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Sexual Violence Happens in Loudoun County – and There is Hope

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Feb 2, 2023

“No one has to do everything, but everyone has to do something.”

–Dr. Dorothy Edwards, Alteristic, Inc.

As our community considers the findings of the Special Grand Jury investigation regarding the two sexual assaults that occurred in Loudoun County Public Schools in 2021, we are reminded that sexual and domestic violence can and does happen in Loudoun County.

LAWS Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services, Loudoun County’s designated sexual and domestic violence service provider, sees this type of violence and offers support to survivors every day. Last year, LAWS received more than 1,560 hotline calls, helped nearly 200 adult and child survivors of domestic violence in need of emergency shelter, and received 224 high danger reports of physical domestic violence from law enforcement.

Why is violence so prevalent in our community?

Sexual violence is an epidemic, affecting over half of the women in the U.S. and one in three American men. National and local data indicate that boys and men are at the highest risk for committing sexual and domestic violence against any gender. Across Loudoun County in 2021, 91% of reported offenders of sexual violence were male. The boys and young men who commit sexual or domestic violence frequently have experienced situations that contribute to their behavior. Studies have found that perpetrators of sexual violence tend to have witnessed or experienced abuse in childhood, conform to elements associated with aggressive masculinity, believe that sex should be impersonal and used for dominance, engage in heavy alcohol consumption, and perpetuate the belief among their peers that sexual violence is the norm.

What's being done?

There is hope. Risk factors for committing sexual violence can be identified and assuaged. LAWS and LCPS are working together to name the current challenges to addressing violence, identify strategies to address risk factors, and implement solutions to stop violence before it happens. For example, LCPS has now hired Title IX staff who are trained and certified through a qualified organization of Title IX experts and staff across the country. LCPS has implemented Title IX trainings for school administrators and mental health professionals to know how to respond and report instances of harm that are prohibited under Title IX.

Along with these efforts, LCPS is partnering with LAWS to provide training for mental health staff to intervene when risk factors are identified; educate parents and community members about how to reduce risk factors in children and teens; and advise student leaders on promoting healthy social norms among their peers.

What more can our community do?

No single entity or individual can address the problem of violence alone. Along with LCPS' and LAWS' partnership, Loudoun County's Domestic Abuse Response Team and Sexual Assault Response Team are two examples of collaborations that are working toward coordinated community solutions. However, all members of our community must take an active role in preventing violence before it happens by condemning all sexual violence and establishing the norm that it is unacceptable in Loudoun County.

Go to LAWS' website, lcsj.org/prevention, to learn how to get involved in preventing violence.