

Shelter Available for Family Emergencies, Inc. (SAFE) History of the Organization

In 1985, a task force was established to assess the needs of victims of domestic violence. They found that, in Transylvania County, there was abuse, neglect family violence, sexual assault, rape and incest and that there was no structured program to deal with this violence. On August 25, 1985, SAFE was officially incorporated; a grant was written, and Jean Young was hired as a part-time Director.

SAFE was to give a new outlook on life and transitional living to families suffering the emotional, mental and physical abuse created by domestic violence. It would also educate not only the women but also the community at large.

The first SAFE office was opened at the United Methodist Church with a part-time staff. In 1986, Terri Fosmire became the full-time Executive Director. With a grant from the Governor's Crime Commission, a part-time position was created and a Community Outreach Coordinator was hired. SAFE sponsored the first Women's Festival, began court accompaniment, recruited and trained volunteer to staff a 24-hour hotline, and spoke to nearly every agency and organization in the County. A contract was made that enabled battered women and their children to be sheltered in a local home on an "as needed" basis. A system of "SAFE HOMES" was established to meet the ever increasing needs for shelter.

1987 was a year of increased contact with battered women and their children. Support groups were offered and the community education program was in full swing. A committee was formed to investigate the possibility of renting or purchasing a permanent shelter facility. Many locations were toured and the committee continued meeting through 1988.

In the spring of 1988, Dianne Hall was hired as the Executive Director. By early summer, a contract was signed to lease a shelter. In October of that year, the offices were moved out of the church and into the new facility. In order to provide 24-hour services to women and children, volunteers were retrained on intake procedures and shelter policies.

Over the next few years, there were various trainings for the medical profession, the judicial system and the ministerial association. Contact with other agencies, particularly DSS, Trend, and the Children's Center have proved beneficial to all.

Roberta Hallinen became Executive Director in June 1991. During her tenure, SAFE became widely recognized in the community and worked closely with law enforcement. In July of 1998, SAFE's Attic was opened with Board approval. Staffed by SAFE employees and volunteers, this successful resale shop generates funding for programs and services provided for SAFE clients.

In March of 1992, through grants received from Z. Smith Reynolds and the Janirve Foundation, a shelter with capacity for eight was purchased.

August of 1999 saw the transfer of the sexual assault/rape crisis program from The Healing Place (which closed its Transylvania County office) to SAFE. A full time counselor was hired to meet the increasing needs.

Awareness programs were initiated at Brevard College and in the school system, moving towards community-wide education. Additionally, programs were further expanded in April 2000 with the Domestic Violence Intervention Services, working closely with the judicial system and ensuring batterers' compliance.

In December 2001, Salley Stepp became SAFE's Executive Director. Recognizing the pressing need for services and the rising demand, a major re-organization initiative was implemented. Capitalizing on the skills and expertise of the staff, Ms. Stepp redefined positions, procedures and policies to enable the organization to function optimally in order to best meet the needs of all victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. This included addressing the apparent need for additional shelter space.

Recognizing the apparent crisis as more and more women and children were forced to find alternatives when SAFE's shelter was filled to capacity, the Board of Directors approved the purchase of a new shelter in the spring of 2006. The new facility, named Stacey's House, has proved to be a place of healing and growth for the women and children who seek refuge there. SAFE's first capital campaign was initiated and new community relationships have been established.

SAFE remains committed to the mission of ending domestic violence and sexual assault in the community as well as the support and empowerment of the victims.