THE CENTER FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES

PREVENT ABUSE • PROMOTE RESPECT • STRENGTHEN LIVES

The Power of One Trusted Adult

At the Center for Safer Communities, prevention is about more than teaching young people how to recognize healthy relationships. It's also about ensuring that the adults in their lives have the skills and confidence to support them when they need it most.

During the 2025–2026 school year, our Prevention Education team partnered with three educational organizations (a public high school, a private high school, and a residential program) to deliver the Make It Your Mission professional development program. The training focused on a simple but powerful idea: every young person deserves at least one trusted adult.

For years, our prevention educators have encouraged students to identify trusted adults in their lives. This training strengthened that work by helping the adults around them understand what that role looks like. The goal is to build relationships without parenting, to create supportive, consistent connections while maintaining healthy boundaries and a non-judgmental approach.

Importantly, the training was not limited to teachers. Everyone participated, including administrators, office staff, custodians, bus drivers, and other school personnel. Every interaction a student has throughout the day matters, and every adult has the potential to make a positive impact.

The program also recognized that different settings require different approaches. The needs of a student in a residential program may differ from those of a student in a traditional high school setting, but the foundation remains the same: creating environments where young people feel seen, respected, and supported.

One of the most encouraging outcomes was the level of engagement among participants. School leaders made the work a priority, with a shared commitment to empowering students and helping them move toward greater independence. Staff reflected on the ways they support students through everyday actions: keeping their word, listening without judgment, checking in regularly, and following through on commitments.



Above: Prevention Educators Kerry Rochford Hague and Ray DePaola, who led the Make It Your Mission training sessions.

A key takeaway was understanding the progression that happens when young people experience consistent support. First, they feel safe and supported. Over time, that support builds trust. Eventually, trust creates the foundation for self-advocacy, resilience, and independence—the "you do" phase where students feel empowered to make decisions, solve problems, and seek help when needed.

At the Center for Safer Communities, we know that preventing violence and promoting healthy relationships requires a community-wide effort. By investing in the adults who interact with young people every day, we help create environments where students can thrive, not only academically, but socially and emotionally as well.

If you know of a school or another Sullivan County organization that would like to receive this training, please reach out to prevention@cscnh.org.



Left: Ray speaks with staff about the complexities of building healthy, lasting relationships with students through the One Trusted Adult model.

Giving Back to Sullivan County

At the Center for Safer Communities, service doesn't end when we leave the office. As part of our commitment to strengthening the communities we serve, each staff member receives up to eight hours of paid volunteer time annually to support local organizations and causes that matter to them.

This past winter, several staff members spent their volunteer hours at the Claremont Soup Kitchen, working together to support neighbors facing food insecurity. Our team helped prepare meals, serve community members, and organize food storage areas to ensure the kitchen could continue operating efficiently. It was a meaningful opportunity to connect with community members in a different setting and support an organization that provides an essential service to many local families.

One of our staff members volunteers with Got Lunch, Newport, an all-volunteer organization that helps ensure children have access to nutritious food when school is not in session. The program serves families whose children receive free and reduced-price meals during the school year, delivering food during school vacations and every other week throughout the summer. Their work helps bridge a critical gap for families when school meal programs are unavailable.



Prevention Educator and Volunteer Coordinator, Jen Gallagher, helps to break down a gigantic squash donated to the Claremont Soup Kitchen by a community member, later used to make a delicious soup!

These volunteer experiences reflect a value that is central to our mission: building safer, healthier communities requires all of us working together. Every day, our staff support survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence, stalking, and related abuse, but we also recognize that community well-being is shaped by many interconnected factors, including access to food, housing, healthcare, education, and social support. By volunteering with organizations that address these needs, our staff deepen their connections to the community and gain a broader understanding of the challenges and strengths that exist throughout Sullivan County.

We are proud of our staff for giving their time and talents to causes that make Sullivan County a stronger, more caring place for everyone. Their volunteer efforts embody the same compassion, commitment, and spirit of service that guide our work each day. These acts of care help create the kind of community we all want to live in.

A Note from the Director

There are moments in this work when the connections we share as a community become impossible to ignore. These are when the threads of care, commitment, and mutual support weave themselves into something visible and real. This newsletter is full of those moments.

In a time when the needs of our community continue to grow and the funding landscape is ever-changing, what sustains and strengthens us goes far beyond any budget line. It is people. It is the quiet acts of generosity that often go unseen: the phone call answered, the meal shared, the hand extended, the decision to show up when it matters most.

Again and again, we are reminded that lasting change is not built by any one person or organization alone. It is built through relationships, through trust, and through countless individuals choosing compassion over indifference and hope over despair.

It is Crystal Ouellette, who found her way through extraordinary circumstances, drew on tremendous reserves of courage and resilience, and now sits beside survivors as a Direct Service Advocate. Her journey is a testament to what becomes possible when a community shows up with open arms.

It is the participants at Steppin' Up to End Violence who wrote on paper shoes their reasons for showing up, whether for a sister, a mother, a friend, or themselves. Some wrote from their own lived experience as survivors. Others wrote from the love and solidarity of a community that refuses to look away. Together, they reminded us that this work is deeply, inescapably personal for so many.

It is a family receiving a box of Vermont strawberries through our partnership with Willing Hands, a small but powerful reminder that dignity and connection are as nourishing as the food itself. It is our staff living out our organizational values by volunteering in the broader community because we know that the wellbeing of our neighbors is inseparable from our mission. It is bus drivers and custodians attending a training because they understand that a young person's sense of safety doesn't stop at the classroom door. It is every person who chooses to learn, to listen, and to take action, recognizing that creating safer communities is not someone else's responsibility, but something we all build together, one relationship and one act of care at a time.

These are not small things. In uncertain times, they are everything.

As you read the stories in these pages, we hope you see yourself reflected in them. Whether you have volunteered, donated, partnered with us, advocated for a neighbor, or simply chosen kindness in a difficult moment, you are part of this larger story. The ripple effects of your compassion reach farther than you may ever know.

We are grateful, more than we can say, for every donor, volunteer, partner organization, and community member who stands with us. You make this work possible. More than that, you make it meaningful.

With deep appreciation,

Pascale



From Survivor to Advocate: Crystal's Story

One day, my son came to me and asked me why I am with someone who is mean to me and doesn't care about my safety. That is when I knew, I needed to get out. I didn't know how I got so deeply into it or how I allowed myself to stay. That's when I went to The Center for Safer Communities (then known as Turning Points Network). They listened and reassured me that it was not my fault, that it was the vicious cycle of abuse.

They really opened my eyes to what abuse looks like, even when I thought I knew. Being in the center of that cycle is so blinding. The abuse wheel is so accurate. I was pregnant, homeless, and alone with my other child to take care of. They offered me shelter, a safe place to stay with my children. I turned it down because I felt like I wasn't rightfully entitled to that. He had control over the bank account and completely drained the account.

They gave me a gas card and a card for food. I had nothing and having nothing while also having children is such a shattering position to be in. He had control over my phone and shut it off; they got me a phone and activated it. They helped me fill out applications to DHHS and apartments. I was approved for an apartment and they assisted me with first month's rent and a sliding payment plan so that I could gradually work myself up to being able to pay the rent in full by myself. I would have never been able to jump head first into paying rent, let alone a security deposit to go with it. They helped me with understanding domestic violence protection orders and how to put my abuse into words, since my mind felt so scrambled. An advocate was with me during the hearing, and I was so scared because he had an attorney and I didn't. The protection order was granted. They changed the way I viewed my life. In the best way. I gained so much strength and independence with the help they had given me.

Then, I got a sob story of wanting to be a family and do better for my family. That is something I have always cared deeply about. Yet again, abuse started but this time I saw it. I stood in my own place, and I told him to leave. It wasn't as life-shattering as it was the first time. However, I was left with no help with the children and constantly worried about him showing up. He did, and he damaged a vehicle I was in. I called the police and they screened me for LAP (lethality assessment protocol) and told me that it was a high lethality situation.



I went back to Safer Communities, so ashamed of myself and worried I would be judged. But that's not what happened. They welcomed me and explained to me that it is a normal part of the process, and it typically takes on average 7 times to officially leave. They gave me guidance and told me more ways that they can help support me staying away and being independent. I started college, they helped me with a computer, childcare costs and gas to be able to attend school. They put my children and I down for Christmas gifts, which was so amazing because I was struggling with getting back out of the financial hole he put me in again. They helped me open a bank account in my own name, that I still have to this day. They pointed me in the right direction for clothing and materials that helped us get through the winter. They were always there with open arms and welcome smiles, helping me understand that what happened to me wasn't my fault.

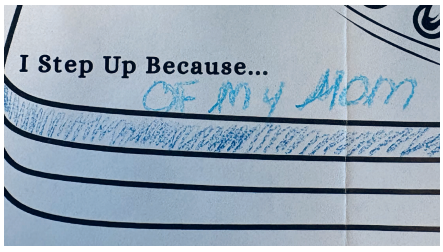
When I say they changed my life, I mean it. I am stronger and I believe in myself. I found that I am worth more. I wish I could express my gratitude in words to match the way I feel. They helped me break my generational curse and guided me to find myself again. I still am taking steps in my healing journey and the most recent is that I have proudly been adopted.

I am a product of abuse. I am a survivor. Now here I am, Crystal Ouellette, a Direct Service Advocate for the place that helped me, in a position I only dreamed about being in. I came full circle and now I can help people like me every day.

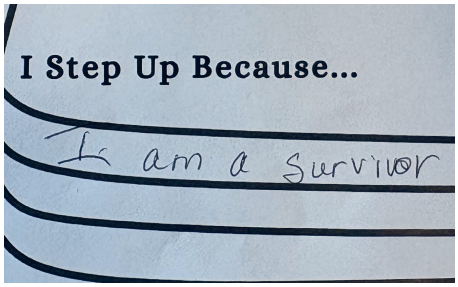
Why We Step Up

Even months after the 20th Annual Steppin' Up to End Violence, we continue to be inspired by the incredible community that came together in support of survivors and violence prevention.

This year, participants were invited to write on paper "shoes" and share why they Step Up. Their responses served as powerful reminders of the many reasons people join this movement—and the many lives touched by violence. Some stepped up because they are survivors themselves. Others walked in honor of loved ones: a sister who survived domestic violence, a mother, or a friend who lost his son to violence.



Reading the reasons people step up was both moving and inspiring for all of us at the Center for Safer Communities. Why do you Step Up with us?



Many shared a commitment to creating a safer future, writing messages such as, "There is no place in NH for domestic violence," and "This service is soooo needed." One participant summed up a sentiment shared by many: "This is a personal subject for me. It is important to bring awareness." Together, these messages tell a larger story. Violence affects our neighbors, friends, families, and communities. It is deeply personal, but it is also something we can address collectively through support, education, advocacy, and action.

Every step taken on May 2 represented hope, courage, and a commitment to a future free from violence. Thank you to everyone who stepped up and for reminding us why this work matters.

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What a Pint of Strawberries Can Mean



When a family receives a weekly food box through our partnership with Willing Hands, they're getting more than fresh food. They're receiving nourishment, dignity, and a reminder that their community cares.

One recent delivery included a surprise: fresh Vermont strawberries and small jars of specialty jam. For many of us, strawberries are an ordinary summer treat. But for families facing financial hardship or rebuilding their lives after experiencing violence, a box of locally grown berries can mean something much more. It can mean the joy of sharing a special snack with a child, the comfort of having fresh, healthy food on the table, and the simple pleasure of enjoying something that feels like a gift rather than a necessity.

Each week, Willing Hands provides fresh food recovered from local farms, grocery stores, restaurants, and wholesalers. Our Volunteer Coordinator, Jen, works closely with our Direct Services team to identify participants who could benefit from a food box and delivers them directly to families and shelter residents.

These deliveries help fill an important gap. While local food pantries and community meals provide valuable support, fresh produce and nutritious foods can be difficult to access or afford. Families often look forward to their boxes, eager to discover what seasonal fruits, vegetables, baked goods, or special treats might be included that week.

Staff have described this partnership as life-changing. Beyond addressing food insecurity, it offers dignity, choice, and a sense of connection. Many of the foods come from farms just down the road, linking families to the community around them.

Sometimes, the impact of a partnership can't be measured only in pounds of food delivered. Sometimes it can be found in a box of strawberries, a jar of jam, and the smile they bring to a family's face.