

**Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services of Whatcom County (DVSAS)** serves individuals affected by domestic violence and sexual assault and leads the community toward ending these abuses of power. Whether it's been twenty minutes or twenty years, DVSAS helps people rebuild their lives. Through a 24 hour help line, advocacy counseling, children's programming, support groups, prevention education and a safe housing program, DVSAS provides services to thousands of people each year. On a broader scale, DVSAS builds partnerships with law enforcement, social services providers, and policymakers to improve the community response to domestic violence and sexual assault. DVSAS has delivered compassionate, confidential services since 1979. Support from volunteers, donors, and partners allow DVSAS to provide services free of charge.

### **24-Hour Services:**

**24-Hour helpline:** Advocacy counselors provide safety planning, emotional support, crisis intervention and referrals through the helpline 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

**Support during medical exams:** When an individual undergoes a sexual assault forensic exam at St. Joseph Hospital, advocacy counselors are dispatched to support the victim and family/friends through the process. Advocacy counselors also provide support during other exams related to domestic violence or sexual assault and can help victims to access necessary services.

**911 Safety planning:** From the scene of a domestic violence call, officers throughout Whatcom County conduct a danger assessment and call DVSAS advocates to provide immediate safety planning and crisis intervention to victims.

### **Support Services:**

**Advocacy counseling sessions:** Advocacy counseling is available to clients who want to meet one-on-one with an advocacy counselor. Sessions are available on a walk-in or scheduled basis during business hours. These sessions strength and empowerment-based and include emotional support, on-going safety planning, identifying coping skills, problem solving, information about the affects of domestic violence and sexual assault, and referrals to other community resources.

Advocacy counseling is offered at the downtown support center, at the DSHS office, over the phone, and at safe locations throughout the County by arrangement.

### **Legal Advocacy:**

**Protection order assistance:** Advocacy counselors to provide assistance completing requests for civil domestic violence protection orders, sexual assault protection orders and anti-harassment orders. Assistance is available on a walk-in basis during business hours and include help filing and support during court hearings.

**Court preparation and accompaniment:** Legal advocates support clients through civil and criminal court processes related to domestic violence and sexual assault, including child custody hearings, trials, and interviews. Support includes preparing clients for court, attending court hearings and post-hearing debriefing.

**Law enforcement reporting:** If clients decide to report domestic violence or sexual assault to law enforcement, advocacy counselors can help guide them through the process. Law enforcement officers are often able to take reports at the downtown support center or advocates can accompany them to the police station.

### **Support Groups:**

**Adult and teen support groups:** Support groups are held for adults and teens at the downtown support center, at the DSHS office, at local schools and other locations throughout the county. The New Beginnings Support Group is offered four times a week for women who have experienced or are currently experiencing domestic violence, one session is in Spanish. Connections are a 12-week group for men and women who have experienced sexual assault. Teen groups are held throughout the school year for girls who have witnessed or experienced domestic violence and/or sexual assault.

**Children's groups:** Children's groups are offered during support groups. The groups focusing on increasing the resiliency skills of children by allowing them play in a safe, child-appropriate environment while increasing social skills, learning positive conflict resolution, and processing their own difficult feelings.

**Parenting after violence program:** This group helps women to understand the effects of domestic violence on themselves and their children, learn healthy discipline techniques, and explore their parental role. It is offered several times throughout the year.

### **Safe Housing Services**

**Safe Shelter:** The DVSAS Safe Shelter is a confidential, shared residence for female-identified survivors of domestic violence and their children. Basic food, clothing, personal items and bedding are provided to residents if needed. Intakes into the Safe Shelter are available 24-hours a day. The Safe Shelter is fully handicapped accessible and service animals are accepted.

**Safe Hotel Stays:** We can make arrangements for Safe Hotel stays in some cases such as, the Safe Shelter is full and the survivor is in immediate danger, the survivor identifies as a male or for other reason's a family would be better accommodated in a hotel setting.

### **Homelessness Prevention**

DVSAS has limited funds to help survivors avoid becoming homeless due to domestic violence. Funds can help survivors stay in their current home or move directly into permanent housing.

### **Education and Training**

**Violence prevention program:** The *Empowerment Project* is a three-session curriculum offered at local middle schools, high schools, and youth organizations. It is designed help youth understand the dynamics of abusive and healthy relationships, explore consent, develop empathy and confidence in setting boundaries.

**Professional trainings and education:** As a leader in the community, DVSAS provides trainings and education to local business, organizations, and service providers on domestic violence and sexual assault.