



SEEDS of CHANGE

Where the healing begins



Working to create a society free of domestic and sexual violence and the harms of substance use.

SPRING 2022

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Letter from Our Executive Director

Spring is a great time to really take notice of the things that bring happiness and meaning to our lives. For me, the opportunity to lead an organization that I know is making a difference in so many people's lives is one of those things. How do I know we are making a difference? Well, I could bore you with spreadsheets and pie charts, but honestly, being present to recognize specific moments that happen day-to-day is what fills my heart and gives me the motivation to keep moving forward no matter what life throws at us. Below are a couple of examples of some of those moments – those little wins that keep us going...

After speaking at an event, an individual approached my table in tears. I don't know if our supporters understand how often this happens. It is always emotional for me as well. This individual in particular wanted to let me know that she had to reach out for counseling services from a domestic violence organization several years back and that it changed her life. She wasn't necessarily emotional because she had experienced domestic violence at the hands of her then spouse, as much as she was emotional because she was so incredibly happy that she did, and that organizations like ours exist.

That same day, I stopped into the shelter to get some materials for my presentation and noticed a bunch of suitcases in the lobby for yet another family coming into shelter to flee abuse happening in their home.

Next, I was meeting with a colleague and he let me know that his daughter had come home from school excited to talk

with him and his spouse about what she learned in school that day from Mutual Ground regarding sexual harassment and violence. He expressed that he was genuinely happy that she was learning information that he knew would help keep her safe as she grows up.

After that I had a conversation with a Judge who is working hard to help us reach more families and individuals who need us at our local court house, discussed with a Board member (who is a retired health care professional) how excited she is to volunteer by providing advocacy for victims in our area hospital emergency rooms, watched as our Student Advisory Board proudly presented to our Board of Directors all of the great work they were doing to spread awareness with teens, and listened as our front desk advocate spoke to an individual making that courageous call for substance use services. When I really think about it, I could go on and on.

Even in times like these where the world seems upside down, here at Mutual Ground, we are reminded daily in these moments, how much our words and actions mean. Thank YOU for helping to make those moments possible.

Sincerely,

Michelle Meyer

Michelle Meyer - Executive Director

Mutual Ground's Walk for Hope is on Sunday, May 15, 2022!



When
Sunday, May 15, 2022

Time
Drop-in between 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Where
Batavia Riverwalk
140 First Street, Batavia, Illinois



Scan Me!

Join us once again for our 2022 Walk for Hope. Every dollar raised helps Mutual Ground provide education, awareness, and life-changing services that empower individuals, families, and communities to end the cycle of domestic and sexual violence and the harms of substance use.

On Sunday, May 15th we will kick off our Walk for Hope with a virtual presentation emailed to all registrants and posted on our social media pages in the morning. Our in-person event will be hosted from 10:00am to 2:00pm. Participants can stop by the event anytime during these hours to pick up their packets, turn in pledges, view our victim impact displays, and walk the one-mile Batavia Riverwalk trail.

This event is free of charge and family-friendly! To register or donate to the event visit www.mutualground.org and click on "Walk for Hope" or scan the code on your smartphone to go directly to our Walk for Hope website!

Mutual Ground
418 Oak Ave.
Aurora IL 60506

mutualground.org
www.breakingfreeinc.org
(630) 897-0084



Sexual Assault Awareness Month - Rape Culture in 2022

Written by Shae Hunt, MSW, Therapist at Mutual Ground

As a follow-up from last year's April blog post, of which I was inspired by, we know that sexual assault of all kinds is still extremely prevalent in our world. After all, programs and agencies like Mutual Ground wouldn't need to exist if sexual violence was eradicated entirely, or at the very least, wasn't as prevalent as it still is.

What I'd like to follow up with is an analysis of the cultural expectation of sexual violence, from our personal day-to-day experiences all the way to the wide-spread acceptance of this form of violence as a normal part of our society. Even in the year 2022, we find that ideas behind rape culture are reinforced consistently. **Some of the questions I find myself asking include:**

- Where does rape culture come from and why is it still around?
- How does rape culture impact the way we view sexual violence as a whole?
- What can we do as individuals, communities, and culturally to combat and end rape culture?

These are some pretty big questions. As with the analysis of most ideas, we need to begin, well, at the beginning. Where did rape culture come from, anyway? The term "rape culture" itself was coined in the 1970's by second-wave feminists, insistent on bringing awareness to the culture created around the degradation of women and other marginalized groups. The cultural piece of this originated long ago, with traces to ancient Greek society and mythology, medieval England, and Victorian societies. Rape culture is defined as "an environment in which rape is prevalent and in which sexual violence against [any person] is normalized and excused in the media and popular culture", according to a post by Marshall University's Women's and Gender Center. Let's break down this definition with examples of what rape culture looks like in practice.

There is no question that sexual violence is very prevalent in our environment. The data doesn't lie; check out last year's post linked above for prevalence statistics. Sexual violence being normalized and excused in media and popular culture, encouraged in some instances even, has more nuance. Here are some prime examples of how rape culture might show up in our day-to-day lives:

- Victim blaming (using phrases like "they asked for it", "you could/should have said no", "look at how they were dressed", "they are just crazy", "that wasn't really rape", "they want to ruin that person's life", etc.)
- Trivializing/minimizing sexual violence (using phrases like or holding the belief that "boys will be boys" or that experiencing sexual violence is "no big deal")
- Sexually explicit jokes
- Tolerance of sexual harassment in workplaces, homes, schools, public, etc.
- Inflating false rape report statistics
- Gratuitous gendered violence in popular media like TV shows and movies
- Defining and enforcing societal gender roles like "men are dominant and aggressive", "women are submissive and sexually passive", etc.
- Pressure on individuals to "score" sexual experiences, particularly men
- Assuming only promiscuous people (or any one group of people) experience sexual violence
- Assuming that men and people of genders other than women (or any one group of people) do not or never experience sexual violence
- Refusing to take rape allegations seriously
- Teaching people to avoid sexual violence instead of teaching people how not to engage in/perpetrate sexual violence

Often, when my clients sit in my office and share their stories, I hear things like what are listed above. If you have seen or heard any of these, or perhaps all of them, you may now understand how sexual violence is normalized in our society and why the term "rape culture" makes sense. Our society not only normalizes, but sometimes sensationalizes sexual violence, making it mainstream and acceptable to the masses. Think about popular shows such as Game of Thrones, where on-screen rape appears many times and sexual abusers are glorified. This website outlines what they refer to as "unconsenting media", offering statistics on how much sexual violence is portrayed as well as offering a feature where you can search different media titles to screen for sexual violence. Reflect on popular music and how much of it mentions ideas behind "slut shaming" promiscuous people, especially women. Even the news media consistently perpetuates sympathy for sexual abusers. Former President Trump directly contributed to rape

culture when a leaked tape from 2005 depicted Trump minimizing conversations on sexual violence to "locker room talk", essentially bragging about being a sexual abuser. This is a clear sign that our cultural norm is one where sexual violence is not only accepted, but encouraged, even by our highest leaders.

So, what do we do about it? How do we combat a piece of our culture that is so pervasive? Here are some suggestions, once again based on the Marshall University site linked above:

- **If someone you know tells you they have experienced sexual violence, believe them without question and offer your support and solidarity**
- Do not use language that degrades any person, sexually active or otherwise
- Speak out and correct people when you hear them contributing to rape culture, such as making jokes about sexual violence, trivializing sexual violence, excusing sexual violence, or victim blaming
- Think critically and analyze how the media you consume portrays sexual violence, relationships, gender roles, etc. and how that may impact your view on the topic
- Always gain active consent to touch another person (sexually or otherwise) and be respectful of people's boundaries
- Never assume consent and communicate with sexual partners
- Stand with survivors of sexual violence and ask them what you need to do to best support them, such as advocacy for better protection under the law, ending stigma, being an empathetic listening ear, etc.
- Call in sexual violence perpetrators and hold them accountable for the harm they have caused
- Get involved! Join an organization like Mutual Ground, anti-violence clubs at your school, or other projects dedicated to ending sexual violence

If we make individual and community change, slowly but surely, we will see a cultural shift where sexual violence is no longer tolerated under any circumstances. This is the ultimate goal. If you're wondering what you can do to contribute to ending rape culture, consider volunteering at Mutual Ground, where you can make an impact with survivors in so many meaningful ways.

Trigger Warning: Mentions of sexual violence & examples of rape culture

Volunteer Spotlight: Batavia Woman's Club

This phenomenal group of women has shown their commitment to improving the community for decades – and has supported Mutual Ground for more than 20 years. In fact, it's been so long that no one can remember the exact year our relationship began!

The Batavia Woman's Club was established in 1892 – exactly 130 years ago – and is the oldest civic organization in Batavia. They are a non-political, non-religious group of women who bond together to make change and help fill distinct needs of non-profits organizations that serve our community. For Mutual Ground the list is endless of the ways they have helped us and our clients. Here are just a few of the most recent things they have done to support MGI:

- Raised more than \$20,000 at their last fashion show that was donated to us
- Delivered home cooked meals to our shelter residents on multiple occasions



- Created a Walk for Hope fundraising team
- Did an adorable flip-flop drive at the beginning of the summer for our clients
- Multiple donation drives to support our Wish List
- Helped organize and run Miss Fannie's Garage Sale with proceeds benefiting MG

They have a membership of approximately 70, but with what they get done it feels like 700! According to Cynthia Kieckhefer, the current President of the Batavia Woman's Club, "There is no more dire need than when someone doesn't feel safe in their own home. We don't want anyone to have that feeling. We know the need of domestic and sexual violence victims and survivors is out there, and it is our privilege to support that need."

We are proud to partner with the Batavia Woman's Club and look forward to working with them for many decades to come!

Become a Mutual Ground GEM

At Mutual Ground all of our domestic and sexual violence services are free of charge thanks to the support of our generous donors. Every donation helps us continue to provide our life changing services.

Through the GEM – Giving Every Month Program, you will join a unique group of donors who make monthly contributions to Mutual Ground. In doing so, you will help provide us with a reliable source of income we can count on. We feel truly honored by every donor who makes the decision to gift to Mutual Ground on a monthly basis!

Mutual Ground and State Street Jewelers have a unique partnership for our GEM donors. For gifts of \$40



Volunteer Opportunities

Walk for Hope Volunteer Signup

Our Walk for Hope fundraiser needs many volunteers in order to be a success. We have opportunities the day before (May 14) loading the truck, and during the event (May 15) for registration, t-shirt distribution, counters, etc. Volunteers are able to walk the route prior to or after their shift! *To see the volunteer times and needs, please visit: www.mutualground.org/walk-for-hope*

Mutual Ground Storage Garage Spring Cleanup & Build

We are looking for groups and individuals who would like to help us clean, organize and build shelving at our storage garage (120 Gale St., Aurora). The volunteer event will happen on Saturday, April 30th from 9:30 - 2 p.m. You can volunteer for part of the event. We are looking for some volunteers who have pick-up trucks and are willing to haul items out. If you or your group are interested, please email ksarrazin@mutualground.org to finalize details.

Painting Groups Wanted

Areas of our shelter and counseling offices are in need of new paint. This type of improvement can make all the difference in making our residents and clients feel more comfortable. We are looking for groups that would like to paint. Please contact ksarrazin@mutualground.org if you are interested.

Transportation Assistance

We are ALWAYS in need of transportation assistance. Residents need to get their kids to school, get to work, make medical appointments, etc. You can help by donating the following:

- Uber/Lyft Gift cards (\$10 and \$20 denominations)
- Gas Cards
- Monetary donations to our Transportation Fund.

Mutual Ground's Legal/Medical Advocacy Team Roll Call Trainings



One of the responsibilities for the Legal/ Medical Advocacy team is to conduct roll call trainings at local police departments. The program is a short presentation to educate and inform first responders about domestic and sexual violence.

Legal Advocates provide important insight on behaviors of victims and perpetrators, the impact it has on families and the impact it has on the community. They also help law enforcement stay updated on all the services Mutual Ground provides, including the substance use

program, Breaking Free. Advocates also provide information on local resources, explain the order of protection process in both criminal and civil proceedings and the support they are able to provide for victims in the courthouses and police stations.

Maintaining collaborative relationships between local law enforcement agencies and Mutual Ground are critical in order to provide ongoing services for the community and victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Thank you to our Corporate Partners!

Thank you to our On-going Support Partner:



Advocate Construction is a residential and commercial construction company with locations in seven states throughout the Midwest. By prioritizing the satisfaction of its customers and the personal fulfillment of its employees, Advocate has quickly become a leader in the construction industry. The Advocate team prides themselves on being an excellent company with which to do business; they not only adhere to the highest standards in the trade, but also commit to being a part of the communities they serve.

Thank you to our Advocate Partner:



GreenState Credit Union is Iowa's largest credit union and one of the top financial institutions in the United States for returning profits to members in the form of better rates and lower fees. GreenState serves over 350,000 members with 30 office locations. Membership is open to anyone living or working in Iowa as well as select counties in Illinois, Wisconsin, Nebraska, and South Dakota. Last year, GreenState contributed \$2.6 million to the communities they serve. As they grow in membership, so does their philanthropic give-back.

If you are interested in becoming a Mutual Ground Corporate Partner contact Kathy Melone at kmelone@mutualground.org.

Mutual Ground
418 Oak Avenue
Aurora, IL 60506

Non-Profit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #40
St. Charles, IL

**Mutual Ground's
Black and White Ball**
Friday, October 14, 2022
Hotel Arista
Naperville, IL

**Mutual Ground's
Walk for Hope**
Sunday, May 15, 2022
Drop in between: 10:00am - 2:00pm
Batavia Riverwalk
140 First Street, Batavia, IL, 60510

Upcoming Events



Contact Us

Give us a call for more
information about
our services

Mutual Ground

418 Oak Avenue
Aurora, IL 60506
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Visit us on the web at

www.mutualground.org
www.breakingfreeinc.org

Follow us on social media!

