

## **What happens when a victim calls Victim Services?**

*By Felicia Robinson of Family Services Incorporated in Blair County*

There are many thoughts that may run through the mind of a survivor of sexual abuse. They could be confused, angry, or scared after the traumatic experience. They may not know what to do or where to go for help. But rape crisis centers throughout the Commonwealth are available to help with counseling and accompaniment to the hospital and/or police.

The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) provides training and information to advocates who work for victim services and rape crisis centers throughout Pennsylvania to assist victims of crime. Our advocates are trained to assist victims of all crimes, but especially sexual assault. From the moment you or a loved one call us, to when he or she feels confident and secure that they no longer need our services, our advocates are trained to assist in any way they may need.

Our work begins the moment a phone call to victim services is placed. Our advocates listen and assess the situation and help to make a safety plan. Safety is our number one concern. Our advocates always defer to the victim regarding what makes them feel safe, what their goals are, and how they would like to proceed from the initial call. Our advocates will discuss their rights which include but are not limited to, their right to services, compensation, and to be notified when the offender is arrested or of any changes like a release, and more.

Confidentiality is our priority and we will not release any information pertaining to those we speak with, except in cases of mandated reporting. In these situations, we are bound by law to report child abuse and neglect in order to protect children. In other situations, we must have an informed release from those we serve in order to share information with others. Our advocates are bound by law to keep information confidential. There is no need to worry that the information shared will become public or shared with other agencies. Even after services are completed, information and files will be kept confidential and cannot be shared without a signed informed release from the person who received the services. An advocate will talk in detail about confidentiality and the limitations during our first meeting.

Our services are free of charge. Our advocates are trained to provide a wide range of services that include case management, crime victim compensation, hotline counseling, crisis counseling, individual and group counseling, follow-up contact, information and referrals, medical advocacy and accompaniment, legal advocacy and accompaniment, therapy, and transportation. Many of these services can be extended to your non-offending significant others and children.

Our goal is to assist and help with any needs one may have and answer any questions through this process. Safety and peace of mind are our priorities. Our advocates are here for you and are on your team.