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Diversity & Human Rights

focus

April: Sexual Assault Awareness Month

The Gift of Democracy, Freedom and Voice

By Jennifer Mayer-Glenn,
newly elected Chair, Salt Lake City Human Rights Commission

Salt Lake City is becoming a wonderfully diverse place to live. The Salt Lake City School District reported in December 2008 that 56 percent of its students are ethnic minorities; a large portion of these students are Hispanic. The 2000 Census indicates Salt Lake City is 21 percent ethnically diverse, although most agree that number has increased significantly. We are one of 30 metropolitan areas in the nation that resettle refugees coming from countries such as Sudan, Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Liberia and Bosnia. As our ethnic communities continue to diversify, so do our religious communities. We are becoming a city of many vibrant cultures, languages, perspectives and ways of understanding the world. We also maintain a tradition of American Indian art, culture and history as well as our pioneer heritage and spirit.

However, in spite of this richness and opportunity, we continue to face incidents of racism, able-ism, faithism, heterosexism and other “isms”.

The Salt Lake City Human Rights Commission recently facilitated the Dialogue on Discrimination Series. We heard from hundreds of Salt Lake City residents. Many acknowledged their own place of power in our society. Many made recommendations to help create equity in our community. Others informed us about their experiences here in Salt Lake related to discrimination. Some reported overt discrimination while others informed us of institutional discrimination that often happens in spite of the best of intentions. Unfortunately, it is easy to make these mistakes. A few stories of discrimination that we heard include:

- A hearing impaired man went to a public theater but was unable to hear the movie because there were no accommodations for him.
- A family was living in a rental property without a working stove and oven for three months. The property owner refused to replace it “because he said that [we] couldn’t speak English”.
- A man was evicted from his rental home when the homeowner learned that he was gay.

Most of us live in safety and with



dignity. However, many among us do not. We all have a responsibility to our community. It is time to notice the unnoticed and hear the silenced. It is time to see the unseen and stand up for what is right. We have been given a gift; the gift of democracy, freedom and voice. We have another gift, the gift of diversity; which includes people of many colors, cultures, languages and perspectives. Let’s commit to uphold, promote and protect the human rights of every individual.

We extend a special welcome to new Human Rights Commissioner Rebecca Hall.

Burying the Myths about Sexual Violence

By Misty McIntyre, Rape Recovery Center

*"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."
-Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 3*



The creation of myths is an inherent feature of every society. They are stories and beliefs that are created to help make sense of the world and diminish fear in the face of the unknown. However, modern myths go beyond creating an understanding of the world. Myths are also used as moral meters; methods of instructing our children on how to behave and interact. From myths we create rules about how we should abide to keep ourselves safe from harm. One topic in our culture that is overshadowed and kept silent by myth is sexual violence.

These myths about sexual violence are present in our every day lives. Different forms of media reinforce a belief that violence is sexy or that it does not happen to good people. Violence is often dressed as love. In the early 1980s many people watched one of the biggest daytime television events in history, the marriage of Luke and Laura on "General Hospital." A marriage born of a relationship that began when Luke raped Laura in an alley. After the rape there was an outpouring of sympathy for the broken boy within the man and this caused a legitimization of his power because in raping Laura he won her love. His violence was forgiven as mere passion for this good girl. What myths does this reinforce about sexual violence in our culture?

More recently we have seen

violence disguised as passion in modern teen literature. In the Twilight series by Stephanie Meyer, we see a vampire version of Beauty and the Beast. Edward, the moody predatory vampire, stalks the main character, Bella, and constantly reminds her that he is a slave to his violent instincts; that he cannot ensure her safety, due in part to the overwhelming passion he has for her. Bella, being good, saves Edward from his fated acts of violence and they live happily ever after. No matter the presentation of the attacker or the perceived goodness of the victim, sexual violence is not about passion, it is about power.

The most dangerous part of these myths is that they create a barrier to understanding sexual violence. Just in our own community, statistics on the prevalence of sexual violence are staggering. In Utah one in three women will experience sexual violence in their lifetime. Sexual violence includes many forms of inappropriate behaviors including stalking, voyeurism, unwanted touching, molestation, dating violence, sexual harassment, human trafficking, sexual exploitation, ritual abuse, statutory rape, child sexual abuse, alcohol or drug facilitated sexual assault, incest, sodomy, marital or partner rape and

rape. According to the FBI, one in eight women will be raped in her lifetime. By the time they turn 18, one of every seven boys and one of every four girls will be sexually assaulted.

Another myth we hold is that sexual violence is committed by strangers in dark alleys, abandoned buildings or crime-ridden neighborhoods. The truth is six out of 10 sexual assaults occur in the homes of the victims, family members or friends and more than half occur within one mile of the victim's home or the attacker's home. Thirty-three percent of sexual assaults take place during the daytime, with less than half, 43 percent, of all sexual assaults occurring at night, between the hours of 6 pm and midnight.

One of our most powerful myths is that sexual assault is committed by strangers. The truth is 90 percent of sexual violence occurs at the hands of someone who is known to the victim, someone that he or she trusts. Victims experience sexual violence through the actions of their spouses, dating partners, co-workers, family or friends. Children are sexually abused by a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle or sibling. Women's bodies are violated as acts of war. Perpetrators are already in our lives and

have all the access they need. Our perpetuation of these myths leaves our communities vulnerable to sexual violence. No age, race, ethnicity, income level, sexual orientation, religious practice, occupation, ability or gender is free of the threat of sexual violence. There are men, women, teens and children in every community who are suffering from its painful effects. Cutting these myths out of the fabric of our culture is the first step in preventing future violence. Through prevention education we have an opportunity to create an awareness of the prevalence, replace these myths with truths and provide support for individuals with a need to access services and begin healing. Most importantly, challenging these myths and replacing them with truth is the first step in abolishing sexual violence from our lives.

The Rape Recovery Center and the Utah Coalition Against Sexual Assault (UCASA) provide prevention education and outreach for our community through presentations, workshops and trainings for all age groups. The Rape Recovery Center also provides therapy, advocacy, hospital response and a 24-hour crisis line to assist individuals whose lives have been impacted by sexual violence. For more information contact the Rape Recovery Center on the 24-hour crisis line at 801-467-7273 or online at www.raperecoverycenter.org or www.ucasa.org.

April SAAM Events

Sexual Assault Awareness Month

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. You may check local listing of events at these websites.

April 2

Dialogue on Human Right and Equity: Sexual Violence Prevention
12 noon
On-air at KUER
Live at the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute, OSH Building
www.hinckley.utah.edu

April 7

Expressions of Healing
6:30-8:30 p.m.
Rape Recovery Center
www.raperecoverycenter.org

April 8

SAAM Day of Action
Walk-a-Mile-in-Her-Shoes
9:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Utah State University

April 24th and 25th

Tara Workshop
Registration required
utahtara@gmail.com

April 25

Tooele Run Against Violence 5K
9:00am
www.dvsava.org

April 26

21 Praises of Tara Dance
4:00 p.m.
Pioneer Craft House
Utahtara@gmail.com

April 29

SAAM Awards Reception
4:30 p.m.
Utah Capitol

**The truth is 90
percent of sexual
violence occurs at the
hands of someone
who is known to the
victim, someone that
he or she trusts.**

Our efforts will advance a society where sexual violence is not tolerated



Prevent Sexual Violence in Our Workplace