

# Choices

*Council on Domestic Violence For Page County, Inc.*



*LHS student art from the October 2019 show at Warehouse Art Gallery, Luray,  
in honor of Domestic Violence Awareness Month*

## *Annual Report FY 2020*

*July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020*

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# Mission Statement

*“To prevent both domestic and sexual violence through public awareness and education and to serve as a resource and a safe haven to those affected.”*

## Objectives

- To provide emergency shelter and support services for battered women and their children in the County of Page, including towns of Luray, Stanley, and Shenandoah.
- To provide crisis intervention counseling and emotional support for victims of domestic violence and/or sexual assault.
- To provide information and referral services throughout the County of Page, including towns of Luray, Stanley, and Shenandoah.
- To act as an advocate for victims of domestic violence and/or sexual assault in other systems or agencies upon request.
- To promote public awareness of the issues of domestic violence and sexual assault, and to provide community education on these issues.
- To work cooperatively with other agencies or groups who deal with specific needs/concerns of women who are victims of domestic violence and/or sexual assault.

## Choices Provided for the Safety and Protection of Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence and their Children in Page County

**From July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2020 Choices provided temporary, 24-hour safe shelter to:**

- 🏠 39 women
- 🏠 34 children
- 🏠 Total of 3,293 bed nights
- 🏠 An average of 9 people in the shelter each night for the year.

NOTE: Fewer people came into shelter in FY20 as compared with FY19. This reduction was likely a direct result of the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders. Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, Choices staff kept the shelter open. Once Virginia entered into Phase II, requests for shelter increased.



## Of the 38 families exiting the shelter this year:



- 9% went back home with their abuser.
- 9% went home and their abuser was no longer present.
- 54% went to stay with a relative or friend.
- 26% were able to obtain self-supported housing.
- 2% left the area.

## Each family in the shelter stayed as long as necessary to have their needs met.

- 0% stayed less than 24 hours
- 47% 1 day to 1 week
- 2% stayed 1 week to 2 weeks
- 11% stayed 2 weeks to 30 days
- 8% stayed 30 to 60 days
- 11% stayed 60 to 90 days
- 21 % stayed over 90 days



## Because of the services Choices provided:

- 99% of those receiving services said they knew **how to better plan for their safety.**
- 100% of those receiving services were **more hopeful about their future.**
- 100% of those receiving services said they **knew more about community services available to them.**
- 100% of those receiving services were **confident about their next steps.**



One former resident wrote:

*“If I had a dollar for each time I think of all of you, I would be able to take a pretty good vacation!!! LOL Some days, I do sorta feel like I am on vacation, as far as the peace of mind and lack of fear that I have!!”*

### What would you have done if the shelter did not exist?

- “Fail miserably, probably still be in the abusive relationship that I came to the shelter to escape.”
- “I don’t think – with good reason – that I would have been alive”
- “My children and I would have slept in my van. We had nowhere else to go and we were NOT safe in our home.”

Note: These quotes represent the most common responses received this year. We housed fewer residents - and thus received fewer surveys – due to COVID-19. We thought the smaller data sample did not justify assigning percentages to the responses.

**We asked survivors to describe any positive experiences they had while working with Choices staff members. Responses included:**

*"I found lots of support."*

*"I was supported by everyone. I am now confident my children and I can live safely."*

*"I was so afraid when I came into shelter. I was torn down, battered and unsure of my future. When I left, I still had some old bruises, but I had been built up and was definitely more hopeful about what my future looked like."*

**Choices provided advocacy to 669 individuals in person and over the telephone. This is an increase of 1.6% from last year.**

- Of the people served, 89% were female and 11% were male.
- Race and ethnicity reflected Page County. Most clients were European-American, but some were African-American and Hispanic-American. A few identified as having mixed heritage.
- By age, Choices served the spectrum of the county, children, adults and seniors. By our measures, again, no demographic group was exempt from the effects of domestic and/or sexual violence.

**Choices provided comprehensive support services in person to individuals who experienced domestic and/or sexual violence.**

- 94% received crisis intervention services
- 100% received counseling and support services.
- 99% received information and referral services.
- 100% developed a safety plan that identified options for getting out of an unsafe situation.

## **Support Groups**

- Choices provided 33 support group sessions with 20 women and 15 children participating.
- Adult attendees were able to identify 3 red flags indicating an unhealthy relationship.
- They also worked on building positive self-esteem.
- Children who attended support group were able to identify feelings and explore safe social connections.



## NEW IN FY20

**Healing Trauma Group** began January 22, 2020.

- Weekly sessions were provided in the shelter to residents and to the clients in housing via ZOOM.
- We provided 23 sessions with 16 women.
- Attendees were able to identify 3 ways power and control can show up in an abusive relationship.
- They were able to list 3 ways to ground or soothe themselves in a healthy manner.
- They were able to describe 3 qualities of a healthy relationship.
- They also learned proper self-care and learned how to make short-term and long-term goals surrounding self-care.

**Choices provided comprehensive support services to 36 children living in the shelter whose families experienced domestic and sexual violence.**

- The Children's Services Coordinator assessed the children to determine their individual needs.
- She and the parent then worked together to develop Individual Services Plans to meet those needs.
- Children were taught communication skills, problem solving and conflict resolution skills.
- Parents participated in individualized parenting sessions and nutrition classes.



NOTE: 2 of the 36 children entered shelter the previous fiscal year.

## Rapid Rehousing Program



- Choices helped 13 adults and 20 children move into permanent housing with Virginia Homeless Services Program funds.
  - All families were financially assisted with deposits for rent and utilities and three months of rent.
  - After the first three months, a re-certification was required and if found eligible, the family could receive additional rental assistance.

**Choices criminal justice staff assisted 65 victims of domestic violence with court services.**

- 86% were accompanied to court by a Choices advocate on criminal matters.
- 65% were helped with civil matters, including obtaining protective orders and filing for custody or visitation.
- The Page County Assistant Commonwealth Attorney began quarterly Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) meetings. SART meetings provide a chance for law enforcement officers and advocates to get together with the commonwealth attorney to discuss victim services and address issues that may prevent these services from being as effective as they could be.
- Choices placed information packets at the jail, in court services and law enforcement offices.



## Choices responded to 543 calls on the 24-hour support line. This is a 30% increase over FY19

- ☎ 435 calls, 80%, related to family violence.
- ☎ 79 calls, 15%, related to sexual assault.
- ☎ 29 calls, 5%, related to being unable to meet basic needs such as shelter, food, or clothing.



To assist callers with tools they need to increase their capacity to live violence-free lives:

- ☎ 96% of the callers were told of additional community resources
- ☎ 97% were provided individual advocacy and counseling
- ☎ 94% received crisis intervention

## Her Story

**Barbara** arrived in the shelter with two toddlers, ages 2 and 3. Traumatized, Barbara had trouble thinking about feeding herself although she did try to feed her children. They had little in the way of possessions. The Children's Services Coordinator (CSC) immediately provided donated food and handmade blankets to help her and the children feel safe and secure. Barbara also received a voucher for clothing at the local thrift store.

Over the next few days, the CSC provided parental support and a thorough assessment of each child to determine the best way to provide support. Barbara was assisted in getting the children fed and entertained. When one of the children needed medical care, the CSC took Barbara and the children to the emergency room. Choices staff worked closely with her, modeling parenting tools such as redirection, praise and creating a calm atmosphere for transition from one activity to another. The development of routines for the children was a top priority to create a sense of safety and stability. We also assisted in making things, such as diaper changes and bedtimes, go more smoothly. Adequate nutrition guidance was another high priority for the CSC to support mom with, including augmenting meals with nutritious snacks just for children.

The children spent an hour with the CSC every week. They played, ate healthy snacks, engaged in self-esteem building activities, celebrations and read stories. At the same time, Barbara attended some group therapy offered by Choices. She spoke of feeling highly supported by all staff members and her increasing calm lead to better parenting.

Barbara also received court services to assist in filing for and obtaining a protective order. The Court Advocate explained courtroom etiquette and expectations. The advocate accompanied and supported Barbara throughout the process.

Barbara worked with the Services Coordinator to identify goals that could lead to self-sufficiency and financial stability. She participated in budgeting classes. We helped her to get assistance through Department of Social Services. We worked with her to complete job applications and improve her interviewing skills.

## Education and Prevention

- Choices gave 30 educational presentations to 535 students in Page County Public Schools, providing resources and tools to develop healthy relationships.
- Choices staff presented educational programs to an additional 427 people in school-based sports teams and community organizations.

## New in FY20 Safe Dates Prevention Curriculum.

Choices led 20 art students in two separate classes at Luray High School through the entire nine-week HeARTful Empowerment Program. In the second semester, 17 students participated in four sessions before schools closed in response to the pandemic.

Note: Late winter staffing shortages followed by the closure of the public schools due to Covid-19 affected the numbers of students we were able to reach this fiscal year.

## Volunteers Improved Services and Facilities for Clients

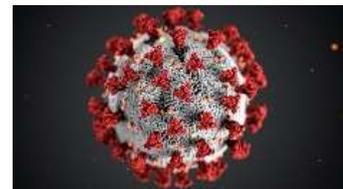


In FY '20, 26 volunteers gave a total of 246 hours of service. Volunteers served as members of the Board of Directors, helped with fundraising, publications, updating the website, shelter upkeep and cared for sheltered children. Volunteers assisted with support groups and facilitated work sessions on nutrition, parenting and self-care. Volunteers helped residents move into permanent housing.

## Program Highlights - July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020

### Pandemic Response

- Choices implemented safety protocols to keep the shelter open throughout the pandemic, including limiting onsite staff, checking temperatures, meticulous cleaning and providing gloves and masks to anyone entering shelter or offices.
- We began operating at half shelter capacity to assist with social distancing.
- We temporarily replaced dishes and utensils with paper products to reduce the possibility of contamination.
- We used social media to get the word out that we were still providing services.
- We also added a new text number; provide one more way for people to reach us.
- The Choices Court Advocate and Page County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court worked through the challenges presented by COVID-19 to ensure clients could be supported by the Advocate.
- Choices printed flyers to place on pizza boxes letting people know that Choices continues to provide services through the pandemic. Dominos and Pizza Hut participated in this effort to get the word out.



Choices continues to collaborate with schools, law enforcement, TRIAD for seniors, faith communities, peer support, social services, landlords and general public to identify people who may need our services.

- The Choices Community Engagement Team found a secure platform to provide videos, power points, worksheets, documents, manuals, coloring books, etc. for people to become informed on Choices, Prevention and Education. There will be pages for parents, teachers in all grades, the elderly and the community at large. It will include a survey so we may gather data and evaluate the offerings. The new prevention Google site will be launched the fall of 2020.  
<https://sites.google.com/view/choicesprevention/home>
- Choices staff participated in Language Access training. Next FY we will implement our Limited English Proficiency Plan, helping us better serve non-English speaking victims and their families.
- Choices set up a booth with family friendly activities and participated in Luray's National Night Out in August.
- During October, Domestic Violence Awareness Month, artworks by participants in the Safe Dates/HeARTful Empowerment program were displayed at Jim Mayes' Warehouse Art Gallery in Luray.
- Additional DVAM activities included distribution of purple ribbons, display of purple wreaths and working with the Luray High School football program in a variety of activities.
- The local weekly, Page News & Courier, wrote a front-page article on Choices for DVAM.
- Fundraisers included: Rotary Club of Luray held a dinner for Choices at the Mimslyn featuring an Illusionist.
- Adelheid and Mike Osmers of the South Court Inn Bed and Breakfast donated all proceeds from two German Dinners for private parties.
- A canoe was donated to Choices then raffled off.
- Several additional businesses continued to support Choices, including Main Street Bakery, Hunt & Peck, Mama Mia and Compass Tea Room.
- The Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance trained staff members in better serving clients with addiction and mental health issues. We implemented improvements including using a trauma trigger/de-escalation assessment, allowing staff to assist clients to identify their trauma response triggers and teach tools to manage them.
- Choices began a Healing Trauma Group, a six-session curriculum which helps the participant to understand trauma and how it presents in them individually.
- The Children's Services Coordinator received training as a 'Certified Trauma Professional' and was invited to be on the Page County School Board committee that is developing plans for reopening of schools.



## Trends

- A persistent trend is how far the aggressor will go to continually terrorize the victim. This year, several perpetrators came to the shelter. They taunted victims over social media with false allegations and had friends and family members contact victims to convey the aggressors' messages. These tactics perpetuate the trauma and interfere with healing.
- Because of numerous defense motions, hearings and trials can be 12-18 months out from an incident. This does not include court dates for civil matters such as child support, spousal support, custody and divorce. This often means time missed from work and loss of wages. Retelling their story can be traumatizing. Domestic violence victims often become discouraged due to the lengthy processes.
- A notable trend in the Commonwealth Attorney's office is their willingness to honor the victim's wish not to testify against the abuser. A plea agreement is offered to the defense with a specific amount of jail time attached, should the good behavior clause be violated. Some victims of domestic violence find this judicial process less traumatic.



- There was a 75% increase of women who reported that they had been strangled by their intimate partner. They also reported the strangulation was so intense they passed out. There was an increase in reports that children witnessed the strangulation as well.
- There was a 31% increase in the number of children in shelter ages infant to 5 years old as compared to the same time period last year.
- There was an increase in the number of women seeking shelter who were in their third trimester of pregnancy.
- Rachel Figura is the new judge in Page County's Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, the first female to serve in that capacity.

**Choices, Council on Domestic Violence for Page County, Inc. partners with:**

- Virginia Domestic and Sexual Violence Action Alliance (VDSVAA)
- Page Alliance for Community Action (PACA)
- SALT (Seniors and Law Enforcement Together)/TRIAD
- Page County Community Response Team (CRT/SART)
- Homeless Advocacy Network
- Northern Shenandoah Valley Continuum of Care (CoC)
- Page County Public Schools
- United Way of Northern Shenandoah Valley
- Local law enforcement agencies
- Commonwealth Attorney's Office
- Page County Victim Witness Program
- Career Support Systems
- Strength in Peers
- Page One

# GRANTS AND MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS

## July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020

### Federal/State/Private Grants

#### Department of Housing and Community Development

- Virginia Housing Services Program (RR) \$72,807.00

#### Department of Criminal Justice Services

- V-STOP \$27,659.00
- Victim Services Grant Program (VOCA) \$389,069.00
- One-time VSGP grant for building maintenance \$31,000.00
- Sexual Assault Services Program \$9,491.00  
(ended 12/30/2019)

#### Other

- Virginia Department of Social Services \$150,000.00
- Warren & Katherine Coopersmith Foundation \$20,000.00
- Andersen Foundation Grant \$7,000.00

#### Local Government

- County of Page \$5,000.00
- Town of Shenandoah \$500.00

#### Local Contributions

- Businesses \$850.00
- Churches \$9,005.00
- Fundraisers \$17,735.00
- Individual Donors \$42,211.00
- Organizations \$4,116.00

***Our thanks to the many people and organizations which have provided funds to help make our services in our community possible!***

*For a detailed FY '20 Financial Report please contact the Executive Director.*

## Services Provided By Choices

**24 Hour Hotline/Support Line** – Persons in need can call any time to speak with a trained volunteer or staff member.

**Emergency Shelter** – Safe housing provided to victims and children in the Luray shelter.

**Crisis Intervention & Safety Planning** – Caring staff and volunteers are available to discuss the problems faced, provide information and referrals, and assist with services.

**Individual Peer Counseling** – Support and education to victims of domestic and sexual violence.

**Adult Support Groups** – Provide information and peer support and encourage self-esteem for victims of domestic and sexual violence. And, January 2020, the Healing Trauma group began.

**Children's Support/Education Groups** – Provides education and peer support for children in families dealing with domestic and sexual violence. Provides children with an outlet for their feelings outside of a family setting.

**Children's Services Coordination** – Children and adolescents are assessed and services coordinated with the parent and community programs. Education provided to parents in parenting skills and good parenting is encouraged

**Legal Advocacy** – Trained court advocates lend support to victims by explaining legal proceedings and accompanying them to court.

**Education/Community Outreach** – Provide education and outreach into the community. This includes a comprehensive program in Page County Schools.

**Community Education and Awareness** – Provide training and education to community groups and para-professionals about the dynamics of domestic and sexual violence and solutions to the problem of family violence in our community.

**Community Response Team** – Representatives from most service agencies in the community meet at least 4 times per year to discuss concerns and issues surrounding domestic and sexual violence. The CRT helps to promote good will and good working relationships between all community agencies who participate.

**Emergency Transportation** – Can be provided for the safety of victims and children. Safety of all involved, including staff, are considered with these services

**Information and Referral** – Provide information to clients and will refer them to other community groups or agencies that are most appropriate to the needs of the person.



## Board of Directors

### Officers

- Chairperson: Eleanor Ames
- Vice-Chairperson: Cathy Weaver
- Treasurer: Brian K. Plum
- Secretary: Gena Comer (Same person as Gena Cook - restored maiden name)

### Members

- Jerry Biller
- Bow Cook, through 12/31/19
- Audre H. Scott King, beginning 1/1/20
- John Leiting, through 10/19
- Stephanie Lillard, beginning 1/1/20
- Mary Menefee, ended her nine years of service on 12/31/19
- Caleb Routhier
- Katherine Spain
- Rev. Cathy Tibbetts

### Staff

Debra M. Dart	Executive Director (1997)
Robin Stevens	Services Coordinator (1997)
Lindy Swinson	Court Advocate (2003)
Tina Knupp	Sexual Assault Services Advocate (2003)
Michelle McClelland	Children's Services Coordinator until 2/13/20
Carrie Comer	Children's Services Coordinator starting 3/2/20
Jacalyn Lee	Housing Services Coordinator (2018)
Tracey Fox	Community/Volunteer Outreach Coor. until 2/15/20
Rebecca Frasier	Community/Vol. Outreach Coor., PT, starting 5/1/20
Barb Stewart	Media Outreach Coordinator, PT, through 6/30/20 (2014)
Felicia Housden	<u>NEW</u> Prevention Coordinator/Advocate, starting 2/1/20
Jennifer Mayhew	Shelter Manager (2006)
Sarah Meaney	Shelter Manager (2016)
Mary Rothgeb	Shelter Manager (2006)
Felicia Housden	Shelter Manager, PT, through 1/31/20 (2019)
Rebecca Frasier	Shelter Manager, PT, 3/1 – 4/30/20 (2020)

## **Staff Positions**

### **Executive Director**

Manages all programs, services and administrative functions. Develops, tracks and reconciles all budgetary and fiscal matters, including grants. Directly supervises all but the shelter managers.

### **Services Coordinator**

Provides direct services to clients: goal planning, information and referral, and assists with problem solving. Provides crisis intervention, support and advocacy. Supervises shelter managers. Trains some volunteers. Assists with public awareness and education.

### **Court Advocate**

Provides information on court proceedings, accompaniment to court and works with clients to help determine the most appropriate legal action. Aids in the prosecution of family violence and sexual assault cases by providing victim assistance.

### **Sexual Assault Services Advocate**

Provides information on court proceedings, provides medical and court accompaniment. Works with victims to help determine appropriate legal action. Facilitates support group for sexual assault victims. Aids in prosecution of sexual violence cases by providing victim assistance.

### **Shelter Managers**

Ensure the shelter is safe, clean, and stocked. Conduct house meetings. Oversee the shelter nights and weekends. Provide crisis intervention, emotional support and advocacy to victims of sexual assault and domestic violence.

### **Children's Services Coordinator**

Provides direct services to children and teens who are victims of domestic violence or sexual assault. Provides information and education to parents who are currently in shelter. Provides education and outreach to the community about the dynamics of domestic violence and sexual assault. Facilitates a children's support group once a week.

### **Housing Services Coordinator**

Works with shelter residents and landlords to find and keep affordable housing through the DHCD Rapid Rehousing Program. Manages cases and supports clients in housing in the community.

### **Community/Volunteer Outreach Coordinator**

Coordinates community education, prevention, and outreach programs. Coordinates volunteer program.

**Media Outreach Coordinator** PT. Focuses on media outreach in community. **Ended 6/30/20.**

### **Prevention Coordinator/Advocate** NEW 2/1/20

Coordinates the Prevention Program. Serves as victim advocate and facilitates Trauma Support Group.

## Early History and Work of Choices, Council on Domestic Violence for Page County, Inc.



**Founded in 1986** by a small group of women concerned about the high incidence of in-home violence in Page County, Choices was truly a grass roots effort to help victims. All persons involved were volunteers and many opened their homes to provide refuge and support to women and children who survived violence.

This group also recognized the need for other services, such as court advocacy, information and referral, transportation, public education, and awareness. They sought grants and other funds that would help support services, and over the next ten years were successful in not only continuing to provide many services, but also funded some staff and other expenses. A part-time director, court advocate, and services coordinator were hired and the list of caring volunteers grew.

As public awareness increased, so did the number of people - many with children - requesting services. In early 1997, a building was located which would provide space for the first emergency shelter in Page County, along with room for office space for staff. This building, located at 216 West Main Street in Luray, was purchased with financial support from Virginia Department of Social Services and other smaller grantors. After extensive renovations, the shelter opened in September of 1997 and was at full capacity within days of opening. The need for temporary shelter for women and children in Page County was very apparent.

In August of 1998, a fire broke out in the shelter and all but gutted the interior of the building on both floors. Almost everything inside was destroyed, including files and computers. Work began quickly to renovate the building, with assistance from many sources, including insurance, private foundation grants, Department of Housing and Community Development and local support. With structural changes making better use of space, a brighter and safer shelter and offices re-opened in April of 1999.

Choices has come a long way since 1986 and has been successful in providing many services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. But without the determination, hard work, and caring of the people who first saw a need and wanted to help, Choices may never have been. The Choices staff, board and volunteers are grateful to those who care and want to make a difference in the lives of many individuals in Page County.

*Peace on Earth Begins at Home*