



Press Release

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Local Training Prepares Volunteers to Assist Rape Survivors

St George, UT – January 9, 2017 – DOVE Center, a local non-profit providing shelter, advocacy, and counseling to survivors of domestic violence, rape and sexual assault, will begin its bi-annual 40-hour training course for volunteer advocates on January 23. The training aims to equip new advocates with the knowledge, tools, and understanding necessary to interact with survivors of abuse and trauma. An advocate’s goal is to ensure a survivor has access to the emotional and physical resources needed following an assault.

The training is specifically tailored to certify members of DOVE Center’s Hospital Advocate Response Team (HART), a group of on-call volunteers who respond to the emergency room to offer immediate support to rape or sexual assault survivors during a forensic exam and/or police interview. Being on-call for an ER visit can be daunting for a volunteer. But the training facilitates a greater understanding of trauma, common reactions to it and techniques to navigate the emotions and confusion that many victims experience. “The training offered a valuable learning opportunity,” said Spring De Hart, a recently certified advocate. “It brought light to my own thinking patterns, assumptions and expectations that could hinder my ability to fully understand and advocate for survivors.”

In addition to the initial 40-hour training, HART volunteers meet monthly in order to debrief, receive ongoing training, and stay up to date on best practices for trauma-informed advocacy. Elizabeth Bluhm, DOVE Center’s Rape Victim Advocate Coordinator, leads the meetings and regularly reminds advocates about their real purpose when responding. “An advocate’s prime responsibility is to really listen to and believe a rape victim,” says Bluhm. “In today’s society, we are bombarded by a rape culture that blames the victim while letting the perpetrator off the hook.” Rape culture refers to a common societal belief that sexual aggression is normal; that, for example, men can’t control their sexual urges and women are to blame for provoking an assault. “We are working to combat that faulty reasoning,” continues Bluhm. “As advocates, we always begin by believing the victim of the crime.”

Although a requirement for HART volunteers, DOVE Center’s advocate training helps prepare volunteers for other roles within the agency. The training is open to interested community members as well and is particularly useful for anyone assisting victims of domestic or sexual violence in an occupational, community, or religious setting.

The training course begins January 23. Classes are held Monday through Friday, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. for 10 sessions, concluding on February 3. For more info, or to register for the course, go to www.dovecenter.org/education/dove-trainings or call 435-628-1204. Space is limited, so register soon to reserve your place. There is a \$50 registration fee and the registration deadline is Monday, January 16, 2017. For info on other volunteer opportunities with DOVE Center, please visit www.dovecenter.org/get-involved/volunteering.

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Note for the editor: DOVE Center is a 501.c.3 not-for-profit organization committed to providing safe, caring, and confidential shelter, advocacy and support for victims of domestic violence, rape, and sexual assault and to reducing the incidents of abuse through prevention education. For more information go to www.dovecenter.org