



Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: Markee Pickett, Communications Manager

markee@dovecenter.org

DOVE Center launching pilot program to tackle unique barriers sexual assault survivors face in rural areas

ST. GEORGE — Reaching out for help and accessing services are not easy tasks for survivors of rape and sexual assault, especially survivors in rural populations.

It's why local non-profit [DOVE Center](#) is improving its rape and sexual assault services in Kane County, starting in Kanab. Survivors in rural populations, such as Kane County, face unique barriers when accessing services, said Executive Director Jillian Penhale.

“COVID intensified these barriers,” Penhale added. “Although the organization was able to offer telehealth services to both local and rural survivors during the pandemic, inadequate internet services in rural areas proved to be a challenge.”

Affordability, accessibility, convenience and service limitations were all issues affecting access to services that were exacerbated by COVID.

To combat these barriers, DOVE plans to utilize grant funds from the Department of Health and Human Services to launch a pilot program to expand case management, advocacy through the organization's Hospital Advocacy Response Team, and prevention and education services for survivors in Kane County. In addition, the organization will offer group therapy services to survivors housed within the Washington County Jail.

DOVE Center is currently hiring for a rape and sexual assault [mobile advocate](#) in Kane County, so survivors don't need to travel far to access services.

During fiscal year 2022, the organization provided services to 211 survivors of rape and sexual assault — a 30% increase compared to the previous year. Despite the increase in survivors

served, Bailey VanOver, Rape/Sexual Assault Program Coordinator for DOVE, said many survivors still don't report or seek services.

“We have learned from clients that there is a misconception that DOVE does not provide services in Kane County, and the distance to St. George is a barrier for many.” she said. “Even when clients are informed that they can access DOVE services over the phone, most survivors of rape and sexual assault prefer to meet in person.”

Lack of education and resources in rural areas can lead to members of the community victim blaming survivors when they do come forward. Survivors are less likely to report within their own communities due to a high familiarity level with community members.

Mercy Stout, a contracted therapist for the organization, offers clinical counseling services to survivors in Kane County. She said the stigma of being a victim of sexual assault and asking for help is “alive and well” in rural areas.

“Fewer people may be trauma informed, resulting in less understanding of the realities victims face both internally and externally,” Stout added.

Despite the barriers these survivors face, both Penhale and VanOver said they deserve and need the same services survivors receive in more urban areas.

If the pilot program is successful, DOVE will seek to expand its mobile advocacy into additional rural areas as needed, such as tribal lands, Enterprise and Central.

Survivors of rape and sexual assault can seek services from DOVE Center by calling its 24-Hour Helpline at 435-628-0458. To learn more about DOVE Center's services, you can visit www.dovecenter.org.

###

About DOVE Center

DOVE Center is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that is dedicated to providing shelter, advocacy and counseling to survivors of domestic abuse, dating violence, sexual assault, rape, sex trafficking and stalking in Washington and Kane counties.

To learn more, please visit dovecenter.org. or connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).