



Women's Center celebrates 30th anniversary

Gretchen Tearle

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South Lake Tahoe Women's Center is celebrating our 30th year of providing services to improve the emotional, social and economic condition of women and families in our community.

In 1977, a handful of dedicated volunteers established a rape crisis hotline in response to increasing incidence of sexual assaults in the community. Over the years, the Women's Center's programs expanded to include domestic violence and child abuse prevention, intervention and treatment services for survivors.

Since our doors opened, we have helped more than 35,000 survivors heal from the trauma they experienced. For the last 20 years, we have conducted violence prevention presentations to more than 20,000 children ages 5-18 in local schools. Sixteen years ago, after providing shelter through private homes and motels for nearly 10 years, we received a grant to purchase an eight-bed emergency domestic violence shelter, and later we purchased a transitional living facility to house two families for up to 18 months. In 1999, thanks to the generous support of our community and a low-interest loan from the Rural Community Assistance Corporation, we moved from our tiny, 800 square-foot office space to a 5,000 square-foot building. With the larger building, we are able to employ a staff of 20 people - seven of whom are bilingual or bicultural - who are supported by more than 10,000 hours of volunteer assistance each year.

Every year, we offer a wide range of no-cost services to more than 2,000 people, including legal services, advocacy, court and hospital accompaniment, individual counseling, support groups, a children's play group, parenting classes, information and referrals, and basic needs assistance.

Unfortunately, domestic violence remains a widespread problem in our community. The violent murder of a young mother by her abusive partner tragically reminded us that although we have come a long way in addressing the problem of violence, we still have a long way to go. Our children deserve to grow up in a safe place and our families deserve to be healthy and happy. We envision a violence-free community for our future, but until that becomes a reality, we will work tirelessly to end the cycle of violence that is passed down through generations.

South Lake Tahoe Women's Center offers confidential, comprehensive services for men, women and children who are dealing with domestic violence, sexual assault, or child abuse. For more information, stop by our offices at 2941 Lake Tahoe Blvd., from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday; call (530) 544-2118; or visit www.sltwc.org.

Thank you to everyone who has made it possible for us to serve those in need for the past 30 years.

- Gretchen Tearle is development coordinator at the South Lake Tahoe Women's Center.