“I AM SO MUCH MORE THAN WHAT I HAVE EXPERIENCED”

SURVIVOR STORIES

AVALON LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER

SURVIVORS STORIES I AM SO MUCH MORE THAN WHAT I HAVE EXPERIENCED

ART THERAPY MINDFULNESS THROUGH ART

HUMAN TRAFFICKING WHY PREVENTION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

FINANCIAL IMPACT 2019 & 2020

STATISTICS HOW COMMON IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

STAFF SPOTLIGHT BENITA ROBINSON
Hello Friends,

The end of 2021 marks another year of innovation and growth for the Avalon Healing Center. For going on 17 years (in January 2022!) our team has been working tirelessly to address the many disparities in services available to survivors of sexual violence.

In 2021 we revealed the Avalon Institute—a learning platform specifically focused on all issues related to sexual violence; worked to advance our new brand of being the Avalon Healing Center—and LOVE our new identity; and provided comprehensive services to almost 1,400 survivors — putting our total of survivors reached since opening our doors in 2006 to over 18,000!!

Avalon’s mission would not be successful without our incredible team of amazing & committed volunteers, courageous & talented staff, dedicated & brilliant Board of Directors and of course… YOU!!!

With community partners, donors, supporters and allies like you in this work, Avalon is able to drive the best practices of providing trauma-informed and empowerment-based services in the way that we do this. This year brought continued challenges in navigating a global pandemic, that almost two years in, has not seen the incidence of sexual assault and abuse skip a beat... almost to the contrary. The need for Avalon is greater than ever and we are honored to have you with us in this fight to end sexual violence.

The resilience that our patients and clients display on a day-in and day-out basis is simply awe inspiring. Thank you in advance for your unwavering support.

In closing, the Avalon Healing Center is about to embark on what will likely be, our biggest year yet… Stay tuned for details as we our new identity… YOU!!!

Sexual assault is something that is sadly very prevalent in our society today. As a student at Wayne State University I have met all different types of people each having their own unique story and experiences. Unfortunately, many of the people who I have met in my life are survivors of sexual assault.

Although this is a hard topic to talk about, there are three women who have shared their stories with me. Even more importantly, they share the steps they are taking to overcome the challenges they are faced with and different things they do to help make themselves feel better.

I AM NOT ALONE IN THIS AND I AM SO MUCH MORE THAN WHAT I HAVE EXPERIENCED.

My assault happened about six years ago and sadly it was caused by someone who I knew and was close with, my boyfriend at that time. When this event took place I was fifteen years old and I did not fully understand and comprehend what had happened to me. I was fighting thoughts of confusion for about a week because I was attacked by someone who said they loved me and cared about me. I was very uneducated at the time and I didn’t know if it would even be considered assault because we were dating. After the relationship ended I did not trust anyone; meeting new people was a challenge and would cause me to become very anxious. I would never walk or go anywhere by myself, I constantly had the thought, “if someone who said they love me and was close to me could do it, what was stopping other people.”

There were so many things about me that had changed and the way I went about my day and all the different thoughts that constantly went through my head. I would wake up in the middle of the night with nightmares reliving what had happened and every time I would see him or someone who resembled him I would immediately run away and hide, or even the way certain people would touch me, even very close friends would cause me to remember what happened. Some of the changes were very subtle while others were not, it was something that affected me every day until the day I decided to do something about it.

I was dealing with a pretty intense breakup. Me and him were on decent terms and we agreed that we should keep some distance between us. That however turned into him showing up on my campus every day. I seemed to keep some distance between us. That however turned into him showing up on my campus every day. I seemed like he was always in my face like he was stalking me or something. One night my friend had a hotel party and since we are all mutual friends he was there as well. The night progressed and we had a few drinks. Everyone was dancing and laughing and having a good time. The next thing that I remember. I was pushing and kicking him off me in front of everybody. I felt violated. I felt disrespected by him and everybody else. It probably took me about a year to get over what happened, gain closure, and regain my peace. I gained closure and regained my peace through writing.

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Although what happened to these survivors is awful, they found different ways to work through what has happened to them. Each survivor utilized a different method from therapy, to writing to reading others stories and looking at artwork. Everyone handles trauma differently and sometimes it may take a few years before someone decides to take action and that is okay. There is no clock that says you have to be ready to overcome your trauma, it is something you have to do on your own time. Although sexual assault is sadly very prevalent in our society today, there are different ways that survivors are working to overcome the trauma they have endured. As knowledge and treatment of sexual assault becomes more common, survivors gain more and more tools to recover, cope with, and move on from their trauma.
If someone asked me what my favorite aspect of my job is at Avalon Healing Center, I would have to say co-facilitating our Art Therapy group with my friend/co-worker SAKI. My background is in art – I grew up loving art class in school, spending hours on the carpet at home drawing and coloring with my 100 count box of crayons. My mother always encouraged me to create and I found art to always be a focal point in my life. Being a survivor of trauma, I unknowingly used it as a tool in my own healing journey. I would lose myself in art books and spending long hours at the surrounding art museums. When it came time for me to decide what degree to pursue in college, the decision was easy – Art History. Okay. So yes, I am not the curator I had hoped to be after I graduated from college. However, I discovered another passion and way for me to use some aspects of my degree, Art Therapy.

Over the past 3 years we have done several different projects. Here are some of our favorites:

- **Vision Board** your hopes, dreams, ideas, and things that represent you
- **Stress-away putty** made with lavender essential oils to promote relaxation
- **Calming jars** that are filled with glitter, then shaken and placed on a table. Watching the glitter slowly fall is meant to reduce anxiety and stress.
- **Fabric portraits** (fabric cut into shapes and arranged to create an image)
- **Button artwork** (Buttons arranged to create a 3D image)
- **Tassel bead necklaces**
- **Painting pots** for our Avalon Healing Center Grow and Glow Garden
- **Kintsugi** – the art of breaking pots and repairing them
- **Pressed flower art**
- **Painting self-portraits**

Art therapy can include a wide range of art materials and different processes. In our group we focus more on the process than necessarily completion. We allow clients to pick up where they left off on previous projects, depending on how they are inspired during the group session.

Some of the benefits of Art Therapy include:

- Allaying stress
- Reducing depression
- Managing anxiety
- Improving communication skills
- Building self-esteem
- Positive distraction
- Encouraging creative exploration
- Improving self-management

Art Therapy is a great alternative to individual counseling or as an additional tool. Clients who attend art therapy group often attend one on one counseling and it seems to provide a good balance. My favorite part of our group is the bonds our clients form with one another. We have had a dedicated group of clients coming to make art now for about 2 years. They are always so happy to be spending time together; listening to music, talking about life and creating art. It’s healing for the soul! If you are a survivor and interested in learning more about our Art Therapy group, please call: 313-964-9701.

Human trafficking, often discussed as modern-day slavery, is a massive global industry. The International Labor Organization estimates that $150 billion is generated annually through the forced labor of 21 million people–other estimates are as high as 40 million people. These numbers include both sex and labor trafficking. While sex trafficking tends to get more attention, and our focus at Avalon Healing Center is sexual assault, labor trafficking does often involve sexual assault as a means of control. I include these numbers to emphasize that all forms of trafficking are profit-generating businesses. Further, what makes a person vulnerable to sex trafficking and labor trafficking are similar, and that is especially true as we navigate a global pandemic.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 defines trafficking as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for commercial sex acts, or labor through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. In the case of sex trafficking a minor, force, fraud, and coercion do not need to be present–any minor performing a commercial sex act is considered a trafficking victim (22USC§7102). Trafficking experiences vary greatly, as there’s no one way that trafficking happens. However, all traffickers do actively seek out and exploit vulnerable people.

Often when discussing vulnerabilities to trafficking, the focus is on the individual. There certainly are person-level elements that can make one more vulnerable, like being young or some mental health diagnoses. However, one’s circumstances and community play an even bigger role. Poverty and lack of job opportunities, childhood trauma and abuse, limited social supports and resources–these all make a person more vulnerable to traffickers and are widespread across our communities.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 and the circumstances around it are creating even more vulnerabilities for folks, and research suggests that disease outbreaks can increase rates of trafficking. This isn’t altogether surprising, as outbreaks are associated with a breakdown of law and order, competition for resources, and diminished economic opportunities. Further, disease outbreaks cause death, disrupting families and sometimes leaving children orphaned. As Shannon reminded us, now is the time to be looking out for those in our communities who are vulnerable. Now is the time for trafficking prevention. For more information on human trafficking visit the Polaris Project website. If you think you or someone you know is being trafficked, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 888-373-7888 or text “BeFree” 233733.


**Meredith** is our Human Trafficking Program Coordinator. She earned her Masters in Social Work from the University of Michigan and has her limited license in social work to practice in Michigan. Meredith’s work is founded in critical intersectionality and focuses on addressing the issues women face in all of their complexity and urgency.

**Katie Smith** is the Director of Communications for the Avalon Healing Center. In her almost 10 years with Avalon, Katie has worn and continues to wear several different hats: overseeing marketing and social media, co-planning and visions events, managing office administration, volunteer coordinating, and community outreach. In addition she co-facilitates the art therapy program–which has been a great source of joy in her position. Katie is passionate about the arts and believes them to be a great healing tool for trauma survivors.
TRINEA’S STORY

Trinea Gonczar knows what it feels like to have someone you trust turn that trust against you. A former gymnast, she is a survivor of convicted child sexual abuser Larry Nassar, a former doctor who was supposed to be entrusted with her care. Through the courage of Trinea and nearly 150 other women, Nassar was convicted and is essentially serving a life sentence for his sexual assaults.

While there is some satisfaction in knowing that Nassar cannot continue his depravity, Trinea realized that resources such as Avalon often only come into someone’s life after they have experienced sexual assault. “It’s ambitious, but we want to create the gold standard in education and care,” Trinea explains. “The goal is to bring awareness to our work, who we are, and what sexual assault is well before a trauma occurs.”

Because sexual assault is most often perpetrated by someone we know, it can be difficult to understand that an assault is, in fact, happening. Especially when it comes to children, or those who have ended up in dangerous trafficking situations out of desperation. “It can be confusing, and scary, and you’re often not sure how to feel about it,” she shares. “And we want to take that power away from those who would hurt us and give it back to ourselves. Publicity and education is key to that, as well as holding perpetrators accountable. After all, these are most often serial crimes, so when we successfully prosecute a predator, we decrease the number of possible assaults overall.”

When Trinea was young, she didn’t envision that her life would be shaped by sexual assault. But the experience changed her, and inspired her to shine a light on survivors. As part of her personal mission to empower others, Trinea has been featured on a number of news outlets around the globe, including BBC, Al Jazeera, and World News Tonight. She is also regularly advocating at the United Nations in support of the passage of the World Wide Survivor Bill of Rights.

To learn more about Trinea and Avalon’s work, please visit avalonhealing.org.

TRANCEING MYTHS

- “Be a man.”
- “Boys don’t cry.”
- “Man up!”

In the US, men are socialized to believe that they can’t share their emotions, show affectation freely to those they care about, and have to be ultra self-reliant lest they be considered weak. These behaviors are part of what is called Toxic Masculinity, and they make men especially vulnerable to sexual assault and internalized trauma.

It’s true that the vast majority of sexual assaults are against femme-presenting individuals, but that doesn’t mean that men are immune to these kinds of attacks. In fact, nearly 25% of men in the US have experienced some type of sexual violence in their lives. But given the culture we have, these men feel unable to share their stories, seek help and support, and advocate for others.

One element of Toxic Masculinity is the promotion of a hypermasculine ideal, a trait that has become enshrined in US sports. It should be no surprise that young male athletes were the victims of choice for Jerry Sandusky, Dr. Robert Anderson or Dr. Richard Strauss. This hypermasculine culture, combined with the youth of the survivors, makes speaking out both incredibly difficult and incredibly necessary.

It’s a myth that men can’t be sexually assaulted, or that it’s only something that occurs in the gay community, or that it will change a survivor’s sexual orientation. What’s not a myth is that sexual assault against men is far more prevalent than we’ve been led to believe, and that male survivors deserve equal outreach and support by the community.

To learn more about how Avalon can help male survivors, please visit avalonhealing.org.

Do not hallucinate.
ANNUAL FIGURES

2019

TOTAL ASSETS
$877,963

TOTAL LIABILITIES
$695,971

NET ASSETS
$181,992

2020

TOTAL ASSETS
$990,586

TOTAL LIABILITIES
$427,347

NET ASSETS
$563,239

FINANCIAL POSITION

2019

TOTAL REVENUE
$2,821,247

TOTAL EXPENSES
$2,750,217

2020

TOTAL REVENUE
$3,169,942

TOTAL EXPENSES
$2,901,318

IMPACT & PROGRAMS

2019

SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICES FORMULA PROGRAM
5%

$152,979

SERVICES TO UNDERSERVED VICTIMS OF CRIME
1%

$16,877

NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT KIT INITIATIVE
1%

$83,967

2020

VOCART CRIME VICTIM ASSISTANCE
97%

$3,069,098

SERVICES TO UNDERSERVED VICTIMS OF CRIME
1%

$16,877

NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT KIT INITIATIVE
2%

$83,967

Avalon Healing brand change took place mid-2020. • Fiscal year ends December 31.
“...AND STILL, WE RISE.”

The Greek god of all gods, Zeus, was rather flagrant in his expression of power, often taking the form of humans or animals (even a swan!) in order to sexually assault a mortal woman who had opposed him, intrigued him, or perhaps just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. Greek mythology is lousy with sexual assault; all of the gods engaged in it in some form or fashion, and it was often the cause and consequence of divine intervention.

As Rome grew, there were a few instances of sexual assault that became mythologized—the Rape of the Sabine Women, for example—but it’s important to note that the Latin word raptio, from which our modern term is derived—is better translated as kidnapping or abduction.

Sexual assault was considered a capital offence in Ancient Rome, but the transgression wasn’t seen as one against the individual themselves; rather, it was seen as the theft of property, specifically, one’s honor. Free men could prosecute their assaulter, but only the patriarch of a virgin woman’s family could prosecute an assault because he was seen as the aggrieved party. Married women, widows, and sex workers were seen as incalculable of being sexually assaulted because their chastity could not be robbed from them.

It wasn’t until the 16th century in Europe, when the recognition that individuals, instead of families, could consent to marriage that the concept of individual consent to anything came into our social perspective and practices. But sexual assault in marriage was still legal even in the US until the 1970s, it was legal to sexually assault non-white women until the Civil War, and definitions of what constitutes sexual assault weren’t explored in a public way until the second wave of the feminist movement, beginning in the 1960s.

We have seen that, for many women, accepting and coping with some form of sexual assault was often considered a cost of pursuing their dreams. From Hollywood actresses to women integrating educational and military institutions, we have heard hundreds of stories of the kind of abuse they experienced as a result of their choice to exercise their right to pursue the kind of life they wanted to live for themselves. And theirs are just the relatively small number of stories that we do know.

But just because sexual assault has reared its ugly head as far back as we have written records, it doesn’t make it natural, or acceptable, or tolerable. Rather, it is a tool often used to exert power and control, and when only a few had the access to power, it became a useful method to control others. And that association between power and assault began to percolate our culture, so much so that it became intertwined in such a way that we could no longer discern one from the other.

Karen Hampton, 51, grew up during a time in our not-too-distant past when our understanding of sexual assault was rather limited. Here’s her story:

Honesty it was never ever talked about. Like never. Rape, sexual assault was hidden behind the stories that we now know to be victim blaming/shaming—drank too much, boys will be boys, dresses provocatively so she asked for it, etc.

I grew up thinking it was the victim’s failure if something happened that he/she didn’t want. The concepts and vocabulary of sexual assault didn’t exist anywhere in my world.

This hits me really personally because I lost my virginity at a college party with someone I didn’t know when I was too drunk to consent. This was my first time. It was my first real sexual assault.

Preyed on more than just me. He was a slime who I’m sure should have paid the price. Should have told and he should have paid the price. I still don’t trust men.

Beginning in the 1980s, Dr. David Lisak began to study interpersonal violence of all kinds, including sexual assault. He found that those who commit sexual assault do so primarily as a method of exerting control over another person. And this can show up in all of the ways that we have come to define as sexual assault—from unwanted touching to physical abuse.

For generations before us, a level of acceptance was expected; bodily integrity was not assumed if you were married or a member of a social class considered unworthy of community support. Even in the rare cases of sexual assault prosecution, it was still considered more of a manner of transgressing a patriarch’s sense of honor and not the highly traumatic, terrifying, and painful experience of the person who was assaulted. But, thankfully, we have seen that change—even during our very own lifetimes!

And we honor the survivors through our work at Avalon—both those in the position to share their stories and those who are coping in silence—because we know that, even if sexual assault has been part of our cultures for thousands of years, we can—and will—take that power back.