

Hope Alliance

Williamson County's Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Response and Prevention Program helps victims of abuse



PHOTOS BY TODD WHITE

Why would former Major League Baseball pitcher Nolan Ryan and his wife, Ruth, and a constellation of family and friends spend days cooking, setting up tables, arranging centerpieces, making name tags, and packing gift bags when no

one is getting married or having a baby? If you know the Ryans, the answer is obvious. They're raising money for a worthy cause; this time the funds will help victims of domestic and sexual abuse.

Hope Alliance, the organization for which the Ryans and others donate their time and resources, is a 27-year-old Williamson County nonprofit that helps women, children, and, yes, male victims of abuse. Hope Alliance is also engaged in the work of education and prevention.

In 2009, according to the Texas Council on Family Violence, 196,713 family violence incidents occurred and over 12,000 adults and almost 16,000 children received shelter. In addition, 74 percent of all Texans report that they themselves, a family member and/or friend have experienced domestic violence.

HELP ON CALL

Hope Alliance volunteers and staff are available 24 hours a day, every day of the year—a critical and potentially life-saving advantage for victims and those afraid of becoming victims. They call with questions such as *What do I do next? Where can I live until I figure things out? How do I get my kids to school? What happens if I have to testify?* The volunteers and workers provide help during the victims' point of greatest need. "By helping victims, we are breaking the cycle of violence," said Patty Conner, Chief Executive Officer. "Not only are we saving lives now, we are also changing

the lives of future generations," she said.

Trained helpers screen callers and assist them in developing a plan of safety. They identify the most appropriate resources based upon the caller's situation. They also provide a certified sexual assault advocate to accompany victims to the hospital and court when necessary. Their aim is to help the victims wade through the emotional trauma, paperwork and legal protocol. They also assist victims to apply for Crime Victims' Compensation.

Just as important, Hope Alliance workers provide the comfort so urgently needed by frightened victims. Thousands of calls come in each year, and because of the workers' training, they know the words of affirmation and hope that victims desperately need to hear.

Hope Alliance can also provide emergency shelter. In these safe shelters, victims can receive counseling, safety planning, case management, tutoring, help with legal processes, and basic staples such as food and clothing. Hope Alliance also provides transitional housing, legal advocacy, counseling support groups, and prevention education.

Hope Alliance's mission is not only to help the victims of abuse, but also to prevent domestic and sexual violence from occurring in the first place. Hope Alliance does this by educating the public through presentations and training at local schools, law enforcement agencies, private organizations, and the community at ►

BY
ALICEA
JONES

"Hope Alliance is trying to help women survive, and I know a lot of those women have no place to go. The [Hope Alliance] people are so dedicated."

— Ruth Ryan

**Hope Alliance 24-Hour
Crisis Hotline:**
800-460 SAFE (7233)

**Texas Council on
Family Violence:**
www.tcfv.org
512-794-1133



Hope Alliance event at the Ryan House

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large. Some of the topics include sexual harassment, bullying, sexual assault risk reduction, and building healthy relationships. Hope Alliance also participates with other organizations, such as the Partners in Prevention Coalition, to collaborate and pool ideas and resources. "Survivors have a myriad of needs that we as a single agency could never fulfill. So it's critical that we develop partnerships that help survivors get those needs met," Patty Conner said.

THE BEGINNINGS

Started in 1984 as a rape crisis center, Hope Alliance expanded with an emergency shelter in 1990. The organization is now the only crisis center to provide comprehensive services across

1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime.

1 in 5 high school girls report being physically assaulted and/or sexually abused by a dating partner.

1 in 6 women and 1 in 33 men will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime.

– Hope Alliance

Williamson County, with outreach offices in Georgetown, Taylor, Cedar Park, and Hutto.

There was a time, in our not too distant past, when victims of abuse—domestic, date rape, and otherwise—suffered in silence. There were few places where a victim could get help or find refuge. In some cases, the victim continued to stay with the perpetrator because she felt she had no means of escape. Besides, victims of abuse sometimes feel responsible or guilty in some way and often suffer in silence.

Because of a family history of violence, some victims don't even know that abuse is unacceptable. "Tracey," a young woman whom Hope Alliance helped and who is now a volunteer, is such an example. Tracey said she did not know what abuse was and did not realize that what was happening to her was not okay. Tracey now knows what abuse is and is modeling for her children an example of what it means to survive and thrive."

Today the reality of abuse receives attention in the media and in our communities, resulting in more places to turn for help. Additionally, law enforcement entities have become more aware of the epidemic and are joining forces with local prevention organizations.

In 2002, the Texas Council on Family

**"I refuse to feel helpless anymore!
Today, as a volunteer at Hope Alliance,
I'm working toward a more peaceful
society where women and children
can live without the psychological and
physical pain of abuse."**

–Vivian Kirkbride, Hope Alliance Volunteer
and author of the book *Break Away*

Violence conducted a poll that found 84 percent of Texans believe they can personally do something about domestic violence. Although this survey is almost 10 years old, perhaps a more current and meaningful measurement is the actions people are putting behind their words by supporting organizations such as Hope Alliance.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

On Sunday, October 16, 2011, Hope Alliance will hold its fifth annual Women Fore! Hope Women's Golf Tournament at Cimarron Hills Golf and Country Club in Georgetown. Supporters can participate as a player (WFH is a women's-only tournament) or a sponsor. For those who want to get in on the event early, Ruth and Nolan Ryan, Title Sponsors, will host the pre-tournament "Safe At Home Dinner" on Saturday evening, October 15, 2011. To register online, visit the Hope Alliance Web site at <http://hopealliancetxt.org/golf.asp>. Or call 512-255-1212 x314. ■



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