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## A shoulder to lean on

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 Comments (No comments posted.)

GURNEE – Imagine what a horrible experience it would be to be the victim of a sexual attack. Imagine the physical pain and the eruption of feelings – fear, anger, confusion, and shame.

Now, add to that the fact that after that terrifying ordeal, the police and the doctors are in a race to beat the clock in order to get what they need to do their job.

This is where the advocates from the Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center come into place.

The center's staff is professionally trained to make the experiences of the result of sexual abuse less frightening for the victim. They aid the professionals such as the police officers and the medical staff by reminding them of the sensitive emotional state that the victim is in.

"They are an integral part of the process," said Jay Patrick, commander at the Gurnee Police Station. "It is very important to the victims [to have them there], and that helps us by making the victims more at ease."

Patrick says he knows that the questions police officers need to ask to get the information they need can make the victims feel intimidated, but that having a professional advocate helps.

"We tell them exactly what is going to happen and we attend to their needs," said Wendy Ivy, director of Advocacy and Volunteer Services at the Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center.

Ivy said the advocate's primary role is to protect the victim's rights and give emotional support to the victim and the family.

"It's to our benefit to work well with the community," Ivy said. "We're really a team."

Ivy said that the more sensitive and complete the procedure is, the easier the healing will be.

"No matter how long they need us to be there with them we stay," Ivy said.

The center has networking agreements with the 42 police stations in Lake County and all of the hospitals. An advocate from the Zacharias Center is always available to be called on.

The center also works with schools and the state's attorneys by providing education and training. The center also teaches children and adults preventive measures to sexual abuse.

"We work with preschoolers, elementary schools, middle schools and colleges," said Jane Hunter, director of Community and Youth Education at the Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center.

Hunter said that the programs they teach have age-appropriate information such as the prevention of date rape for college students and how to deal with bullies for preschoolers.



Pictured is a room at the Zacharias Center in Gurnee, with the paintings completed by a sexual abuse survivor who wanted to contribute to the center. (Photo provided)

“The more resources, options and choices people have the safer they’ll be,” said Hunter, who added that children need to know what their rights are.

The staff at schools are advised on how to identify a sexually abused child and what the process is of aiding the child in that situation.

“The more training that we’re allowed to do,” Ivy said, “the better the care will be for the survivor of sexual abuse.”

### More information

- Support is available in English and Spanish and to anyone regardless of race, age, gender, ability, sexual orientation, legal status, language, or religion. If you have questions, need help or seek to schedule a training program call 847-244-1187. For emergencies call the center’s crisis line at 847-872-7799.

### Series overview

For five weeks, the Lake County Journals will examine the Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center and the services it provides. Below is a look at the series in its entirety.

Feb. 28: Name change and background of the center.

March 6: How the center works with the community – The center’s links with schools, hospitals and police.

March 13: A look at survivors of sexual abuse – When the system works and when it fails.

March 20: The center’s children’s program – Youth Allies Kares.

March 27: The people who are a part of the healing – The staff, volunteers and financial supporters of the center.

## COMMENTS

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