

## 'It's never too late' to call LaCASA

### Teen found help after six years of sex abuse

December 19, 2007

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GURNEE – The identities of clients at the Lake County Council Against Sexual Assault (LaCASA) are, of course, confidential. But what can be shared with the public are the stories – the experiences that can illustrate how lives can be impacted by LaCASA services.

According to LaCASA spokeswoman Linda West, one recent example not only centers on a young woman who benefitted from the agency, but it also involves how the woman's mother also found help.

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"We help anyone who's been impacted by sexual abuse," said Linda West, a spokeswoman for LaCASA in Gurnee. As of Jan. 1, LaCASA will be known as the Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center.

*(Marina Samovsky/News-Sun)*

"This girl, from age 10 to 16, was sexually assaulted by her mother's boyfriend," West said. "Then at age 16, she came to us."

LaCASA's assistance began when the victim was in a local emergency room. Hospital employees called LaCASA's 24-hour hot line -- (847) 872-7799 -- and a medical advocate was sent to assist her.

"After that, she came into our individual counseling," West said. "We also assigned her legal advocates because (the offender) was charged with 33 total counts of criminal sexual assault ... They were with her every step of the way."

LaCASA staffers helped the young woman both write and practice reading her victim impact statement, and two counselors and two medical advocates went to the sentencing hearing with her.

"She felt supported and had a lot of help," West said. "These were people she knew well by that point."

During this time, the victim's mother also came to LaCASA to participate in family counseling sessions. "We help anyone

who's been impacted by sexual abuse," West said.

In the years following her work with LaCASA, the young woman has started college.

"The outcome has been phenomenal," West said. "It's never too late to give us a call and ask for help, or even just to talk to someone."

LaCASA, one of eight social service agencies that benefit from The Lake County News-Sun's Help Them to Hope campaign, will be known as the Zacharias Sexual Abuse Center as of Jan. 1.

For more information on the LaCASA programs and services, call (847) 244-1187 or go to [www.lacasastoprape.org](http://www.lacasastoprape.org).