

## [EXTERNAL]Victims

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Subject	[EXTERNAL]Victims
Link to Outlook Item	<a href="#">Click here</a>
From	<a href="#">Deanne Gerdes</a>
To	<a href="#">Doug Hewett</a>
Cc	<a href="#">Mario Benavente</a> ; <a href="#">Kemberle Braden</a>
Sent	5/22/2023, 8:50:27 AM

Good morning Mr. Hewett,

I want to follow up with a meeting I had with Councilman Benavente. As you know, we started providing domestic violence (DV) services a few years ago. Let me share the background of how that happened. In the 70's Cape Fear Valley Health System and the Fayetteville Police Department realized that there was a lack of services for victims of sexual violence. That is when our organization started. Also, in the 70's DV services were set up through the department of social services. For decades, we provided services to only victims of sexual violence. But as we all know, often sexual and domestic violence go hand-in-hand. At no fault of DSS, often victims would not want to reach out to DSS and go into the "system" for fear that their children would be taken away because of violence in the home. In 2019, then Judge Robert Stiehl, who was the head of our DV task force team said that the state of North Carolina was bringing e-filing of DVPO's throughout the state. He asked if there was an agency that would be willing to provide e-filing services to victims. The concept was so that the DVPO's were done outside of the courthouse in order for victims to receive advocacy, support, and resources. For whatever reason DSS decided not to be involved. We thought it was so important for the community to provide the services that we agreed to take it on. Victims are told about our services in a variety of different ways, through law enforcement, the magistrates office, or other collaborative agencies. Victims come into our office, which is a warm and supportive atmosphere, where they can bring their children, friends, other family members, fill out the paperwork for a DVPO and video chat with a judge. We also do safety planning with them which can be very intense, we provide resources, to include shelter. We ask if they need medical treatment, if they would like to file a police report, and depending on their circumstances, a host of other needs we address. We also offer to have an advocate go with them for their court date, which is typically 10 days after they leave our office. The judicial system can be very scary, confusing, overwhelming and an intimidating place.

In February of this year Chief Braden asked us to help further address the domestic violence issues we are having in our community. Chief Braden asked us to make calls to all the people that Fayetteville Police Dept receives calls for services from. It is our hope that by making these calls we can inform victims of resources available to them to 'help break the cycle'. Although officers do have information with them at the time that they respond, it can be an intense, traumatic, chaotic situation for victims and they often do not comprehend services available. Which is why he asked us to make follow-up calls. We receive a list on Monday and Thursday. We have committed to make follow up calls no later than 24 hours after we received the list. We have had much success. Victims have come to our office to receive help, we have e-filed DVPO's with them. Oftentimes when victims feel that they're in a safe place they tend to tell their story. On multiple, multiple occasions we have called FPD for a detective to be assigned to look into specific cases, because when people feel that they are safer, and that there's help available, they feel more confident in telling their story to law enforcement and ask for help.

Cumberland County has one DV shelter that is run by DSS. It has eight beds. Not nearly enough. They often do not have availability when we call. So, then we're stuck. We do call surrounding counties to see if they have availability. But if the victim has children, it is prohibitive to leave the county and be so far away and get the children back-and-forth from school, to get back-and-forth from work, so more often than not victims have no other choice than to go back to the home or the violence happened.

Domestic violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking is very complex with layers and layers of issues and problems that we have to help them overcome. But if we cannot provide basic services such as a roof over their head, then we cannot expect them to be able to leave a violent situation, and so the numbers will continue to grow

Since June of 2019, we have completed 649 Domestic Violence Protective Orders.

Since 6 March 2023, we have completed 516 calls to victims referred to us by the Fayetteville Police Department.

Since June of 2019, we have provided services to almost 1,000 victims of sexual violence.

All of our services are free and available to any man, woman or child.

Rape Crisis of Cumberland County is asking for financial assistance for paying for a victim advocate to provide services to victims.

Rape Crisis of Cumberland County is also requesting, much like the vouchers given to our homeless population that vouchers be given to victims of violence in Fayetteville.

I am always available to answer any questions you may have.

Deanne

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