

## **A New Leaf Advocacy Crisis Counseling**

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A New Leaf's mission of *Helping Families... Changing Lives* is exemplified through services provided to victims of violence and abuse. Our philosophy is to carry out our work with compassion, sincerity and clarity of purpose. The comprehensive array of programs that make up A New Leaf, offers a continuum of services within the agency to ensure the safety and well-being of our clients. Since 2003, A New Leaf's Advocacy Crisis Counseling program has been providing individual crisis intervention counseling at the Phoenix Family Advocacy Center, the Glendale Family Advocacy Center and Mesa's Center Against Family Violence. Other services include personal advocacy, group counseling, and information and referral. The primary aspect of the therapeutic process is the development of support systems and the improvement of the client's overall level of functioning within the community through education, goal setting, empowerment, and decision making skill development. We hope to provide clients with the tools and resiliency to self manage their care after the 12 crisis sessions are completed. When necessary, clients are provided referrals to long term therapy. We serve all survivors of sexual assault (primary and secondary), including women, men, and children. The program staff is composed of master's level counselors, a Clinical Supervisor and a Program Coordinator.

Through the door of an advocacy center, survivors are provided services to help navigate the criminal justice system, strengthen investigations and enhance the prosecution of perpetrators. This unique system is designed to dramatically decrease the stress and trauma often placed on survivors. The Multidisciplinary approach at a Family Advocacy Center provides survivors a variety of services without having to travel to multiple locations. This coordination includes working with law enforcement, victims' advocates, forensic nurses and local prosecution.

However, through feedback from our clients and mounting research in the field, we knew we were still missing a larger piece of the puzzle. While statewide data shows that Arizona is the fastest growing state in the United States, sexual assault and rape cases are increasing at almost double the rate of our state population growth.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that 19% of adult women in Arizona have been victims of one or more completed forcible rapes during their life time.<sup>2</sup> Professionals and experts in this field believe a great deal of victims are not reporting this crime and not receiving the services they so greatly need. This deficit in reporting may be representative of mitigating circumstances from cultural implications to lack of information of services available. We are aware through demographic reporting collected at intake, that Latino survivors of sexual assault were not requesting services relative to community populations. Further information collected through client surveys, reported that when Spanish speaking clients have pursued services, resources were limited. Consequently, where resources do exist waiting lists may be six months long. The National Violence Against Women Survey (1998) found that Latina women were less likely to report rape victimization than non-Latina women and that

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<sup>1</sup> Crime in the United States 2004: Uniform Crime Reports. Department of Justice. Federal Bureau of Investigative Crime. Retrieved from [http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius\\_04/](http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius_04/).

<sup>2</sup> Ruggiero, K.J. & Kilpatrick, D.G. (2003). *Rape in Arizona: A report to the state*. Charleston, SC: National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center, Medical University of South Carolina.

Latinos were less likely to report sexual assault due to the obstacles in obtaining victim services, such as language barriers, cultural factors, and a fear of deportation.<sup>3</sup>

Since the inception of A New Leaf's Advocacy Crisis Counseling program in 2003, we have struggled to consistently serve the Spanish speaking community with counseling services, determining their specific needs and making appropriate referrals. As an agency, we attempted to solve this issue by providing translation services; however, this was not always the most appropriate solution. When phone messages were left by a Spanish speaking client, at times it took several days to procure translation services to respond to the caller. Additionally, services sought by English speaking minors with Spanish speaking parents posed a concern due to consent policies. We were unable to serve these clients unless a translator was available. Furthermore, translation services were available only during certain hours, were very costly and often disrupted the therapeutic relationship. In an attempt to address this critical need, our approach was to develop a local grass roots outreach campaign, increase awareness of services and enhance counseling services.

A New Leaf sought additional funding through the Sexual Assault Services Program (SASP) administered through Arizona Department of Health Services to provide dependable and appropriate services to the Latino community. To tackle the outreach component we targeted areas with historically limited resources, created materials and organized speaking engagements. We began a viral campaign to share our services with this largely underserved community; beginning with Avondale, Buckeye and Tolleson. We are saturating local markets and churches with posted flyers and branching out to more communities and neighborhoods. We are confident that we can increase awareness of services by getting to know the residents of the communities where we are serving and collaborating with other community providers. We have begun relations with organizations such as Care First, the Avondale Social Services Committee and the West Valley Human Services Alliance. Building and maintaining lasting relationships with community agencies, neighborhood representatives and local businesses is a key step in opening the doors to serving those most in need.

The Advocacy Crisis Counseling program continues our existing collaborations and has enhanced services by adding collaboration with the Southwest Valley Advocacy Center. Additionally, to meet the increasing needs of our clients, we have increased service availability from 8am-9pm Monday through Saturday. Most importantly, we have added Spanish speaking Master's level counselors that are available at each site. Our Crisis counseling and advocacy services address the needs of adults and children by helping them recover emotionally and by providing them with relevant community resource information. At each of the Centers, A New Leaf continues to work closely with Victims Services, local police, medical professionals, prosecuting attorneys and collaborating agencies (i.e. Child Protective Services and Child Help) to provide comprehensive services to survivors at a single location. The program continues to function with the purpose of the crisis counseling stabilizing the client, assisting in development of a support network, and increasing levels of functioning. Since June 2010, our program increased to 59 new clients an increase of 29, compared to the previous month's data of 30 new clients in the program collectively. We are encouraged by this small success and look forward to the opportunity of continuing this crucially needed service.

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<sup>3</sup> Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (2000). Full report of the prevalence, incidence, and consequences of violence against women. Research Report. Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice.