







Copyright © 2019 by Texas Christian University FIRST EDITION

All rights reserved

No part of this book may be reproduced without written permission of the author.

Manufactured in the United States of America

eleven40seven Books is a nonprofit literary organization funded by the generosity of the Hamilton Family Endowment, Dr. James Giles, the TCU English Department, and the TCU Insitute for Critical and Creative Expression. "Founded in 1979, The Women's Center's mission is to inspire and empower women, men, and children to overcome violence, crisis, and poverty. It is a place of hope, opportunity, and better futures for families of Tarrant County."







Working with The Women's Center to create this chapbook has truly changed my perspective not only on the center itself, but on the issue of sexual assault as a whole. The widespread effect of sexual assault is something that has gained more attention in the media with movements like Me Too, and it would benefit our society to continue to give voice to survivors. Something that has stuck with me from our interviews at The Women's Center is that there is always a chance for healing. There is always someone out there willing to help you get through that hard time. Hearing the stories of lives being touched by the staff at The Women's Center gave me a new sense of hope and I feel honored to have met such inspirational and giving individuals.

I would like to thank the directors and management staff at The Women's Center for sharing their time and stories with us and allowing us to use their voices in this chapbook. You have impacted us more than you know. I also would like to thank my staff for the dedication they have shown to this project. I am so thankful that we had this opportunity to work with The Women's Center. We feel privileged to honor them with this chapbook for their 40th anniversary.

Lacey Harms Editor-in-Chief, Fall 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PARTICIPANTS	7
THE WOMEN'S CENTER	9
Personal Stories	17
The Effects of Me Too	25
Education & Misconceptions	30
Affording the Resources	37
The Next 40 Years	40









(

PARTICIPANTS

JASMINE

FRAN

BECKA

CATHY

CHRISEE

MIKE

HANNAH

MÓNICA





In general in Tarrant County, 1 in 3 women will experience domestic violence according to SafeHaven of Tarrant County.

Nationally, this is 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men according to the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

According to a 2015 University of Texas study, 2 in 5 women and 1 in 5 men in Texas experience some form of sexual assault within their lifetime.

In 2018, advocates responded a total of 880 times to local Tarrant County hospitals to provide accompaniment to sexual assault victims while they received a forensic rape exam. This was a 6% increase from the previous year according to The Women's Center of Tarrant County.





THE WOMEN'S CENTER

JASMINE

I want clients to know that we're here and that this is a place that's about hope and healing and that the people who are here care about them—that we believe that the individual person is the best driver of their own life and their own change. And so this is about them and their journey and their hope. I want people to know that there are stories from the other side, as I was describing, that people heal from tragedy, and people overcome the lowest times in their life. I think if there was another message from The Women's Center that I have gained, [it] is that someone can have the worst possible story—just an unbelievably terrible story about what they experienced—but they can heal. That is the beauty of human beings and our processes, and the power of our brains is that with the right supports and the right messaging, people can heal from tragedy and go on to live productive lives and to fulfill dreams. And, and there are times that—I know personally, there's been times in my life that I couldn't see the other side of something. And so I want clients to know that, that other side exists and that the services that we have here can help them on their journey towards that new beginning. I want them to know that we searched the evidence that works. I want

them to know that we want to serve everyone who lives in Tarrant County who needs services in our mission area, so that we are a place that is open to people from different spiritual backgrounds, from different lifestyle backgrounds, that this is a home for them. As part of that feminist ideal, this women-centered idea, that everyone has value and that everyone's story is a piece of that long story.

FRAN

We started as a center for women that were just entering the workforce and entering our employment program. So, primarily, we did serve women, but very soon realized that we needed to add rape crisis. We realized that sexual assault, sexual abuse, was a huge issue in our community. So, we added our Rape Crisis and Victim's Services Program, and we've always seen men and boys in that program and have seen men for many, many years across all of our programs now.

BECKA

I was a poor graduate student and trying to make ends meet. In one of my classes up at UNT, someone announced a scholarship that was available to graduate students, and I was all over that idea—some kind of a scholarship that had some kind of monetary funds to it. And so I applied and ended up winning the scholarship and found out I was the first recipient of this particular scholarship. It was named by Mary Lyons, who was one of the original volunteers in our employment program here at The Women's Center, and also one of the friends of Karen Perkins, who is our founding mother. She had this scholarship set up in honor of her daughter. Her daughter had been murdered, and so,

tragically, Mary had decided that she wanted to honor her daughter and set up a scholarship for graduate students, because her daughter was working in this field and also was a consultant here at The Women's Center. And so when I won the scholarship, of course I wanted to learn more about Mary and her daughter. I wasn't familiar with the story, and so I met Mary for lunch one day so that we could get to know each other. And I heard about her daughter and I was very inspired by that, and she suggested I check out The Women's Center, and I said, "That sounds great." As a graduate student not far from graduating with a counseling degree, I wanted to learn more about this organization that served crime and abuse victims. So I did and loved what I heard about it and became a volunteer. And that's how my experience started here. So technically, I was a volunteer before I started working here and fell in love with the work and fell in love with the people. And there was an opening that came open, and so while I was still finishing my degree, I jumped at the chance. And that was over twenty years ago.

FRAN

When I started, historically the materials that went out were white faces—usually white women—and kind of consistently the same age range. Because I have a very diverse marketing background (I've been doing marketing for at least twenty years in very different environments), I brought a very unique perspective. So one of the first things I noticed was, "Okay, hey, we need to put some color in here, and we need to put some men in here, because if we say that we serve men, but we don't see men when we pick up our materials..." So I think that perspective—that diversity perspective

that I've had in other jobs that I brought with me—I think that's what has influenced. And then as a woman of color, I see things differently, I process things differently, because of my life experience. And so what I love about this organization is that thought process is very much not just respected but incorporated. We have a very diverse staff.

CATHY

We do have a greater understanding of the effect of trauma on an individual—and not just the life of the survivor, but every life that that person touches.... When The Women's Center started forty years ago, the founding mother (whose picture's in our lobby, and I hope you take a minute to look at that and read her words that we have on the wall), her vision was to grow a community that would provide better services for victims. So back in the day when a rape victim was at a hospital, you would wait in the lobby with everyone. They'd call you by name, state why you're there, and you're up and walking, you know, in front of everybody there, and you're at the hospital for twelve hours. Today JPS has a separate area for victims of sexual assault. So you're ushered into that space. It's private. The wait is a lot less time. THR is now providing services as well, and they're working hard to make things better as well. So we work with law enforcement, we work with attorneys, judges, and just the community in trying to build a wraparound service that can recognize the importance of providing good services and fast services to victims of assault.

CHRISEE

The Women's Center is always a proactive organization. The partnerships that we have within the community, whether it be with medical law enforcement, other social service organizations, it's always about collaboration and working together as a team. And there's been a number of things formed through the years through those efforts. And you know, one of the roles for us is helping provide education: education to professionals, education to law enforcement, education to school personnel on understanding sexual harassment, understanding trauma to make us a more trauma-informed community. So, I think we've been very much in the wave of trying to help the community go and be a better-informed community.

MIKE

Anybody who's a possible client is somebody who's dealing with something bad that's happened to them, either as a primary victim or a secondary victim of some type of violence or sexual assault. So that person may not even come here. They may just be thinking, "What should I do? Should I call this place called The Women's Center? Should I call the rape crisis hotline, which The Women's Center operates?" And the answer to all of that is: understand that you don't have to do this by yourself. You don't have to deal with all this by yourself. Everybody's story is unique. Everything is individual, you know, so we can all look at it and go, "Every one of those flowers is different." But almost everybody's story fits into some type of category. Something that, yes, I've seen a lot of things like this before. I haven't seen your story, but I've seen stories similar to your story. And from all that, all sorts

of people here at The Women's Center have learned valuable lessons. There's science that studied this. We can do so many things to help you get through this—between therapy, you know, that's the biggest one. Therapy. Just helping you out, helping you process through, helping you work through it, giving you alternatives to things that if you're thinking you've got to do this by yourself, you know, be manly enough to, or tough enough to, or there's nobody that can help me, nobody will understand me. You're not right. You don't have to do it by yourself.

HANNAH

We've helped people as young as under the age of one all the way up to ninety, I believe. So we help absolutely everyone, and I don't want anyone to ever feel excluded.

JASMINE

The Center, when it was started in 1979, was started by a group of women who really saw this hole in Tarrant County, where women found themselves without support.... There were less women in the labor force, so if you didn't have a husband who was able to [help] pay [expenses], if your husband left you, became disabled, passed away, there were not a lot of resources for you or your kids to support yourself. And they saw that as a really big hole in the community, and they wanted to do something to address that. And it started in our founding mother's living room. Those women who were involved in starting The Women's Center still live in this community. I posted on Nextdoor where I work, and one of my neighbors reached out and said, "I was a friend of Karen Perkins, and I was part of starting The Women's Center." So those women are

still with us in Tarrant County, and their efforts are part of what makes this agency what it is today.

BECKA

I want them to know that The Women's Center constantly strives to be a safe place for survivors. That there has always been, and there will always be, I believe, a culture here of safety and security and thinking of what survivors need and giving people voice and partnering. Our founding mother always talked about how the outstretched hand always yields better results than the closed fist. And so always trying to partner with people—even people that might be at a different place than you are and where you want them to be, perhaps, when it comes to say partners within the community. But to embrace that and to build relationships and be a place of safety for not only survivors, but also for partnerships. The only true way to grow is to really, truly stretch when we're not comfortable and push through it, and so to do that work is important. I'd also want people to know that, in my opinion, The Women's Center is kind of a hidden gem in our community, and I'd encourage them to come check us out. And it's really important that people are aware that the resources are here because we want survivors always to have a voice and always know they're not alone and to have hope, you know, that part of that is connecting with people who know how to help so you can renew hope.

HANNAH

It makes me sad that people have to deal with trauma in their lives that they didn't ask for. They never asked to be molested. They never asked to be beaten. They never asked for anything, and they have to deal with the repercussions forever. So that's why it's important to me to work here.

MÓNICA

One of the beauties of The Women's Center is that I've seen so many people heal. I've seen so many people restore their lives and understand that what happened wasn't their fault and that it wasn't anything they did. It was completely somebody else's choice. But they also get to be like, "You know what? I do deserve a healthy life. I do deserve a healthy marriage." Regardless of any of the choices that I did or didn't make that led to this, they have healed. And that's just been beautiful to be a part of. That's probably why I've been here so long, because as horrible as the stories are, there's so much healing that happens here, too. There's so much restoration that happens, and that's hopeful. That's inspiring. And there are times where it's like, I just get to see a glimpse of that. It's... it's an honor.

BECKA

There are days where it's hard work, and there are days where we get overwhelmed just like anybody else. But more days I'm inspired. I'm inspired by what people do. I'm inspired by the amazing hope and resilience of the human spirit. And we get to have this, this little piece of that... they allow us to come alongside them, and they trust us, and that is such an honor. And so for that, you're eternally grateful.

FRAN

Our tagline is "Hope Starts Here." I hear it all the time, I see it all the time, and I truly want potential clients to know hope truly does start when you open the doors to The Women's Center.

PERSONAL STORIES

FRAN

We're doing wonderful, wonderful things in the community. We are touching individual lives in such a transformational way. The story, for me, that sticks out—and I hear all of them, I hear a lot of success stories—there's a few that stick out to me. One of them is a man named Tom, who was probably in his mid-to-late eighties. Had been married to his wife for forty-five years, and she passed away. And Tom talked about his abject depression, the fact that he cried every day for four months, the fact that he could not function at all because of the loss of his wife. If you pulled out a picture of her, he said he couldn't even look at the picture of her, because he would just get so inconsolable. And after four months, his daughter came and said, "Dad, we've gotta do something. This is a really bad situation." And so Tom reached out to some ex-colleagues that used to work at the Area Agency on Aging, and they told him about our Pearls Program. Our Pearls Program is a program where we actually go into the home of older adults, and we offer counseling and case management, to help them overcome depression and isolation. And so Tom reached out to our Pearls Program and started, and within just a few weeks began to make a transformation in his life, to where he could leave the house. He started going back to church, started reconnecting with old friends; and he said his life became purposeful again, that he really found joy in living again and wanted to continue on because at one point, he had given up on life. He was



ready to commit suicide. And so he said for him, there was no value that he could put on what Pearls had done for him and the transformation. And you know the quote that he always said was, "How do you put a value on a returned smile, on a lilt in your voice, on a spring in your step? Pearls changed my life." And so for me, Tom is always, always the one that I think. He is the story. He is the picture of transformation that happens in this agency.

CATHY

So, when I found out about the position here at The Women's Center, I was working for another nonprofit in town. I had been there 12 years. And when this opportunity opened up, I pursued it, and I've been in nonprofit accounting for most of my career and was really interested in a new challenge, and The Women's Center provided that. I'm really grateful to work in this kind of environment. In a corporate world versus a nonprofit world, there's a huge amount of difference in the culture of the organization, the people that you work with, because everyone works toward one goal.

BECKA

This child came to us initially very hesitant and very scared and very withdrawn. And the expert play therapists that we have here just met him where he was at, and let him be in charge, and let him figure out that he could be safe here. And so we watched this child who started not even feeling safe having the door to the playroom closed when he would come in for session, to weeks later having the door closed. And I knew that was his choice when he felt safe, and when he started, he came here, and the play therapist told

him, you know, all the toys in this room, you can use them in any way you'd like.... We have a variety of toys, even things that most playrooms don't typically have. And he honed in on the dinosaurs. A bunch of plastic, scary-looking dinosaurs. And he did not like those. And every week he came, one by one, he'd remove all the dinosaurs from the playroom, and he'd set them out in the hall away from his play space, and then he'd go and have his session, and everything was safe and fine. And then I knew he was there, because the playroom was right across from my office. And slowly but surely, I watched the stack of dinosaurs get smaller and smaller and smaller, until one week. I knew he was there, and there wasn't a dinosaur in the hallway, and the door was closed to the playroom. And so in play therapy language, that told us he no longer felt like he had to remove the scary things in order to be safe. He was able to be safe in his play therapy space, and he had processed some of his feelings with his play therapist. And so that was one of my favorite stories. Still is, even though it was years ago, because I think it shows that you don't have to have words to heal from these horrible things. And sometimes there aren't even words for survivors to be able to use, but that doesn't matter. Healing is still possible. And I know this cause we watch it every day, and it's a great privilege.

CHRISEE

When I was Volunteer Coordinator, one of the very first volunteers I had was a woman named Naina, and she was a retired nurse. She was a mother—a grandmother, you know, really someone who you could tell all of her life had been about giving to others—but she was ready to give to others differently. And so she

came here, we met; she started volunteering first on our helpline, which is part of one program, and then within months wanted to also volunteer in our rape crisis program and wanted to be a victim advocate, where she could go out to the hospitals and support survivors of sexual assault, and be there with them for that. She's really the only volunteer I've ever had that's done both of those jobs. And at the same time—most people, it would just be too much. It's a lot on your heart, and it's a lot on your time. But Naina was the kind of person that just, she just showed compassion to everybody. And I think she always just did her work through her heart. And so, she started volunteering with us probably when she was sixty-six years old and was with us for sixteen years, so into her eighties. Anyways, so there was a part of Naina that will always be in me when I think about The Women's Center. She just really represented, I think, who we are and how we respect people and want to do our work.

HANNAH

There was one instance... we used to close at 5:30, so my job was to be at the desk from 5:00 to 5:30 in case anyone came in or needed something after hours. And there was a lady that came in at 5:28 one day. So, my first thought is like, "Oh my gosh, why? Like, I want to go home." But she was very distraught, and she needed someone other than me. I couldn't really help her exactly with what she needed; I'm not trained in how to help with trauma. And that's what she had. She had a major trauma, and she said it literally just happened. So that breaks my heart just even thinking about it again. It had just happened, and she came here because she had heard about us, which is awesome.

So I was, I was terrified that there wasn't going to be anyone here, because it's 5:28, and we close at 5:30 and most people leave at 5:00. I'm terrified because I really want to help this lady and I don't want to tell her, you know, "Sorry, we can't help you now. You can come back tomorrow." It's because she needed help now. And she was uncomfortable. She was not feeling safe. So, luckily, I did find someone that was in the building. And that goes back to me saying, I mean there's always someone here that can help, and that's what I love. She came up and she actually spoke with her back in her office, and it wasn't too long, but I think she had kind of put the client more at ease and gave her a sense of direction, so she knew what she was going to do the next day. She knew that there'll be more people in the office, and she knew that she could come back and she felt a little safer. So, she did leave. But before she left, she had tears in her eyes, and she was telling me thank you. And in my mind, I didn't really do anything, but just her saying thank you like that... I have more of an impact than I think.

FRAN

I interviewed a man named Lee, who was a single father of two teenage kids, and after fourteen years got laid off from a telecommunications company, and ended up on welfare, losing his house, living with a family member. This was somebody who had a master's degree, had a 401K, had money saved. He did everything that you're supposed to do, and basically lost it all. He was not able to find a job for, I think, fourteen months, and so, in the course of that fourteen months, really ended up hitting some hard times, and came to The Women's Center as a last resort. Because he, too, had the misconception

that we did not help men. So when he came, he went through our skills training program and got a couple of certifications, and within two months, had another job—got a job with a very well-known technology firm and moved to California and was back to making the same amount of money that he had made getting laid off. So he talked about the transformation of never thinking that he would ever be on welfare, never thinking that that would ever happen to him, and the despair that he felt, and the depression, and the fact that every day you stay unemployed, it gets worse and worse and worse. And so, to hear his transformation and how victorious he felt, how much restoration he experienced going through that and coming through this program, and what he was able to take from it... that's the best part for me. To hear the clients, that their lives literally have changed, as a result of stepping in this building.

JASMINE

I had a pretty good handle on poverty and employment and labor markets and developing those. And so personally, I was looking for a way to expand into other service areas. And around that same time, a family member of mine disclosed that they had been a victim of child sexual abuse. And they made that disclosure twenty, thirty years after the incident happened, and they were victimized by another family member. So that was one of those things that just really tore into the fabric of our family. The person having the courage to disclose that story, but then everyone around the story thinking about where they had failed in that journey, and going through this initial, "Well that can't be true because I didn't know about it." And so really

for me and the type of person that I am, I really needed to intellectualize that. I needed to understand more about why sexual violence happens, what it does to a family, what it does to the individual, and how we as a family could begin to heal.

MIKE

I think you also have to educate people, sometimes, on what's really involved in what happens. I'll give you an example. It's not taken from any particular case, but I heard an attorney in court saying, "Well, your honor, my client was strangled by the guy." And the judge said, "That's bad." And you're like, that's it? I mean, we're kind of moving along from there. You know, I'll take some points off for him, but.... And then in contrast, why just say, "My client was strangled?" Tell the judge, tell the public what really happened. "The guy came in, he smacked through the blocked bedroom door, he broke the door, he grabbed me by the neck with both hands, he slammed me up against one wall. He pulled me away and slammed me up against another wall. He threw me to the ground, and he shoved all of his weight onto my chest and onto my neck with his hands still around it. And when I woke up at that point, I don't remember anything. I woke up, and I defecated on myself, and he had left." That's a hell of a lot different story than saying "My client got strangled." And so I think part of our mission—and you've got to pick your place and your time for doing it this way—is to educate the public. What's really going on? What are we really working to solve and improve? Because a lot of people don't have that understanding. You know, mentally they understand, cognitively they know the problem. But did you really understand the problem? Do you really understand that as a result of this, my client may have to be living in a shelter? My client may have lost transportation? Have you ever thought about how long you spend during your day waiting on a bus? If all you have to do is rely on the bus to get around, do you realize how much of your day you waste standing around waiting on a bus, and then going and finding the next bus stop and waiting around on that bus stop just to accomplish some basic things? I mean, I think a lot of people don't have that understanding, and if they did, you would hope that they would be more sensitive to it.

MÓNICA

Unfortunately, you have these TV shows who show you like a victim is supposed to act a specific way. You're supposed to cry. You're supposed to do this. I've seen victims.... I walked into the hospital one time and this girl was laughing hysterically, and I understood: this is her way of coping. And she's like, "Oh my gosh, can you believe I just got raped yesterday? Oh, my-" ... And I'm just like, okay, look, laugh about this. And then afterwards, the shock wore off and everything, but I've seen it all. I've seen people sleep through it. I've seen people get angry. I've seen people—there's no specific way that victims act. And I think the average person who has no idea is expecting that. And when it isn't that, then it didn't happen. "But why didn't you call for help?" "Why did you just let it happen?" Yeah. "Why didn't I fight back? Because he had his hands around my neck, and I thought I was going to die."

THE EFFECTS OF ME TOO

"Our hospital accompaniment stats continue to rise—whether there are actually more sexual assaults, or the stigma in reporting is lessened due to these national movements, it is difficult to ascertain. Additionally, the numbers at the hospital reflect individuals receiving medical attention post-assault and may not necessarily be reported cases to law enforcement. However, there has been a noticeable increase in hotline calls when national events align with sexual assault. For example, in the midst of the Kavanaugh hearings in conjunction with the Me Too movement, there was a 46% increase in hotline calls from the previous week and a 38% increase from the same time period a year before." -Katharine Collier Esser, The Women's Center of Tarrant County

CATHY

Sexual assault is not a taboo subject anymore. So, if you know four women, you know one of them has been sexually assaulted by the age of eighteen, one in six boys by the age of eighteen. So, realizing how prevalent it is—and it's not, it's socioeconomic, there is nothing... race, neighborhood, anything to do with who is affected by it. Perpetrators are everybody and survivors are everybody.

HANNAH

Before I worked here, I unfortunately was one of the ones that sometimes didn't believe everyone's stories. I'm like, "Oh, there's no way that could have happened." And now that's the complete opposite. I actually talk to people who say that, and I try to get them to see that people, people are saying what they mean. They're being truthful, you know, so that's what it used to be like. But, once I worked here, I really did realize that trauma comes in many forms, from many things. I mean there's not trauma that is just in one form. A lot of different people have issues, and they come to us for help. ... The Me Too movement happened while I was working here. And that was a big, big, big deal. And I think, I think that has helped. I mean it helped me, obviously has helped everyone in the area to feel safer about speaking up. I remember it was a big deal. Katharine actually was interviewed on—I can't remember which news channel—but she and Alicia, I think, were both interviewed, and we had it on Facebook Live, and everyone was watching. And it's, it's how we got people to know who we are. Thankfully. I mean, we had a flood of new clients, new phone calls, people calling from hospitals, just everything because of that movement.

MÓNICA

If we're not comfortable or feel safe enough or even explain that it's healthy to have conversations about sex for healthy relationships, there's no way we're ever going to talk about the abuse. It's such a shameful piece. And there's so much of like, well, what was the woman doing? Like, was it the way she was dressed, was it the way she was coqueteando? Was it the way she was, you know, flirting, or what were you wearing? And all these misconceptions. I remember growing up and hearing the "Mija, you gotta be careful what you're wearing because you're going to be asking for it." And I'm like, "I don't understand. What am I asking for?"

BECKA

This is the kind of work, especially with Me Too—you could live it twenty-four hours a day, and that's not good for anyone. That's not healthy. Everybody needs to learn how to take care of themselves and put things and compartmentalize things, in order to allow your spirit to rejuvenate and to heal. And healing can only happen when you're taking care of yourself. That has to happen first.

JASMINE

Sexual violence is a crime that very often goes unreported, and there are so many societal issues about that. Misconceptions on who a victim would be, or what victimization is. I think you all are familiar with kind of the old philosophy of you're a young woman, or a woman of any age, who goes out to a bar by herself and has some drinks and reports a sexual perpetration. And the first question police are going to ask you, or you fear that they're going to ask you, is about what you were wearing. And those parts of rape culture that the victim is at fault keep people from disclosing sexual violence. And so, when Me Too movements and spotlights on issues of sexual violence have happened at a national level, people are seeing victims coming out and being received by the community in positive and negative lights. And... it was very difficult for us to know the exact root causes of this, but this could be causing more people to be coming to us to disclose sexual violence and to seek services, which is ultimately what we would want to happen.

MIKE

Society does get better. I mean, the Me Too movement was a big deal. We got upticks in calls here. But there was also an uptick in people wanting education. And I don't think that more sexual assaults were happening because of the Me Too movement. I think more people were reporting, and statistically we know that somewhere in the neighborhood of ninety percent of sexual assaults are not reported every year. So, you know, society does move things, too.

FRAN

I have seen more support for survivors. We very much do live in a rape culture where a lot of times, the victim is blamed for what happened to them. So what I am seeing is a shift in that, where we're starting to understand as a culture, that we believe survivors, we are empowering survivors. It's slow. It's a slow process of change. But I am starting to see that awareness happen in our society since I have been here.

JASMINE

I have been involved in this work for five years, which, I think, you know, for someone who's been working here for thirty years, you know that change might be a big bright line. And so for me, the line is not quite as bright, but at the very same time, I've been working in this job while we have experienced the Me Too movement and some of those other big kind of national awarenesses, around issues of sexual harassment and sexual violence. So, I think since I walked in the door in 2014 to today, there's much more media attention. What's interesting from a personal level as people know what I do here in my outside life. And you



know, I always told my husband I can kill a happy hour in no time. I'd be like, "What do you do?" "I sell spoons. What do you do?" "I work at a rape crisis center." But people in my circle have, in some ways, looked at me to have some information about what's going on and where those lines are. I've had a lot of interesting dialogues with my contemporaries about what rape is and how those things have happened, in college in particular. So I think that there's just much more awareness of the issues. From a personal level, I've learned so much more about the importance of language around that and the importance of believing victims when they disclose those issues and supporting victims. That's been a real growth from me. Where in the past I may have let some of those things happening around me slide, believing that kind of "boys will be boys," or "this happens all the time," or "it's not that dangerous." And one of the things that happens is you start to really educate yourself about those issues. And this is true in a lot of social justice ways is that tolerance dissolves, and it's no longer acceptable to overhear those things. And I think there's been times that I've had to be conscious of what rooms I put myself in, at what times in my personal life, because those things are going to happen, and I may or may not feel like I'm in a position to educate an entire room of strangers on rape culture. And so I think, personally, I've become much more conscious of how pervasive issues of rape culture are and the lack of information that people have and the tolerance that people have for unacceptable behavior.



EDUCATION & MISCONCEPTIONS

In the fiscal year, from October 1, 2018 to September 20, 2019, The Women's Center of Tarrant County served 3,142 individuals for general counseling, 4,303 for Rape Crisis, 446 for employment needs, and 138,993 children for Play it Safe! education and counseling.

JASMINE

I think people make the assumption that our services are just for women, when, really, our service matrix was derived out of the feminist movement and how feminist themes affect all of us, men, women, and children. And so at the center, we serve men in all of our program tracks, and we also serve children primarily in our crisis, general counseling program, and then also in our rape crisis work. So I think people just get this assumption about what we do and get that image in their mind. The other thing that happens a lot, I think, is because we do really three very unique services. We address poverty through an employment solutions program that we've been doing since our inception, and then we have crisis services through our general counseling program, and then a really extensive violence prevention and trauma, trauma services for violent crime victims, particularly sexual violence victims. That might mean that people in the community learned about us because of one of those service tracks, and so, they really don't know that we're doing all of that work. And so a misconception could be, "Oh, The Women's Center is Tarrant County's rape crisis center," but we are actually doing all these other elements of work in the community. And then I

think sometimes people have an image in their mind of who is suffering from poverty, or who is a victim of sexual violence or in crisis. And so the misconception is about who we serve can be really limited to how society or individuals view the mission areas that we focus in. And one of the things that we really work as an agency to do is to teach the community that people in poverty could have had a twenty-year career before something happened, a medical issue happened, a layoff happened, and they find themselves unemployed. Or that a victim of sexual violence isn't necessarily a college student, that people are victims of violent crimes from very young ages up to very old ages. And in really a variety of different ways that, that you can be victimized that's outside of what people's conception of those things are.

HANNAH

We have upped our Play It Safe program, which is our outreach program to schools. So, it teaches [students] Pre-K through senior year. We have a program for each grade level, and it teaches them how to identify what abuse is, what rape is, what non-safe touch is. You know, for the young ones that's really all you focus on.... So that's something we're really trying to get going, so that we can maybe avoid trauma in the younger generation.

FRAN

We very much live in a rape culture where a lot of times the victim is blamed for what happened to them. So what I am seeing is a shift in that, where we're starting to understand as a culture that we believe survivors, we are empowering survivors. It's slow. It's a slow process of change.

MÓNICA

When they come in for counseling, there's so many of the minority culture, especially Spanish speakers who are probably here because—who start being here first as a victim of a crime, a shooting, an armed robbery, something, something different. And then somewhere along the lines it's like, "Oh, yeah. And I was a victim of sexual abuse." So much safer and easier to come in for a different victimization until we test it out. Because to talk about sexual abuse and to talk about sexual abuse that happened within my family by another family member is very much betrayal. Is very, very much betrayal. And one, the community doesn't go outside the community to ask for help. Like, you either go to your pastor or your, your—what is it? The cura, the Father, you know, any of those, you go to the church, and the church is like, "Oh, just pray about it. Like, just pray about it." And so, I think they're starting to realize it's okay to have Jesus and a therapist, too. It is. And it's okay to ask for help.

BECKA

There's still a lot of work to do. Whether it's something that pops up in the media, or it's just a conversation I have in my personal life with someone that I know is an acquaintance or a friend of a friend. And just the statements they make lead me to think, "Wow, they really don't understand this topic." Even with all that's out there to help educate people, there's still a whole lot of people who have misconceptions and are victim blaming and don't understand that sexual assault is this crime of opportunity that one person decides to commit against another person. And that that person

who is the victim, the survivor, they have no fault. It has nothing to do with them. It is about the person who chooses to do this. And, sadly, there's still a tendency for a lot of people to ask about what was the victim doing or not doing. And it really has nothing to do with that. So, you know, we're gonna keep fighting the good fight and helping educate people and helping people understand the truth about sexual assault and sexual abuse.

MIKE

When you talk to a person who's been sexually assaulted, provide them this information. When you go into a domestic violence situation, provide people with this information... those sorts of things so that they can more readily get help, and they know about it. I mean, part of it is just—all of a sudden you're flung into a new situation that you didn't anticipate, and you don't look for the resources on how to get help. If I'm right, you don't keep that at your fingertips. You don't keep the rape crisis number just on speed dial on your phone. Instead, you know how to order Uber, you know how to order from Grub Hub. You know how to get a ticket on Ticket Stub, or whatever the thing is now. So, you know, that's the way people's lives work. So we have to make sure that the agencies and individuals who come in contact with our potential clients are getting the word out.

CHRISEE

I told you earlier that I worked in politics. And so, I think you just kind of maneuvered yourself through that landscape thinking that's just what the environment was going to be like. And you just purposely avoided situations or you, you know, you just didn't really think

that there was something you could do about it. And I think through—especially through recent years, I think society has come to accept that there are behaviors that are inappropriate and not okay, and they shouldn't happen. And so, I think that that's been a big change, that it's even a conversation. It's a conversation that I can easily have with my kids who are now young adults, but I could have that conversation with them in their teens and now, which I think twenty years ago that we wouldn't have even had that conversation.

MÓNICA

The U.S. has different laws. Like, maybe culturally it was okay for a twenty-one-year-old to seek a fifteen-year-old in Latin American countries. But culturally and legally here, it's not. And so having to educate on like, yes, I get they're coming to your door and asking your permission, and they're wanting to court your daughter, but let's talk about the imbalances of power with that. But I definitely see a positive within the Latino community. I think there are more people who are wanting to talk about it, more people who are being empowered.

MIKE

There was a lot of emphasis on: How do we deal with victims of sexual assault? How do we deal with victims of domestic violence? You know, what can we put in place to do that? And you kind of sit here and you go, Well, this is Texas. I mean, are we on the cutting edge of anything like that? And we really are—I mean, it's a bipartisan effort to address some of these problems. And the legislature was real good about it. We've got some good laws on how to deal with—to better deal with—tracking rape kits, dealing with offenders and

tracking offenders, giving all sorts of protections to victims of violence. Texas has gotten really good about that. And our law has gotten better about it. Right now, there's a concerted effort to educate people about the dangers of strangulation. That if you're strangled, you know, that used to be kind of on the bottom of the domestic violence deal. Blood, bruises, and broken bones is what you want to see. And yeah, "I got choked out once," that's way down at the bottom. In reality, the experts say that strangulation ought to be way at the top, because it's just a step away—if I'm willing to strangle you, I'm willing to kill you.

HANNAH

We work closely with law enforcement to train them to recognize trauma, and that's not something I think that they've been trained on in the past. At least not in depth. So I think that is something that they're now allowing... people to learn. So it's kind of being incorporated, and it's a new thing for them. So that's definitely something that has changed.

MIKE

We've done a real concerted effort to educate judges, to educate police officers, district attorneys on these things. And it, it has gotten better, but it's almost a two-step forward and almost two-step back process, sometimes. You make headway, you feel like you're really getting somewhere, and then you realize you have a trial, and jurors just aren't convinced. They're still back at believing, "Well, what was the girl wearing when she went out? Where did she go? Why was she, why was she out at midnight?" You know, things that you feel like you're past that, but you're really not.

So there've been a lot of strides. I mean, don't get me wrong, the baseline is slowly pushing toward more protections for victims, better tracking of offenders, a more trauma-informed approach to dealing with people in the legal system. But then, there's a lot of lot of way to go.

MÓNICA

More education on just the average person on sexual abuse, sexual assault, because it's still hard to get a conviction. It's still about proving the victim is not lying. And if those jury members are the average person, we need to obviously do a lot more educating, because people will get a lot more time for consuming or doing drugs than they would for sexually assaulting someone—and you're robbing their life.

BECKA

The things that have changed, I will say, is that that sense of research of "evidence-based" and "trauma informed"—those basic terminologies—now are more commonplace. Not just in treatment providers, but in a variety of agencies. And there's the court systems that are striving and doing great things to be trauma informed. There's police departments. There's all sorts of agencies that are striving to be sensitive to what trauma survivors need. And that's a wonderful thing to see. That from twenty years ago, where very little was talked about... there was a little talked about, just being sensitive to victim's needs, but to have this movement and to see it become something very formalized is pretty awesome.

AFFORDING THE RESOURCES

According to The Women's Center of Tarrant County, in 2018, their total expenses for the year accumulated to \$4,922,359.

FRAN

Even though I don't work directly with clients, I know when I send a newsletter out if somebody sends a one-hundred-dollar check, that one-hundred-dollar check is affecting a client and helping their lives be better. So knowing that what I do makes a difference makes me very passionate about what I do and about The Women's Center.

JASMINE

Funding can be somewhat unpredictable. So we can do our very best to apply for dollars, and sometimes, our application falls short, and there's a lot of good agencies in this town, in this county, in this state, in the country, doing important work. And so sometimes, we don't get the grants that we need, and that can be a really big problem cause we have to figure out how to address that issue. And then, I can't help but to take those things personally, because I know that those dollars are the dollars that we use to serve the clients that we serve and help.

CATHY

It's a challenge because we have a growing demand for our services. We have a growing staff, and we have a budget that is constrained by the money that we can raise. We do not charge for services. We do charge some program fees for counseling, some for student investment when they go into our employment training classes. But for the most part, we're funded by government grants, individuals, foundations, corporations, and our fundraising. We have two special events a year, so we're limited by those resources as to how much we can grow.

MÓNICA

There are never enough resources for our clients, especially in the case management position. They're needing resources. Like if the offender is also someone who provides and contributes to the household. If the offending party is also someone who does childcare. You know, there's so many things. If a client needs to get away from unhealthy individuals, there's never enough housing, and there's never enough monetary resources for them to get back on their feet, or it's just not enough financial resources for them to get back out.

CHRISEE

For me, being in the Fundraising Department, there is always going to be that constant need to raise the dollars that we need to provide the services. Because from year to year, that landscape is always going to change. And you'll have donors who are going to be a one-time donor and donors who are long-time donors. There'll be new services that we need to seek additional funds for. So, I think it's just that piece knowing that we need to make sure we have the resources needed in order for us to fulfill the mission of the organization.

BECKA

Even though we're very fortunate that we have a variety of grants and brilliant grant writers that work here,

there's never enough. We always are functioning from a place of needing more services for more survivors. And so the clinical staff here when I started has nearly doubled from where I started to now, and we still function off wait lists, oftentimes. And so it's one of those things where it feels like even though we keep successfully looking and searching (and we always will) to find more resources and more funding, [it] doesn't seem like we ever have enough to meet everybody's needs exactly how we'd like to immediately. So that's probably one of the biggest frustrations.

FRAN

I see us continuing to meet a need in the community. As those needs evolve, then we evolve. So you know our programs have expanded exponentially over the years. We started with employment, then we added our Rape Crisis and Victim Services. We added Pearls and our general counseling program four or five years ago, so as we see needs in a community, we work very hard to expand our services to meet those needs, and I see that continuing. I don't see that being any different than it was forty years ago. When we see a need that meets our mission or fits our mission—and our mission is to empower and inspire women, men, and children to overcome violence, crisis, and poverty as we see a need that fits within that mission, I just see us continuing to expand to meet those needs in the community. We are already almost outgrowing our building, so as we expand, I see us expanding even from a logistics standpoint, and I see us hopefully serving more and more men, women, and children in Tarrant County, continuing to transform those lives.

THE NEXT 40 YEARS

MIKE

I see us doing the same thing fifty years from now that we're doing now. The terminology may change. The therapist may no longer be doing "trauma informed" therapy. There may be something newer and better that they've learned—a newer way to deal with trauma. So it may not be called "trauma informed." It may be something new. The bigger and better. But the essential mission [will be] maintaining a rape crisis hotline, accompanying advocates on hospital accompaniments, therapy for survivors. Hopefully, we can keep the legal group here funded to do what we do. They're still gonna need that fifty years from now, because there's always going to be a population that's underserved. I just don't see these crimes going away.... I see us getting better at what we do.

CATHY

I think we're going to be doing what we're doing now, and I don't see that changing. I see it just growing. And maybe through our Play It Safe program that we teach children how to recognize and avoid and respond to sexual abuse by an adult when they don't understand what's happening. If we can train them to know it's not okay, then maybe we can eradicate sexual assault, because children won't any longer give them the opportunity. But I don't think we can reach every kid. So we're going to be right here doing what we're doing now.

MÓNICA

I would love to see more bilingual staff. I would love to be able to go out into the community a lot more and not just survive the community. I think with the staff we have, we survive serving the Latino community, but I'd love to just serve them. So, more bilingual staff, more minorities of all kinds, you know, African American, LGBT. I want this to just be the safest place people can be.

HANNAH

I think with all the changes with the Me Too movement and the way that victims are viewed now, I think that a lot more people are going to be coming to see usand they already have, but I think that number is still gonna grow, because I feel like the normalization of victimization, I guess, is growing, even to this day. So I think we will grow with clientele for sure. We're expanding our buildings since, I mean we're getting bigger, so we have more clientele. We have more employees, so we're having to grow physically, and that means we're growing with clientele. I think we're going to be in a lot more areas with our Play It Safe program—the program that goes out to schools and teaches [children] about abuse and rape. That's going nationwide. So now we can do that anywhere, not just Tarrant County. And it used to start really small, with only Tarrant County. We could help with that. So I think we're just gonna get bigger and bigger and have more clientele, and everyone's gonna know about us. It's gonna be great.

MÓNICA

I have a passion for making sure the Latino community is having this conversation, because I didn't hear it growing up, you know? So, I think it's definitely a need, but even as a whole, I would love to live in a world where we have as many therapists—not just bilingual therapists, because we have nine and it still doesn't seem to be enough. We still have a long waiting list. I would love to see that waiting list disappear. I think just growing in services, more volunteers, more partnerships with hospitals and officers and bridging the gap of making it an easier way to report. And you know what? More education for just the average person on sexual abuse, sexual assault, because it's still hard to get a conviction. It's still about proving the victim is not lying. And if those juror members are the average person, we need to obviously do a lot more educating, because people will get a lot more time for consuming or doing drugs than they would for sexually assaulting someone, and you're robbing their life.

BECKA

My hope is someday we don't exist. My hope is that there is no need for us to exist, and I'm going to keep working towards that hope. I keep hope alive. That's the phrase that they will use in our clinical team here. And if I look into the future, at least for the foreseeable future, The Women's Center will be here and growing and being better than ever, until there is no need for us. And that's what my hope will be.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF LACEY HARMS

CREATIVE DIRECTOR
AMY BEHRENS

Editorial Team
Elizabeth Afeman | Jillian Bradford
Nathan Caballero | Laura Fuentes
Darlene Ninziza

SPECIAL THANKS & SUPPORT

DR. EMORY & MR. FREDERIC HAMILTON
THE HAMILTON FAMILY ELEVEN40SEVEN ENDOWMENT
FUND

DR. CHANTEL L. CARLSON
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
WOMEN & GENDER STUDIES AFFILIATE

DR. CURT RODE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
CENTER FOR DIGITAL EXPRESSION

Dr. Theresa Gaul Department of English

Dr. Andrew Schoolmaster AddRan College of Liberal Arts

KATHARINE COLLIER ESSER
THE WOMEN'S CENTER









(









Printed thanks to our friends at









"Our founding mother
Karen Perkins
always talked about how:
The outstretched hand always yields
better results than the closed fist."
Becka ~ The Women's Center

eleven40seven

Chapbook Series #5

Texas Christian University

Fort Worth, Texas

