girls and one in five boys will be sexually abused by age 13.
- 80 to 90 percent of the time, a child is abused by someone they know.
- When someone is sexually assaulted, most of the time there is no weapon involved.
- The FBI reports that 98 percent of the time when a victim reports sexual assault, they are making a true report.

"Sexual assault is about having the most intimate parts of your body invaded in the most violent ways possible," said Betty

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### by the numbers

**828** adults and children victims of sexual violence helped by the WRC

**98** percent of those who report sexual violence are telling the truth

One in **8** men will be sexually assaulted by the time they are 18

By the age of **13**, 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 5 boys will be sexually assaulted

Every **2** minutes someone is sexually assaulted in the U.S.

**1** in 4 women will be a victim of rape or attempted rape by the time they graduate from college

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

## Pat Brown



I will never forget the day “Linda” came into the Women’s Resource Center office. She talked in whispers and made eye contact for brief moments. Her fear and anxiety were palpable. She was a wife, a mom, a member of our community. And she was a survivor of child sexual assault. She was barely able to cope with life, but somehow she found the WRC and came for counseling. I watched her during the next several months come in to the office for her appointments. Little by

little, I saw her resurface into life. Her voice became stronger, her posture straightened and she began to interact with office staff. Eventually, Linda smiled more and more. She took back her life.

We see hundreds of people like Linda every year. They come from all walks of life and are men and women, adults and children. What they have in common is that someone has victimized them in absolutely the most personal way. Sexual assault is not about sexuality. It is about one person asserting power and control over another and using intimate contact as the weapon. Our work is to provide hope and help to people who have experienced sexual assault

in whatever ways we can. That help includes emergency advocacy at hospitals, crisis intervention, on-going counseling, support groups and advocacy support with the criminal justice and other systems. It is about trying to help the system work in the best way possible for victims. The WRC facilitates five Coordinating Councils on Domestic and Sexual Violence each month. Each of our localities has its own Coordinating Council. We invite law enforcement, commonwealth’s attorneys’ offices, social services, hospitals (forensic nurses), schools, universities, Children’s Advocacy Center and all the different WRC programs. We talk about how we can work better and better together to make the system easier for victims of sexual assault. We work with other advocates in the Commonwealth to have legislation enacted that will help victims of sexual assault.

Finally, our work is not complete until we have done what we can to prevent sexual assault. Our Peaceline program is a school-based domestic and sexual violence prevention program for sixth through 10th graders. We teach healthy relationships to around 6,000 children every year. Our goal is to prevent what happened to Linda from ever happening to them.

In Peace,  
*Pat Brown*  
Executive Director

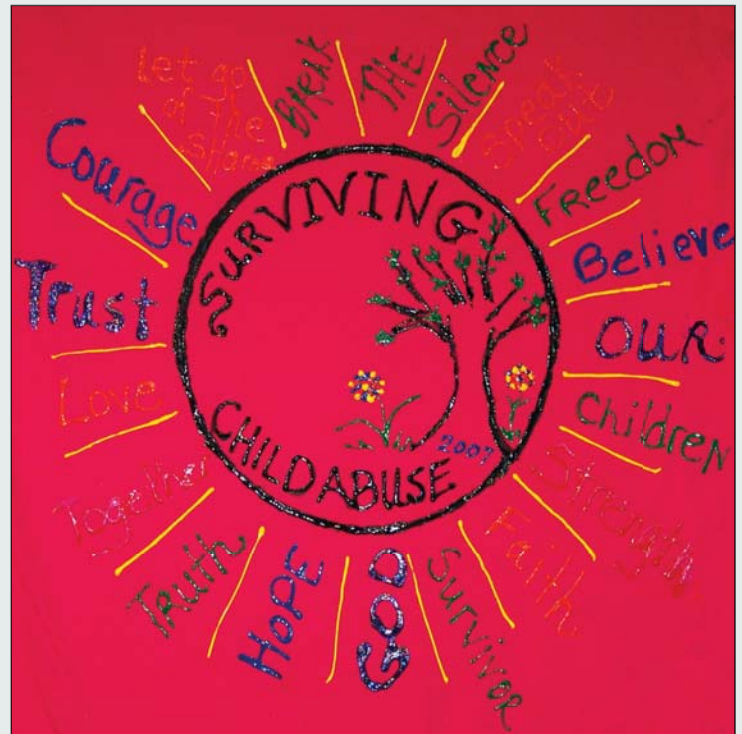
## T-shirts inspire hope, unity

A.C. came to the WRC for childhood sexual abuse counseling. Most of A.C.’s adult life, she knew something had happened to her, but she had no memories of what. Her daughter approached her 12th birthday, and A.C. began having flashbacks, nightmares and memories of being sexually abused by her father starting at 12 and continuing into her teen years. The next several months brought memories, and each memory or flashback seemed to grow in intensity.

During counseling at the WRC, A.C. said not only was she concerned for her own children’s safety, ages 8, 10 and 12, she also was concerned for other grandchildren. A.C. broke her silence. She severed ties with her family who were keeping her father’s secret. A.C. lost her family, and her children lost their grandparents.

After much anguish, A.C. decided to share with her children the abuse she suffered at the hands of her father. Prior to disclosing the sexual abuse to her children, A.C. spoke with her counselor and questioned whether she should tell her children; she talked with counselors for her children providing a safety net for them once they learned of the abuse. After agonizing, she made the decision to disclose. A.C. told her children about the sexual abuse she suffered at the hands of their grandfather. She explained why it was not safe to be around “Grandma and Grandpa.” She answered their questions. She eased their fears. She listened. And most of all, she told her children she would always be there to help protect them, believe them and love them unconditionally.

A.C. continued to question whether she did the right thing by disclosing to her children. Then a defining moment came for A.C. and her children. A.C. decided to make a T-shirt for the Clothesline Project ([www.clothesline.org](http://www.clothesline.org)) – a visual display that calls attention to violence against women. The project displays T-shirts designed by woman survivors of violence and families/friends of woman victims



of violence. The T-shirts hang side-by-side on a clothesline to “Break the Silence” and to bear witness to violence against women.

A.C. explained to her children what she was doing. Once explained, all three of her children made a decision – they wanted to go with her. All three children made a shirt as well. And when they were finished, they hung side by side – a physical replication of what this family went through emotionally. The children’s T-shirts are now displayed at the WRC, and all together, the shirts tell a story – they tell a story of victimization and the path of healing.

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Jones, the WRC's Sexual Assault Program Coordinator. "Sexual assault is a violent act in which sex is used as a weapon motivated by the need to have power and control over another person."

The WRC has an entire Sexual Assault Team to help those who have experienced sexual violence. The Sexual Assault Program offers emotional support as well as counseling for adults and children who have experienced sexual assault. Services, which

*"We do not put timetables on a person's healing journey. We're like a road map. We know some things that may help, but it's very individualized."*

- BETTY JONES  
SEXUAL ASSAULT  
PROGRAM COORDINATOR

are free of charge for everyone, also are available for family and friends of the victim.

The first line of help is always the WRC's Crisis Hotline, (540) 639-1123, that is available 24-hours a day with trained crisis intervention staff and volunteers answering all calls. The hospital called the Hotline when Frankie arrived at the emergency room and asked for the person on call. Anyone who needs help can call the Hotline and expect to talk to a person who can provide help and information. Regionally, there is a toll-free number as well, (800) 788-1123. Translators are available via AT&T Language Lines for our non-English speaking callers. In addition, a TTY machine is available to assist the hearing impaired at (540) 639-2197.

Once the hospital called the WRC's Hotline, the Emergency Advocate is paged. No matter what the time of day or night, the WRC always has someone on call to help sexual assault victims. Once they are paged, they go to the hospital to meet the victim. The advocate arrives armed with

a bag that includes fliers and brochures providing information about sexual assault, some extra change should they need it for drinks, and games, toys and a teddy bear if the victim is a child. And just like Frankie's advocate, they sit and provide whatever help Frankie and others like her need – from just sitting with them while undergoing a physical examination to being in the room when they are interviewed by the police officer.

"The Emergency Advocacy Program is such an important piece to what we do," said Pat Brown, the WRC's Executive Director. "They provide help to victims at the point of crisis. It's a time when someone may not be thinking clearly, they're panicked and they're in crisis mode. We're there to make sure they're not by themselves."

Frankie felt comfortable enough to return to her apartment, but for those women who don't feel comfortable returning home, they always can come to the WRC's Emergency Shelter. For men who are sexually assaulted and don't feel comfortable returning home, the WRC can provide alternative safe shelter for them as well.

The day after Frankie's visit to the hospital, a staff member of the WRC Sexual Assault Team called Frankie. While on the phone, the staff member answered some additional questions Frankie had and scheduled an appointment with her for the next week. Frankie felt comfortable coming to the WRC offices for the counseling appointment, but there are those who don't. For them, the WRC can schedule appointments in confidential settings within the New River Valley. Often, WRC staff goes to schools to meet child sexual assault victims for their counseling visits.

Healing from sexual assault can be complicated. WRC staff understands the unique concerns of sexual assault survivors and their families. "We do not put timetables on a person's healing journey. We're like a road map. We know some things that may help a person heal, but it's very individualized.

Sexual assault victims are not alone. Sexual violence can happen to anyone. The WRC is here to help. If you or someone you know has a problem, contact us at (540) 639-1123

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Please visit our web site, [www.wrcnr.org](http://www.wrcnr.org), to find out more information about the Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley, its services and its needs. On our web site, you can find an updated needs list and a place to donate to our organization online.

**24-Hour Crisis Hotline: 540.639.1123**  
or **1.800.788.1123** (*regional access*)

Office: 540.639.9592  
E-mail: [director@wrcnr.org](mailto:director@wrcnr.org)  
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## **“Giving Shelter, Finding Peace” Benefit Concert with the Uppity Blues Women**

The Women's Resource Center is bringing the Uppity Blues Women to the New River Valley for a benefit concert. This all-woman blues trio has produced nine recordings and played thousands of gigs. The group tears into their material with passion, dedication and originality. They are indeed the torchbearers for the original classic uppity blues women like Bessie Smith, Sippie Wallace and Victoria Spivey. The concert is at 8 p.m. Friday, May 30, at the Inn at Virginia Tech. Doors open at 7:30. Tickets, \$35 each, can be obtained by calling (540) 639-9592 or at the door.



**To benefit the Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley**