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## Keeping it safe

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The stories and faces of abuse are unique and solitary, yet with the care of professionals and volunteers who work for CAPSA, victims know they're not alone but rather part of something universal, both in cause and recovery.

Since 1976, the Community Abuse Prevention Services Agency has been helping persons escape violent homes, relationships and other environments and into healthy and self-sufficient lifestyles.

The Herald Journal sat down with CAPSA's Executive Director Jill Anderson and Operations Director Tracy Hernandez to hear the organization's goals, accomplishments and mission to keep this community a safe place.

**Q:** What are some of the unique services you provide to clients?

**A:** Most people, when they think about CAPSA, think about a shelter but we also have eight other programs with coordinators over each one. The rape crisis program works with rape victims, we also have a rape prevention and education program where a team goes into the schools and teaches young people about healthy relationships. There's a support group program — not therapy but an educational support group. We also have a diversity program that assists non-English speaking clients, the majority of which are Spanish speaking clients but we do have other languages as well.

Our mobile crisis team is an all volunteer team of advocates that goes on domestic violence calls. Anytime the police get a domestic violence call, they contact our team and have them come as well. We also have a children's program that works with children who come to CAPSA with their parents. We don't specifically work with just child victims but if there were any child victims, they would go to the Child

and Family Support Center.

Our newest program is the transitional housing program and it provides housing assistance for people who leave the center so they can work on ways to become more self sufficient — like saving money to go to school or make a down payment on a house. One of things we found is they only have 30 days in the shelter and that's a really limited time and if you imagine your life turned upside down and in 30 days you have to find a job and housing and daycare, it's a pretty amazing that they can accomplish that — it's a lot of work.

What we found is that many of our clients got stuck in the poverty cycle and weren't able to increase their level of self sufficiency. The goal of the new transitional housing program is to help them build a life asset. Whether that's in education or something that can move them beyond survival and poverty.

Q: What are your goals for this year?

A: One of the projects we've been working on this year is a capital fundraising campaign. Currently our transitional housing program is a scattered site program where the clients go and find an apartment that's available in the community and we subsidize their rent during the time they're on the program working for their goal of establishment. Right now we're working on building our own housing units so we can take the money they pay toward their rent and reinvest that in the program to help future survivors. That way, the program will begin to support itself instead of relying solely on state or federal grants.

We're starting with twelve units and we currently average about eight to 12 families per month.

One of the biggest reasons for implementing this program is to increase confidentiality of the clients and their safety. Right now we sign an agreement with the landlord so they know the person is a CAPSA client. This new way, they'll be able to keep their confidentiality and we'll be able to help keep them safe.

Q: What are the new challenges that your staff is dealing with as individuals with unique problems that are coming to CAPSA?

A: Every case that comes in is different and a challenge. All the cases are as unique as the different people that walk in here. We really have to adjust and adapt with every case. As we have progressed as an organization over the last 32 years, we tried to focus on different issues and increase the level of services we provide. For example, in 1997 we hired our diversity coordinator — we saw an increase in the Latino population and had to address that. We had clients coming in who spoke Spanish and none of us did, so how do you tell someone

about the services we offer and how do you tell that person he or she is safe here? It was extremely difficult, so we now have six full-time staff members that speak Spanish.

Another thing we're working on right now is serving people with disabilities. The challenge is when a person has a mental health issue — how do we address that? It seems like every four or five years we evaluate and address a specific issue and try and make our services better. In October we received a \$750,000 grant from the Department of Justice to address how we serve people with disabilities over the next three years. We continue to work with organizations like Options for Independence and USU's Center for Persons with Disabilities and we're helping to address those issues.

And of course, there's the methamphetamine issue. We're very cautious in watching clients when they may have a drug or alcohol problem. We link them immediately with drug and alcohol services so they can get the treatment they need. We can't really address the abuse issues of a client until the drug problems have been taken care of.

Q: How does the education program work?

A: Different topics are introduced in different grades starting with the sixth grade through the 12th grade. When they're in the sixth grade, they're not talking about rape prevention — they're talking about bullying and safety issues. Later they discuss healthy relationships, dating, rape prevention and more advanced topics. They sort of graduate through the program and hopefully kids will see us every year and that the topics all reinforce violence prevention.

Q: What's the day to day clientele at CAPSA?

A: We have 32 beds in eight bedrooms along with four bathrooms. Last year we had an average of 12 people in the shelter each night and that's up from an average of about four to six from about five years ago.

Q: How do you accommodate the daily needs of clients?

A: Because CAPSA operates on a 24-hour schedule, we have to staff our crisis hotline, the mobile crisis team and then, of course, staffing the shelter 24 hours a day requires a lot of help and volunteers are critical to the operation of the organization. There are 25 staff here and about 45 volunteers at any given time. In the past couple of years we have averaged 12,000 volunteer hours a year plus an additional six full-time staff positions. Bottom line is we couldn't do this without volunteers.

Q: Can you recall one instance where your services changed a person's life and helped put him or her into a better environment.

A: There was a recent case where a woman moved to Cache County from California after an abusive relationship and when she got here she met with our mobile crisis team and went into the shelter. She then graduated into our support group program and was accepted into a scholarship program called the Sunshine Lady — a national program that provides scholarships for survivors of domestic violence. She went to USU and manages a 3.9 grade point average while caring for three kids. She has talked about how the program has really changed her and her family. Her oldest son had never spoken about wanting to pursue a college degree but after seeing his mother go through school, he now hopes to follow in her footsteps and is talking about his future college goals.

CAPSA expresses gratitude to those in the community who have already and will continue to support It's efforts in addressing and treating the effects of abuse and encourages additional people to take advantage of their training session for new volunteers that begins in May.

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