

SLT Women's Center brings awareness to sexual assault

To the community,

April is Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Prevention Month. This month, South Lake Tahoe Women's Center is raising funds to support our local Sexual Assault Response Team (SART). The team promotes the health and healing of adult and child sexual assault victims, holds sex offenders accountable for their crimes, and helps prevent further sexual violence from happening in South Lake Tahoe.

Our El Dorado County SART is a multidisciplinary group of local professionals that include Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE), South Lake Tahoe Women's Center advocates, law enforcement, and the District Attorney's Office, who work together to care for adult and child survivors of sexual assault and child abuse and hold the offender accountable in the criminal justice system.

Our El Dorado County SART has been in operation for more than 15 years. When one of our community members is the victim of any form of sexual violence, the Sexual Assault Response Team is called into action. Each agency responds to the different needs of the victim through the medical, reporting, legal and healing process.

Currently our SART is missing a key component and this is having a direct impact on children in South Lake Tahoe. There are currently no child Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners at Barton Memorial Hospital. When a young child has survived sexual abuse and needs to have a medical exam for evidence and wellbeing, they must travel more than two hours from South Lake Tahoe to Nevada where there is a hospital with a SANE on staff. In California, the closest hospital is in Oakland.

For adults, we only have two SANEs, which aren't enough to cover the need, and adults must travel to Nevada as well. This means that after the victim has been sexually assaulted they must travel more than two hours for medical attention to address the unique needs of a sexual violence victim. This is unacceptable.

Throughout April the Women's Center will be having various events and fundraisers to raise funds to support the El Dorado SART. We need your financial support to send registered nurses to training to become Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners and to purchase equipment for evidence collection. With these desperately needed funds, victims of sexual assault will be spared the emotionally taxing wait to receive services. It is our responsibility as a community to support our most vulnerable members, so victims will be supported right here in South Lake Tahoe within minutes of the sexual assault disclosure.

Please call Leanne Wagoner for more information on how you can help at (530) 544.2118; visit our website at www.sltwc.org for the calendar of events scheduled for April; or stop by our business office at 2941 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

Leanne Wagoner, executive director of the South Lake Tahoe Women's Center