

making a DIFFERENCE

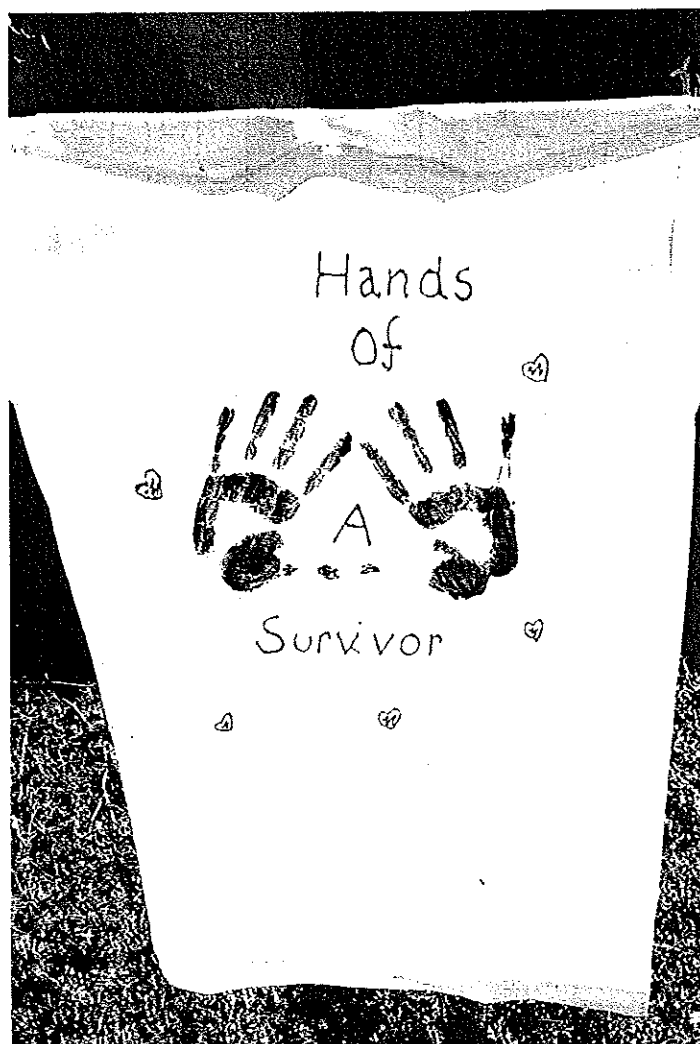
Sexual Assault Center

By Krysta McNaughton

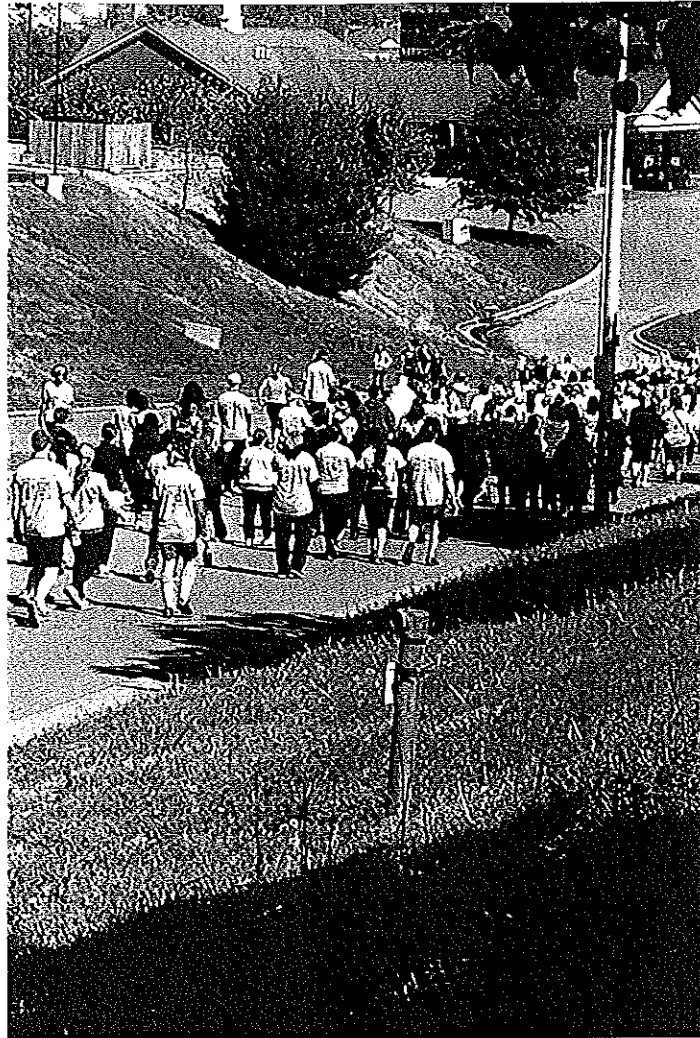
Saturday, April 20th, part of Rosa Parks Boulevard was shut down. Six hundred participants took to the streets for “Walk in Their Shoes.” It was a sea of purple. Why purple? It’s one of the colors that represent the Sexual Assault Center (SAC), whose colors are yellow and purple. The participants not only wore purple shirts, but the more creative folks donned purple hats, capes, and a few dyed their hair purple. “Walk in Their Shoes” is the first of two fundraisers the SAC organizes annually. Survivors, along with their families and friends, not only walked 5K to raise awareness about such an important issue, but to let the public know there is a place to go for help. That place is the Sexual Assault Center (SAC), located in the Metro Center at 101 French Landing Drive. They provide counseling, education, and a 24-hour crisis line for immediate support.

The first year, less than 50 people participated. “The SAC was located on Lindsley Avenue back then,” said Dede Bearden, the center’s marketing and events manager. “It was more of a Kumbaya moment—just therapists and survivors meeting up, taking walks and just being together.” That was 12 years ago. By utilizing various media outlets such as *The Tennessean*, Graffiti Indoor Advertising, and *Nashville Lifestyles* magazine, participation this year was at its highest. “We raised \$11,700.00 for the center through personal fundraising pages alone. I’m so excited,” said Dede, beaming with pride. Her job comes with some difficulty. “Sexual assault is NOT a topic people want to discuss.” Yet Dede is not to be deterred. She wants to “bring this issue right in people’s faces.” The fact that Channel 4 covered the walk, and Channel 5’s news reporter Cynthia Williams was the emcee should help Dede’s desire come to fruition.

After the walk, it was time to celebrate. An after party at the center featured food trucks, activities, and booths of sponsors such as 101.1 The Beat for all to enjoy. For the \$15 entry fee, each person got a little exercise, ate good food, listened to live entertainment, and helped support a fantastic organization.



How does SAC benefit? Increased publicity in the Nashville area helps to provide the much needed funding to maintain the quality of support for those who seek it. Dede mentioned this year was her first time participating in “Walk in Their Shoes.” She was exuberant as she asked her fellow seasoned walkers, “I know I haven’t done this before, but it was great, right? I thought it was great!”



Planning for the 2014 “Walk in Their Shoes” is in the beginning stages. Let’s see if as a neighborhood, we can walk together and make next year better than great!

Although “Walk in Their Shoes” generates awareness, the Sexual Assault Center’s premier event is Mad Hatter. This year, Mad Hatter will be held on Friday, September 6, 2013, at the beautiful Hutton Hotel. As a primary fundraiser, the Mad Hatter together with its Patron Party typically raises 10% of the SAC budget. Since its inception, Mad Hatter has raised more than \$2 million dollars for the center. For the past 20 years, approximately 350 supporters have attended this wonderful event. They’ve delighted in eating great food, listening to live music, and were able bid on fabulous auction items. For example, last year’s auction included: 2 tickets to the 2013 CMT awards, 2 tickets to the Nashville Symphony, one year’s worth of ice cream from Purity Dairies, and a customized voice message for your personal phone by The Black Keys.

The Sexual Assault Center’s mission statement reads, “To provide healing for children, adults and families affected by sexual assault and to end sexual violence through counseling, education and advocacy.

We have been providing sexual assault services for Middle Tennessee since 1978 and have counseled more than 17,000 children and adults.

This center is the only one of its kind in the Nashville area. There are many ways to reach out and help the center maintain its purpose. They accept donations. For example, a gift of \$50.00 can provide art supplies in the Art Therapy room. A \$75 donation pays for 50 high school students to participate in healthy relationship training. Volunteers are at the heart of SAC; they are trained to answer the crisis line and care for the victims of sexual assault. The center is currently implementing a patient advocacy system called Hospital Accompany Program, or HAP for short. To learn more about HAP, contact Jessica Labenberg; her email address is jlabenberg@sacenter.org. The volunteer training for this program is planned for the fall.

To inquire about Mad Hatter tickets, learn more about volunteering your time, making a donation, or to read about the essential programs provided by SAC, please go to their website: <http://www.sacenter.org>.