

VOSAS

VOICES OF SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS

SAAM

APRIL IS SEXUAL
ASSAULT
AWARNESS
MONTH

HEALTHY LIVING

*Making healthy eating
choices can improve your
mental health*

THE
COUNSELOR'S
CORNER
*Don't give up on
your search for a
therapist*

LUWANDA JARMON

THERE IS STILL HOPE IN DARK PLACES



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



What Does SAAM Mean To Me?

I think sometimes the way I view sexual assault awareness is a little different from the normal person. We see and hear so many disturbing stories of children, girls and boys, who have suffered from the criminal act of sexual abuse. It has been especially exposed in today's day and age. One sad thing is that some victims didn't even realize they were victims. And although it is so heartbreakingly sad when we hear these stories, speaking up is necessary in order to bring this long overdue awareness. The more we allow and give our children the permission to speak up, the more we can boldly declare this needs end, and end TODAY! Our voices must be loud and not ashamed. I think sometimes when people see me coming they don't want to even look my way, because I remind them of a taboo topic in need of discussion, and I'm not afraid to use my voice. Although SAAM is acknowledged one month out of the year, we must remember that sexual abuse has been happening since the beginning of time and will continue to occur if we remain silent. The truth of the matter is, exposure is necessary no matter how uncomfortable it makes us feel. Survivors have a right for their voices to be heard, because it is the beginning of a much needed healing journey. So as SAAM comes around every year, let's continue to be intentional about learning facts, sharing knowledge, and keeping the conversation going. It's not only important for survivors and current victims, but for society as a whole, and to prevent anyone from experiencing sexual abuse going forward. Every voice is important, and when abuse is suspected, speaking up is of utmost importance. I'm grateful for NSVRC for acknowledging the month of April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

Dee Marie

VOSAS LLC

OUR

TEAM

INFORM•ENCOURAGE•EMPOWER



Chief Editor/Founder
Dee Marie



Managing Editor
Latonya Buford

VOSAS LLC uses video, audio, and print media to shatter the silence, by telling the stories that promotes healing from past trauma, aiming to live victoriously, and uplifting those that are doing to work to improve our communities. We are changing the narrative so our audience can be informed, encouraged, and empowered. Our work is achieved through VOSAS Magazine, an online magazine that is tailored to the Voices of Sexual Abuse Survivors. Also, through Be The Voice Podcast, a weekly podcast where we interview experts and everyday people to share their knowledge and experiences.



FERGUSON TWILIGHT RUN

5K • 10K
1 MILE FUN RUN
2024

Saturday, May 18

5:00 PM - 1-Mile Fun Run | 5:45 PM - 10K | 6:00 PM - 5K

REGISTER to #RunWithFerguson

The events includes:

- Pre-race Entertainment
- Professional Timing
- Cheer stations along the Route
- Finisher Medals
- Awards for Top Finishers
- Vendors, Beer Samples, & Free Concert



FergTwilightRun.com



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#RunWithFerguson

1. You register as a Virtual Runner.
2. We email you a "Virtual Runner" bib.
3. You run or walk a 5K, 10K, or 1-mile course between May 12 & May 19 at a location & time convenient for you.
4. You post pictures of your run/walk to social media using #RunWithFerguson as a hashtag (or email us directly.)
5. We send you your shirt & finisher's medal before June 10.

FergTwilightRun.com



Survivor's Story



LuWanda, thank you for your courage to allow us to interview you as our featured story. Sexual abuse has been a taboo topic in our society and communities for many years and has been difficult for survivors to come forward with their truth, understandably. As we begin this interview, please feel free to start by telling us your story. Be as detailed as you would like.

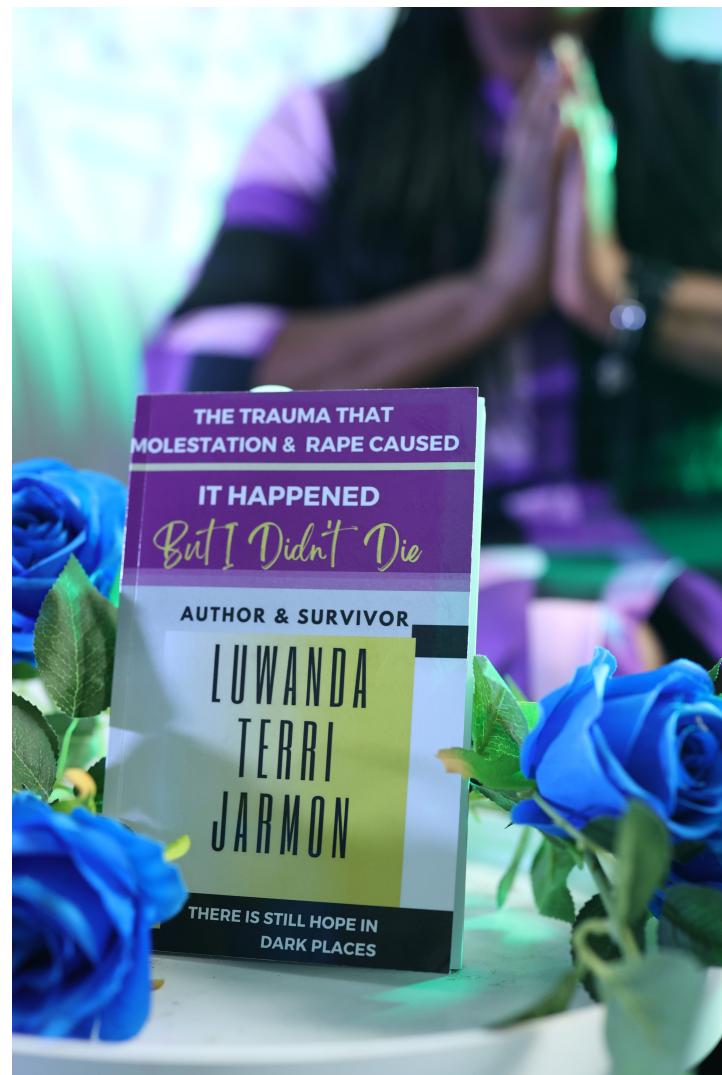
I started writing my story in 2016 when God said it was time to tell it all. I started writing because I was getting depressed again. I still had to see this man. I left St. Louis because I wanted to escape all the drama. I married my childhood sweetheart and he ended up going into the military and later sending for my daughter and I to join him. This helped take some of the pressure off of me although I was able to move forward, things just weren't normal, but I just dealt with it. Things were starting to go downhill because I didn't even know who Wanda was. I went into the dark place, as I called it, because to me there was no light at the end of the tunnel. I knew of God, but I didn't really know him like I do now. I grew up in church like most people did. But really that's just it, as children we went to church because we had to and as long as we sat in the church without falling asleep we were good. I didn't know anything about praying, even as I became older. I remember one day I was in Oklahoma and I had a breakdown and decided I would be better off not in this, what I called, ugly world. I couldn't do it, but it was heavy on my heart. Now I know and believe that God was going to use any story to help someone some day. And He is doing that right now!

How were you able to overcome the trauma of your past?

I was able to overcome because I had to seek help. I had to make my way back home. I had been gone from St. Louis for 10 years. We spent 6 of those years in Oklahoma, and 4 of those years in Hawaii where my husband was stationed. You think Hawaii would have allowed me to be on top of the world, but in reality it was the worst time because my marriage really went downhill. Whenever a man mistreats me it is triggering and reminds me of how my virginity was snatched at an early age. I can't remember the exact age, but I know I was between the ages of nine and eleven. When I think of that time, I can see myself at that age and how I looked. Therapy really helped me because I was finally able to talk someone, although not the world just yet. It felt good seeing a therapist but I knew once I left her office my old feelings would come back even stronger. What I'm saying is that you have to take control to start your healing journey. That's what I did and that's when it helped. When I got serious about God, it was Him first, and that's when it really happened.. Now I can lay on the therapist couch and really begin to heal. I will tell everybody to seek help because it doesn't make you crazy, it gives you peace of mind.

LUWANDA JARMON

THERE IS STILL HOPE IN DARK PLACES



As a survivor, what do you feel was the most important benefit of seeking your personal healing journey?

You have to talk about it! That's what helped me when depression set in because the trauma is all you think about. I just wanted to be by myself or talk to my friends. I remember talking to two of my friends about wanting to commit suicide because now I had three small grandkids that I was raising. That struggle was real because I was broken and I couldn't mentally handle the situation. I was in trouble with myself. I used to cry out to God and ask Him, "why did you give them to me?" He reminded me that they needed me as much as I needed Him. The more I saw Him the more I was able to survive this journey. The scripture says in John 15:5, "we can do nothing without Him." We need to believe that so we can move forward, that's when my journey really began. I knew I needed help. I knew I would not survive without God. I put all my trust in Him and that's when the real healing began. I had to start with forgiveness in every area of my life, including my daughter most of all. I was raising her kids. I want people to know forgiveness hurts you, not the person you're upset with. Do you really think they care? They don't! They're going on about their business.

Telling the truth about sexual abuse can allow survivors to begin to walk in freedom, but at the same time cause issues with family members, or others that may not believe the truth. How important was it for you to have a support system?

It was so important to have a support system because not having one is how I kept the secret for so long. We tried to tell, but we knew no one would believe us. They made my abuser feel like the victim and he wasn't. They made me feel like I was in the wrong. Oh, but God! He brought me help with Moving4ward Ministries. I was able to talk about it and not be ashamed. It was other women that were going through the same thing and that allowed me to be free from worrying about what other people thought. This was good for me because people can be so judgmental which kept what happened to me a secret. You never know what a person is going through. People can be so mean and you wonder why survivors don't want to tell their story. I think society can be so cruel, but we wonder why so many take this ugly generational curse to their grave. My support system was very important to me. It gave me the voice that I didn't even know I had. So please talk to someone. There are systems that are in place like friends, therapists, and even your doctor. When I came forward, my doctor gave me information and resources that I didn't know was out there. There are also teachers and school counselors. The same man that molested me was exposed yet again but nothing happened because no one believed the victim. However, still speak up because there is so much help out there now.

What would you say to other survivors that want to speak up, but just not sure how?

You have to step out of your box. It's not easy and it's still not easy for me. I have a voice and I didn't want to take this to my grave. I had to get triggered because my abuser did it again. This sparked something inside of me that made me so mad I wanted to fight. At that point I started to talk. You have to find a support group or someone you can comfortably talk to. For me, once I started to talk it gave me power. And once you get set free, I mean really free, nothing else matters.



It takes an unmeasurable amount of courage to speak up about past sexual abuse. This special photo shoot allowed LuWanda to be treated like the queen she is. We celebrate her strength!

You no longer consider what others say about you. I know people were thinking what took me so long. It was that dark cloud that made me wait so long. I knew no one would believe me, even in my early age. So I would say to other survivors, stop worrying about what people think because they are not you. Don't let the devil control your thoughts. I didn't know how much I had to share until I started speaking up. My story is out there now. Unfortunately, I didn't have a story from someone else, and I didn't have an outlet to talk. Help is here. I saw God first when I was able to be free. I'm not saying it was easy because it's not. Don't be afraid to tell someone. Don't let the perpetrator win. When you talk to someone about what happened to you, you will feel free. I think we give people too much power, including the enemy. We just want to be left alone, hoping it will go away. But it won't.

Self-Care is also a very important as it relates to healing from any trauma. What are some things you do for self-care.

Self-care is very important and I had to learn this because it wasn't something I was used to. I worked at Red Lobster for 25 years and I used to see people, mostly women, that would come in and eat by themselves. They would just sit there looking around. They just looked so lonely. I would think to myself that I didn't want that to be my life. Even though I was by myself, I didn't want to go out and eat, go to the mall, or do anything by myself. I started doing self-care as I got older. I'm starting to understand it now. I don't have a problem going places alone. It really helps me with my peace. And I love to eat! I have to tell you it's therapeutic for me. Self-care, now, is a must for me. I haven't had time for myself in over 16 years, raising three small kids. Now they are 23, 20, and 17. Two of them are out of the house doing their own thing, and I just have the 17-year-old at home. I am really proud of them and now I am able to do more for myself. I really enjoy it because of my work schedule. I'm too tired sometimes to go anywhere alone, but when I do, I'm really enjoy the time. It takes my mind off of things. I'm very observant, so I see a lot and hear a lot. I love to take pictures of my food and post things saying this is what self-care looks like. Self-care is much needed. Sometimes I just sit in my car after work, or sometimes I'll drive around just for the peace of music. It is all very helpful.

Although we use the language "survivor" when describing those who are recovering and has overcome the past trauma sexual abuse. We, here at VOSAS Magazine, believe that we are not made to only survive, but to thrive. Tell us what thriving feels like to you.

OMG! Thriving! Well thrive, this is my saying for the year. Oh my gosh! I think God gave it to me to push me farther than I wanted to go. Thriving for me means moving forward, doing things, and feeling comfortable doing them. I do things now I would have never done. And I had low self-esteem for a long time. I'm talking about in high school, at work, and at home. We let people do this to us because that's all we know. I was a people pleaser for sure. I loved doing what people said, even though I didn't want to. If it would please them, I was happy to do it. This was my life. I was always told by men I was nothing. No one would want me and I was fat. Those things just stuck out to me all my life. When a man did tell me that I didn't receive it. But now, now one can tell me anything because as humble as I am, I love myself now more than anything. The word thrive makes me want to do more for myself and others, but only if I want to, that's the difference.

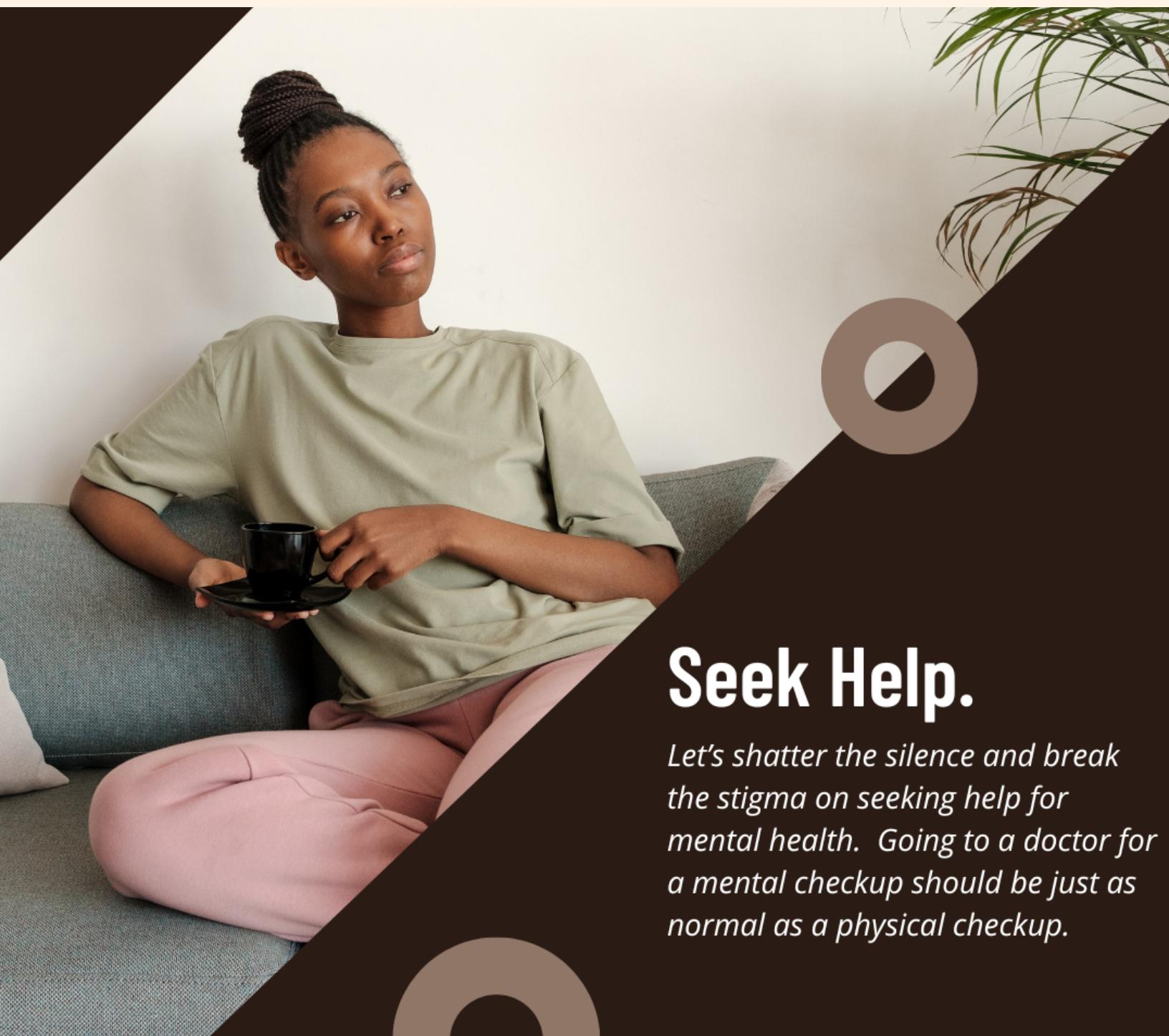
How do you use your artistry to help other survivors or encourage yourself.

I am a minister even though I don't have the papers yet. I have been ordained twice and still don't have papers. God says I am one! I was ministering to people before I even got ordained. He saw that. I like talking and helping people anyway I can. Even men are coming to me to talk now. I don't have an office, but I don't need one because of the places I Minister, people come to me, even at work and on the phone, which is best for me. God will send people to me that say they come because they trust me. I have found that a lot of people are that way with me. I am honored when people come to me just to talk and I able to them give advice. It's not about me. When God tells me to tell them something, I can tell them. I have not always been able to hear from God. The key is we have to listen. He just gave me a word last week and it was yield. I think I was letting people disturb my peace and He said stop and SLOW DOWN! Sometimes I get in my feelings because I am mad at things I have no control over. I think it makes me cry. People think crying is a weakness and really it's not. It's a release of pressure off of you. I actually feel better when I cry. I also have a relationship with God now, so if I don't get it, I pray. Normally He will send someone to me to say, God said, and it's usually what I have already prayed about. I know it's God.

Lastly, what are some future projects you are working on, so we can support you?

I want to get back to praise dancing. I used to do that at my former church. I can't explain it, but that was my peace! When I danced, it was just God and I. I didn't see anyone else, I only thought of dancing with God. Besides the book I've just written, I have another book I want to write about my journey with my grandkids. The title will be, "Three Different Souls With Their Own Trauma." It's so much people don't know about my grandkids, but they are judged. They've been through a lot. I'm going to seek family counseling because we need it. One is in therapy now and no one knows. I often say to people, and I'll share this with you, we say we trust God, but do we? I know I do but sometimes my actions show something differently. God has been so good to me and I am definitely blessed! There is no way I can or could have raised three kids by myself and I didn't look like a single grandmother was raising them. But God!

THE COUNSELOR'S CORNER



Seek Help.

Let's shatter the silence and break the stigma on seeking help for mental health. Going to a doctor for a mental checkup should be just as normal as a physical checkup.

Don't give up on your search for a therapist!

For most of us growing up in the typical African American household, we all understood the not so hidden rule, "What goes on in this house, stays in this house!" Telling family business was an absolute no no! My personal opinion is that due to our history and our culture, it has been hard for us to trust others outside of our home. It really is an inherited trauma. Not saying that other groups don't suffer from that as well, I just know first hand about things we as African American had to endure, and somethings we still endure. But that's another topic for another day. I have found, however, as time passes along and new generations are born, that rule is slowly diminishing. As it should! Being a survivor of sexual abuse, and having also to deal with the issues of life, I have figured out that it's okay to not be okay. As long as we live, we all will go through things that causes pain, uneasiness, sadness, and being uncomfortable. All the while life still has to be lived. We're working, have families, raising children, trying to eat right, exercising, traveling, hanging with friends, and so much more! Who has time to sit down and talk to a therapist? Well I'm here to tell you to make the time. People in general have time for everybody else, and not for their own mental sanity. Going forward let's normalize seeking a therapist with the understanding that it is just as important as seeking a medical doctor for your physical wellness.

When seeking for a therapist it is important to do your research. If you know for certain the main issue you want to discuss, look for a therapist that specializes in that field. If you're not sure what you want to talk about, and that's okay, seek for someone you will feel comfortable with. Ask your trusted friends or family members that you know have a therapist and see if they have any suggestions. The big important thing to remember is not to give up looking for the therapist that suits you. I have found that some people will go to one person that they are not really digging, and give up. Please, do not give up on your search for a therapist. It's just like seeking a doctor that suits you. Once you find that connection, it can be the beginning of a journey to a freedom you didn't know you needed. Don't give up!



TITUS 2 FOUNDATION

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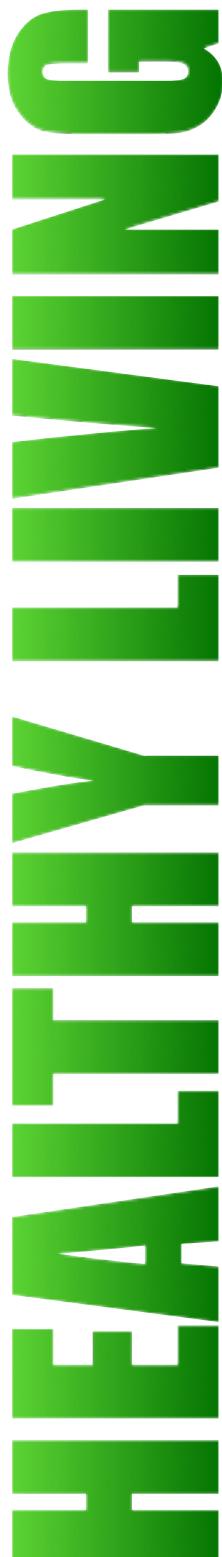
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Making Healthy Eating Choices Can Improve Your Mental Health!



You are what you eat. How many times have we heard those words? I think the problem is not that we don't know it's better to eat healthy, I think the problem is there are so many choices and temptation is everywhere. It's hard to say no to all of this good food! Restaurants are everywhere, on every corner! What do you do? Coming from someone that struggles day to day with healthy food choices, and having a complete understanding of what happens to us physically and mentally from making better choices, we just have to be discipline and say NO!

I have been on a kick for many years of trying to lose this adult weight, yes I said adult weight. Growing up I was a skinny kid and never concerned myself with weight, because physically that was not my issue. Throughout the years I have come to understand that eating healthy is more then just looking good and physically feeling good, but we need it for our mental health as well. Being transparent, I am someone that has suffered from anxiety and panic attacks. I am also challenged with high blood pressure. I bring this up because when I don't eat right, I can always feel the effects. If you've ever paid attention to a time when you felt sluggish, or just didn't have any energy, you may had to question what you ate. Fast foods may taste delicious, and are definitely convenient, especially for people on the go, but they are so bad for us. What I have found is that when I eat out a lot, I begin to feel tired, bloated, like I'm dragging. When I'm feeling that way, I lose focus and mental clarity. Especially if I'm working on projects.

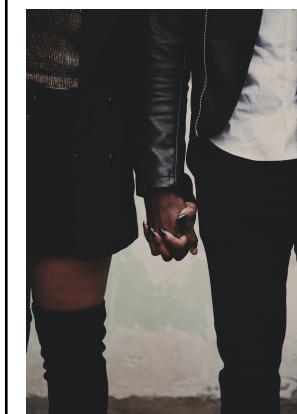
According to the American Society of Nutrition there is definitely a correlation between nutrition and mental health. A healthy balanced diet can positively affect your mood, and can even help with things such as depression and anxiety. Fruits and vegetables offer any vitamins and minerals that directly help with brain power as well as overall nutrients for our bodies. Drinking water can assist with clarity, and so forth. With healthy food choices we can enjoy our day to day lives even better. Combine it with proper sleep and exercise, energy levels will rise, which causes more productivity and better mobility.

I know it's hard sometimes to eat better since we are in a go, go, go society, but let's challenge ourselves to slow down for a quick second and really pay attention to what we are putting in our mouths and question if it's beneficial. We only get one life to live, let's make the most of it physically and mentally.

Click this link to learn more about how to boost your mental health through better nutrition. <https://nutrition.org/how-to-boost-mental-health-through-better-nutrition/>

**Above all else, guard your heart, for
everything you do flows from it.**

~ Proverbs 4:23



**HEALTHY
CHOICES**

SPOTLIGHT

SAAM 2024

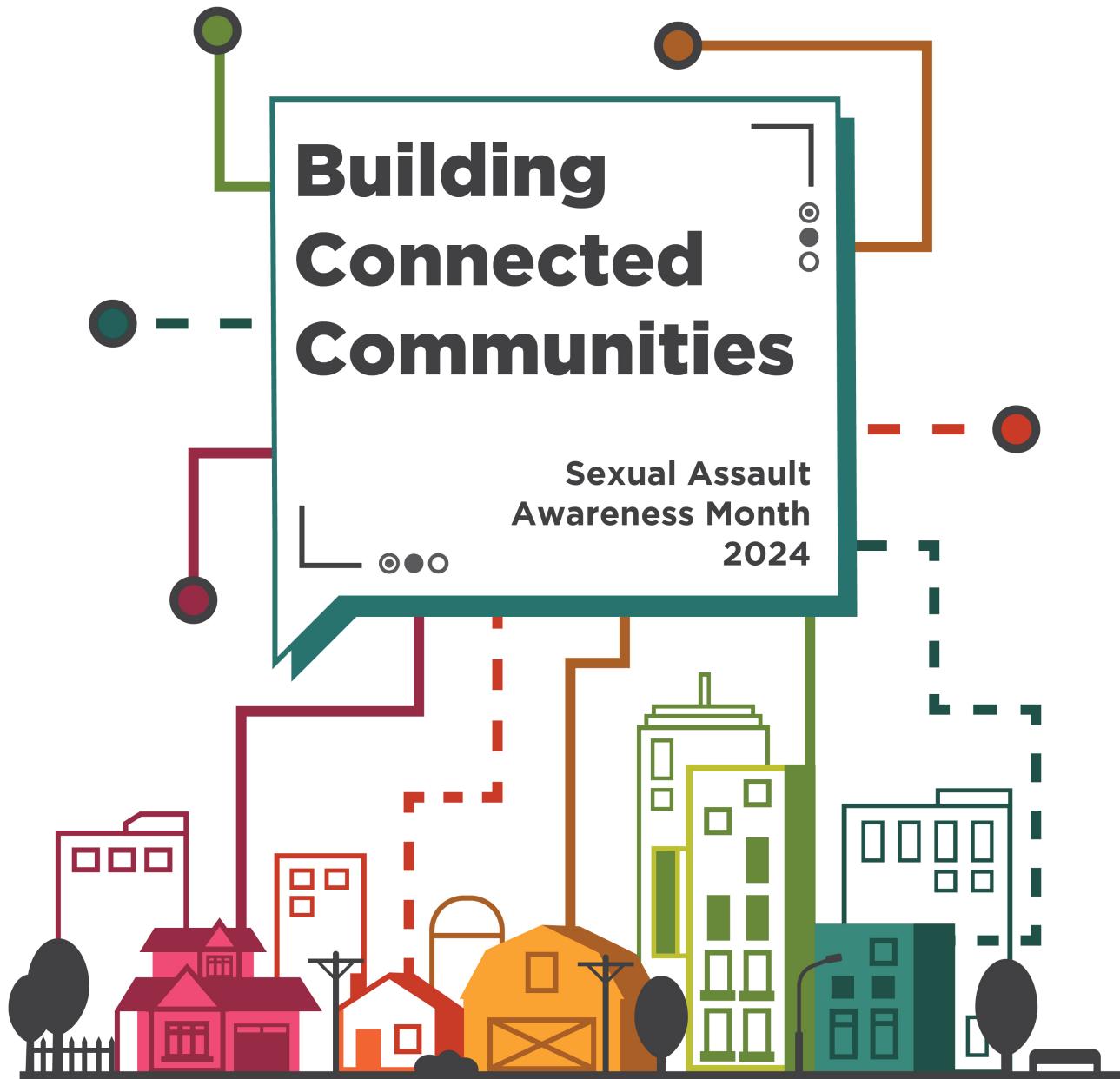
APRIL IS SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH!

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center reserves the month of April to bring awareness to sexual assault so that everyone understands they have a role in helping to end sexual violence, harassment, and abuse. This is the perfect time to get educated on the truth about sexual violence and how this crime not only effects survivors, but also effects society as a whole. The more we learn and continue these much needed conversations, the more we can end sexual violence for our future children. 1 out of 3 girls and 1 out of 6 boys will be sexually abused before they reach the age of 18. These numbers are not exactly accurate because they only reflect those that tell. Most survivors never speak up due to things such as shame and victim blaming.

A great way to support survivors is by building a community that allows a safe space for truth and understanding. Connecting with organizations such as NSVRC and other local groups supporting this mission makes room for knowledge, additional information, and resources. Let's band together not just in April but everyday to create safe communities, families, and circles.

#ConnectedCommunities
<https://www.nsvrc.org/saam>

Building Connected Communities helps us reduce the likelihood of sexual abuse, assault, and harassment in our communities. Join @NSVRC in creating strong, connected communities that take care of one another and make decisions to ensure the safety and well-being of others to end sexual violence. #SAAM2024 #ConnectedCommunities



Be The Voice

PODCAST

with DEE MARIE



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