

## **Sexual Violence Intervention Services for victims in South Florida**

### **Issue:**

Preventing sexual violence is critical. Sexual violence is a public health issue that affects the well being of the victim, family, friends, community and society. The National Institute of Justice estimates that rape and sexual assault of adults cause an annual minimum loss of 127 billion dollars, or about \$508 per U.S. resident. Sexual assault is considered one of the highest costing crimes, even more than murder.<sup>1</sup>

### **Intervention:**

In 2005, 15 year old Jessica came to the agency for counseling. She lived with her grandmother because she had recently disclosed that her mother's boyfriend had been sexually molesting her for several years and her mother did not want her in the house any more. Mom did not believe her. The boyfriend was an officer in the armed services and had transferred to a base in another country. He always told Jessica that because of his rank, no one would ever believe her.

Jessica was a very angry young woman who frequently got into fights. She argued with her grandmother constantly. In counseling she learned about the relationship between the sexual abuse and her anger, she learned the long-term effects of sexual abuse, she learned coping techniques to handle her memories, and most importantly, she learned that people did believe her and that they were actively working to prosecute her abuser.

The agency stayed with her throughout the entire process, either by hotline- if she needed to talk about her frustrations or if she couldn't sleep, through periodic counseling appointments to help at various stages of the healing process, during depositions in fall of 2008, and finally during the trial in 2009. Many times, Jessica wanted to give up. The criminal justice process can be slow, especially to someone who is growing up quickly. The advocates were there to listen, support, and encourage her to persevere.

The look on Jessica's face when he was pronounced guilty four years after she disclosed was priceless! Although she knew that he had been lying when he said no one would believe her, she finally appreciated the enormity of that truth. The jurors believed her! She could finally close that chapter of her life and move on.

### **Impact:**

Without funding from the PHHSBG, rape crisis centers will suffer personnel cuts, serve fewer victims and cover fewer counties. Rape crisis centers are committed to quality compassionate delivery to victims of sexual assault. Loss of funding will impact services now provided free of charge to victims age 12 and older.

*All names have been changed to protect the identity of our clients.*

(1) U.S. Department of Justice, Victim Costs and Consequences: A New Look, 1996

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