



JENNIFER'S STORY

Helping other victims of sexual assault

Jennifer is a survivor of sexual assault. She was raped by her boyfriend and two of his friends.

After the horrific attack, a friend took Jennifer to the local hospital, and the hospital contacted a YWCA on-call advocate for support. The advocate suggested they send Jennifer to the YWCA Sexual Assault Forensic Examination (SAFE) Center for a sexual assault exam. Upon arrival, Jennifer was withdrawn, afraid, and unsure what was going to happen to her there. Sensing this, the YWCA advocate took time to explain how exams are conducted, how evidence is collected and documented, and what her options were for police reporting. Because the advocate spent this time with Jennifer, she felt more comfortable about the testing and her options.

Eventually Jennifer felt comfortable enough to reveal she lived with her boyfriend and did

not feel safe there. She did not want to return to her current, unsafe living conditions, but she felt she did not have any other options.

The victim advocate contacted YWCA's SafeHouse shelter. They made sure Jennifer did not have to go back to where she had been living; she was able to stay at SafeHouse for 45 days. After a needs assessment was performed, residential advocates assisted Jennifer with finding housing and a job. They also provided Jennifer with regularly scheduled goal planning sessions. Because of the services she received through the YWCA, Jennifer was able to find a safe place to live with assistance from our Housing Advocate. She is currently working two jobs and is enrolled in college to become a social worker. Just like the advocate who helped Jennifer when she felt scared and alone, she wants to be able to help others.

TONYA'S STORY

New knowledge, support, and access to resources have been life-changing

Tonya did not understand why friends continually told her that her boyfriend was abusive; she was confused when they repeatedly encouraged her to contact the YWCA of Greater Flint. He was never physically abusive—he never hit her or the children.

Tonya always reasoned that no relationship was perfect and that hers was a typical relationship with ups and downs. After repeated urging from friends, she finally decided to reach out to the YWCA crisis line and was connected to an advocate who recommended she attend a group session. Tonya continued attending individual and group sessions and learned that domestic violence has many forms—not all are physical. She quickly realized she was being mentally and emotionally abused. Her boyfriend had been controlling, isolating, and manipulating her to stay in their relationship.

Tonya also discovered the devastating effects of domestic violence on children. In the past, she relied on her children to be her language translators, and often silenced herself to save her children the burden of "adult stuff". When her children began acting out in response to the abuse, she realized the effect it was having and that they needed help as well. The YWCA support services provided Tonya with an interpreter, so her voice could be heard without involving her children. They also taught her to use a phone app that could translate conversations.

The YWCA Greater Flint's partnership with Metro Community Development and the Rapid Re-housing Program helped Tonya secure a safe apartment for her family. Tonya also received assistance enrolling her children in school. In addition, community resources supported Tonya's own learning and self-discovery. With the help of the YWCA's vast support services and resources, Tonya was able to give her family a fresh start, where they felt safe and could begin healing.