

HOPE Works is an organization of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence dedicated to eradicating sexual violence in our communities and supporting and advocating for all survivors of sexual violence. We work towards these goals in many ways, primarily through anti-violence education and prevention work, and through the free and confidential supportive services we provide to survivors in Chittenden County. As the victim advocate, I am responsible for the latter.

When we use the language of “survivors of sexual violence,” we are referring to any person who has experienced any kind of sexual violence, which itself is an umbrella term that encompasses (but isn’t necessarily limited to) rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, voyeurism, child sexual abuse, sex trafficking, reproductive coercion, etc.

While we all have conscious and subconscious preconceptions of what we think sexual violence looks like, and who we believe is most impacted, the reality is that there is an incredible diversity of experiences and identities with regards to survivors and sexual violence generally in our communities.

In the last year or so, HOPE Works has worked with and supported survivors across the age range, survivors of all genders and sexualities, survivors of diverse racial, ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities, survivors of all abilities, and survivors of diverse socioeconomic experience.

Some of these survivors experienced sexual violence long ago, some very recently. Some were survivors of sexual assault and rape, others stalking, sexual harassment, and voyeurism. Some were survivors of sex trafficking and other forms of sexual exploitation, commercial or otherwise. Some of the people we served were parents, partners, friends, and loved ones of survivors looking for tools and information around supporting the survivors in their lives.

Despite the sometimes skewed representations of sexual violence in our culture, sexual violence does not discriminate.

The services provided by our three full-time staff advocates and \_\_\_\_ blank volunteer advocates on our hotline are as varied as the survivors we serve (I often joke that the hardest part of my job is actually explaining to others what it actually IS that I do...). Our 24 hour crisis hotline provides emotional support, information and resources, and options counseling, as well as emergency support resources like housing, protection orders, and accompaniment to SANE exams following a sexual assault.

Beyond the hotline, myself, our Youth Advocate, our in-house clinical therapist, and our Advocacy Services Coordinator provide the bulk of direct services out of our organization. Some of those services include clinical therapy, legal support in obtaining protection orders and other pertinent legal needs following an experience of sexual violence or stalking, free support groups, systems advocacy (ie. advocacy that supports a survivor navigating systems that intersect with their experience of sexual violence, such as the criminal justice system), advocacy around helping survivors obtain necessary resources related to an experience of violence, as



well as day to day emotional support, care, and validation around a survivor's experience with violence-- something that most survivors do not necessarily receive from other people in their lives.

While HOPE Works provides support, advocacy, resources and care to survivors that is undoubtedly transformative to many, a bulk of the work we do-- listening to, believing, validating, and uplifting survivors-- is work anyone is capable of. Sexual violence can be (and often is) traumatizing on physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological levels, but what survivors frequently articulate as being nearly as traumatizing as the sexual violence itself, is the violence of being forced, repeatedly, to justify their pain and experience in order to be heard and believed.

Thank you for the incredibly hard work you do, and for making time in your lives and work to consider these issues.