



## SCTF Community Spotlight

# YWCA Sexual Assault Program

Hello Readers,

Welcome to another Community Spotlight where we feature organizations and resources within Clark County.

I recently had the honor of interviewing Laurie Schacht, Director of the YWCA Clark County Sexual Assault Program. Laurie brings many great strengths to the Safe Communities Task Force in addition to her impressive knowledge and tact in sexual assault prevention.

I am particularly excited to share this spotlight because during a Core Gift Workshop where participants learned more about the unique strengths they bring to their community, Laurie and I shared a similar gift of helping people feel they *matter*. I believe Laurie uses this gift in her work every day.

### If there were only four things you could tell someone about the program, what would they be?

“There are a few important pieces of the sexual assault program:

- We work on the proactive piece of sexual assault prevention, which is consent. Knowing how to give and ask for consent and being able to express boundaries. In the past, the culture has been to tell people, “Don’t rape.” People don’t need to be told what not to do, but given tools and skills for how to have healthy relationships.
- Sexual assault can happen to anybody: males, females, youth or adults. We work with many diverse populations.
- We are confidential. As community-based advocates we provide confidential services. Many victims don’t seek services because of fear of what might happen. We offer a victim-centered space to move forward. We practice empowerment-based advocacy that recognizes people know what’s best for them. We give people enough information to make the best choice for themselves and a safe way to sort through what’s happening and figure out the next steps. With sexual assault, someone didn’t have a choice about what happened to them. We need to give them as many choices as possible in their journey forward.
- Lastly, we recognize how resilient survivors are. It is very inspiring to see their impressive strength and courage while coping with traumatic experiences.”

### What is the impact you see the Sexual Assault Program having on youth or adults?

“The impacts are two-fold. On the prevention side, youth and young adults are engaged in learning about making changes and creating a difference in culture. They are learning to create a culture of consent and look critically at media messages and how things that may seem like a given in our culture don’t have to be. Youth and young adults are agents of change in creating culture. We’re recognizing power and leadership in youth because they’ll be our next adult leaders. We can also support them to be strong leaders now. Second, young people have a safe place to talk about things- maybe things that weren’t believed by others when they talked about it in the past.”

### What is one thing that makes you proud of this program?

“I am so proud of the program. It is such an honor to work with these folks.” *(continued)*

“They are so dedicated, compassionate and committed. I’ve been with them for sixteen years and it’s a very welcoming experience. I feel really lucky. It’s a lot of teamwork.”

I keep going back to youth/adults with trauma. It’s such an honor when people trust you. It feels like such a special spot- it’s not just us doing work. Sometimes it’s hard to hear information about when people have been hurt. It’s important to put that aside and first and foremost thank them for trusting you with their story.”

### Is there a lesson(s) you’ve learned in your work the community would benefit from hearing?

“Often people get overwhelmed with emotion if a kid/friend/relative tells an adult about sexual assault. They don’t need to know what to say. It’s okay to be honest and say, “I’ve never dealt with this before. Let’s figure it out together.” I’m really big on not making promises I can’t keep, but I can authentically promise that it won’t always be like it is now.”

I think also of the myths that come in, and of consent. People incorrectly think that someone “asked for it,” but nobody asks to be sexually assaulted. Ever. For example, if two people went on a date and one person didn’t say, “no,” that doesn’t mean they are consenting. Compliance does not equal consent. A survivor might shut down or freeze, especially if it’s being facilitated by substances, but this does not mean they have given consent. They might not know what happened but they couldn’t have given consent because they don’t remember it.”

### Is there anything I didn’t cover you’d like featured?

“If you or someone you know has experienced sexual assault, know you’re not alone. Generally it’s a very isolating crime. Victims might not know how to speak up or maybe they did and weren’t believed. They need a safe space to do so.”

### Contact the 24-hour hotline: 360-695-0501

When you call, you’ll give your first name to the hotline and will be called back. It doesn’t have to be your real name. Say you want to speak to a sexual assault advocate. You don’t need to provide details. People sometimes feel they need to justify themselves but they don’t. Also know we work with folks whether it’s happened recently or if it happened fifty years ago.”

Thank you Laurie.  
Sending my best,  
Christopher at SCTF

