

## Speaking Out Against Abuse

By Caitlin Hawes

First Published on October 12, 2009 in JMU's *The Breeze*

**HARRISONBURG, VA.** — As the five panel members took their seats behind the long table they shared, the audience shifted in their seats. Two speakers were therapists, two were sexual abuse victims and one was a former sexual offender. Their nametags bore only their first names and no indication of their status, which was revealed only gradually.

The panel was part of Stop It Now!'s Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Dialogue, hosted in ISAT on Wednesday night.

"I would like you to understand how emotionally difficult it is for our panel to sit together as one panel, than it is for us to sit before you," said Sarah Lewis, a licensed clinical social worker who sat on the panel.

According to the Virginia Department of Health, one in four women and one in five men in Virginia have experienced sexual abuse before age 18.

"All of us will be affected by this issue. It can happen within our very own families and within our very own lives," said Trent Wagler, the prevention educator for The Collins Center, an organization which aids victims of sexual abuse.

### **WANDA: Thriving Despite All**

Wanda, the first victim to speak, grew up in a Mennonite farm in Pennsylvania. Her perpetrator, Alvin, was a 56 year-old man hired to help the family on the farm. She was 13 at the time.

"He would ask me about sexual things related to animals," she said, saying that these comments lead up to him touching her and beyond. "He knew my parents were Mennonite and that I didn't know anything about sex. He himself was Mennonite."

Children that know nothing about sex or their anatomy are often easier prey for sexual offenders, according to Lewis.

"Show me a kid that knows nothing about sex and you've showed me my next victim," Lewis later said, quoting a perpetrator with whom she once worked.

For years, Wanda drank alcohol to cope with her inner turmoil and she "fell apart" when a co-worker later sexually harassed her.

"I became seriously suicidal and emotionally a wreck," she said.

But now, after therapy and talking on the panel, she has come closer to a normal life.

"I'm a thriver today, too," Wanda said. "I don't want to keep silent."

### **MIKE: Prison for Six Years**

Mike grew up in a rural part of the Shenandoah Valley with his sister and his college educated parents. In sixth grade, despite his activities such as youth group, scouting and piano playing, he sensed his parents lost interest in him.

*(continued on page 2)*

# COLLINS CENTER

*Crisis · Prevention · Treatment · CAC*

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“I didn’t have a very good self-perception,” he said. Kids at school began to pick on him. One day, he helped his sister babysit and bathe a five-year-old neighbor and described the incident as his first sexual encounter with children.

“I was sexually aroused, actually,” he said.

After moving to Pennsylvania, church friends invited him to be a junior camp counselor.

“It was the first time I had a population, a demographic looking up to me,” he said. He found that he sought attention from the children, realizing that he preferred their attention over his peers.

Mike would first make the victim comfortable sleeping in his bed by encouraging them to take naps there, making sure they wore loose-fitting clothing and testing how difficult it was to wake them up. Like most perpetrators, Mike meticulously planned each violation.

“This is a very planned event,” Ana Castaneda, the associate director of the Collins Center, said afterwards, “but a lot of times children think that’s something that just happened, and it’s because of what they did.”

Wanda reflected this concept.

“I thought I was a bad person just because what had been done to me,” Wanda said earlier during her introduction.

Mike said he cared about these kids and didn’t think he was “doing something wrong.”

However, a victim finally told his parents and Mike was arrested and sent to prison for six years.

“I was just an emotional wreck,” Mike said. “In the front of my mind was, well, I’d lost this person with whom I’d had this strong emotional tie. I thought it was love. I called it love.”

Many perpetrators think they are the victims, said Joseph G. Lynch, the other licensed clinical social worker on the panel.

After learning in prison how to deal with other adults, he now tries to see himself from the victims’ perspective. He always brings a friend when he goes out to make other people more comfortable with his presence.

### **KEITH: A Broken Shovel**

Keith was a middle child of five from Pennsylvania. As a young teen, his father, a pastor, met a man named Willard who offered Keith the “wonderful opportunity to travel with a great Christian man.” However, as the trips went on, the abuse started.

“It was like I was a rag doll,” Keith said. “I would fall up to the ceiling every night. I would watch what was going on, but I wasn’t there.”

When he told his dad, the response was, “Well that’s too bad what he did to you.” So Keith decided to bury his pain with his “shovel.”

He became depressed and suicidal, even going to the bridge over New River Gorge in West Virginia with the intent to jump. However, he decided that if he died, his burden would only be passed on to his family, so he went home.

Finally, he sought more help. While speaking Wednesday, he constantly smiled, made jokes and referred to himself as the “troublemaker” of the panel.

“I couldn’t bury my past anymore. It’s broken,” he said, displaying a broken shovel he had brought. “That doesn’t mean every day is good to you.”

### **The Road to Recovery**

According to the Virginia Department of Health, in Virginia, 89 percent of the perpetrators are male, 90 percent of the victims know their perpetrator and 43 percent of the offenders are household members.

When Wanda was asked how she felt sharing a panel with a previous offender, Mike reached for the mic instead. He lifted it out of its holder and, rather than speaking, offered it to Wanda in a gesture of friendship. Wanda laughed as he passed it to her.

“He’s working on his stuff just like the rest of us,” she said. “It’s helped me to have contact with Mike. I talked to him, got to know him.” She added that she felt comfortable and “safe” around him because he was open about the crimes he had committed.

Keith had slightly more complex feelings toward Mike.

“Mike scared the shit out of me when I found out he was going to serve with me — Sorry!” he said, glancing over at Mike and raising his palm up in an apologetic gesture. The panel laughed.

“It’s OK,” Mike said.

Keith said that his initial fears were because Mike was the first offender against boys he had met.

“Each time I listen to him, I learn something,” Keith said of Mike. “I’m honored to sit beside this guy.”

And of Keith, Mike said, “It really struck home when I met him... because I understood what the potential consequences to the later development in a victim would be... That gives me a lot more empathy for the victim.”

Neither Keith nor Wanda expressed discomfort sitting next to Mike.

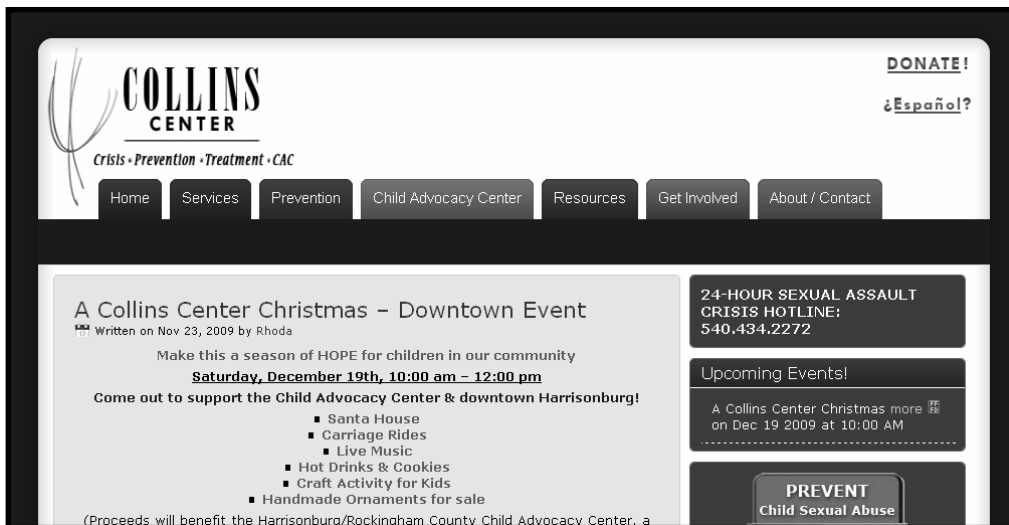
“There’s a lot more anxiety in not knowing who’s an offender,” Castaneda said.

The panel collaborated to enlighten the audience to prevent future sexual abuse incidents. Wagler promoted prevention through teaching adults to recognize warning signs, providing tools for help and having adults initiate conversations with other adults.

“In our society,” said Jacki Buffington-Vollum, a clinical psychologist and Justice Studies professor, “sex is such a taboo topic.”

# New Website

After several months of hard work and determination, the Collins Center now has a new and improved website. This is a project that had been on the minds of staff for a long time, but until recently, had to be put on the back burner. With the addition of new staff and the extensive help of board member, Kevin Hegg, our new website was launched during the week of Thanksgiving. Grateful thanks to Kevin for his technical assistance and to Rhoda, Collins Center Victim Advocate, for her design and hard work! Below is a small preview; please check out the site and let us know what you think. Our homepage is now set up in a blog format, so check back frequently for new and pertinent information. The website address is still the same: [www.thecollinscenter.org](http://www.thecollinscenter.org)



# BB&T Project Lighthouse

This past September, BB&T (Branch Banking & Trust Company) partnered with the Collins Center for their annual BB&T Project Lighthouse community service project. The project focused on preparing one of the Collins Center's offices for therapy with children and included purchasing shelving, a desk and other office accessories to make the room both functional and child-friendly. In addition, BB&T provided new phone equipment as well as photographic/printing supplies to document artwork created by child clients during therapy sessions.

The staff and board of the Collins Center wish to extend their gratitude to the BB&T branch on South Main Street in Harrisonburg for their generosity and efforts to make the Collins Center a better place to serve children who have experienced trauma.

# Disco Gala Wrap-up

On October 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Collins Center held our Annual Disco Gala at Clementine Café in downtown Harrisonburg. The night was extra special as we celebrated it as our 10<sup>th</sup> annual fundraiser! Many people from the community came down to support our work and also had a great time with food, drinks and dancing. Thanks to the generous support of attendees, we raised over \$21,000 in one evening! We would especially like to thank our sponsors for their kind support: Wachovia, Excel Steel, Richard Collins, Keith and Marie Morris, and Andy Huggins. Special thanks also goes Garrison Press for printing our invitations, Justin Michael for being our auctioneer, and finally Collins Center Board Members and volunteers for their help in procuring items for the auction, set up, and clean up the night of the event!



*The partnership is part of BB&T's companywide community service initiative in August and September called the BB&T Lighthouse Project. The philanthropic effort is the largest in BB&T's 137-year history.*

Check out our new & improved website:  
[www.thecollinscenter.org](http://www.thecollinscenter.org)

# My Story

A Narrative by Carol

It was 11 years ago that I faced him for what he did to me 20 years before that. But in December of 1998, we were in a court room. The judge was there. His lawyer was there. The district attorney handling the case was there. The detective who worked with me was there.

Suddenly, I felt like I was 10, 11, and 12 again. Just seeing his face took me back to being in my Plaza Patriots sports uniform and in his car. Sometimes other girls from the team he coached were in the backseat. Sometimes not. Either way, he would do the indescribable that still makes me shudder today. There, in the court room, I had to describe it. I had to answer the lawyers' questions. I had to speak loudly and clearly for the judge to hear and the court reporter to document it. All the painful details. All the emotions.

The miracle is that I was *able* to describe them. Less than two years before, I had sobbed and shook while telling some of those details to a group of fellow survivors at a CASA meeting. I couldn't bring myself to say all that he had done during subsequent meetings. I would either feel so nauseous that I had to throw up, or I would be so angry that I couldn't formulate my words. I listened to other survivors tell their stories and I would feel for them, but I was too afraid to feel for my own life story. But I kept talking. I kept attending CASA meetings and kept working with counselors. They believed me and provided access to information I knew little about. Like laws. Like how the judicial system works.

And I felt empowered. I contacted the police in April 1998. After an investigation and grand jury in August, the trial commenced in December of that same year. I didn't know it would happen so fast. I prayed for courage. Really, I prayed that somebody *else* would step forward to prosecute. I would gladly support any one of his other many victims. But it looked like I was going to be the one to come forward. The detective said that other victims were watching to see what happened with my case. I leaned extra hard on the CASA counselors during that time. They listened to me. They believed me. And I felt empowered enough to speak - to speak clearly and loudly for the judge to hear.

My Catholic faith has a special blessing called the Red Mass, for people who serve in the judicial system. The more I am learning about the blessing, the easier it is becoming for me to differentiate between justice and mercy. I know I was blessed with the support of CASA, or the Collins Center as it is now called. Their support empowered me to speak the truth which led to my perpetrator's conviction on December 8th, 1998.

*A special thanks to Carol for sharing her story.*

# Save the Date

JMU Sister Speak, NOW (National Organization for Women), and Student Wellness and Outreach presents:

## The Vagina Monologues

Sunday, February 14th

&

Monday, February 15th

JMU Memorial Hall

The 2010 Spotlight Campaign focuses on Women and Girls of the Democratic Republic of Congo. All proceeds will benefit the Collins Center and First Step.

*For more information, check our website closer to the date, or call JMU Student Wellness and Outreach at: 540-568-2831.*

## Support the Collins Center By Supporting V-day

V-Day is a global movement to stop violence against women and girls. V-Day is a catalyst that promotes creative events to increase awareness, raise money and revitalize the spirit of existing anti-violence organizations. V-Day generates broader attention for the fight to stop violence against women and girls, including rape, battery, incest, female genital mutilation and sexual slavery.

Through V-Day campaigns, local volunteers and college students produce annual benefit performances of *The Vagina Monologues*, *A Memory*, *A Monologue*, *A Rant* and *A Prayer*, and screenings of V-Day's documentary *Until The Violence Stops*, to raise awareness and funds for anti-violence groups within their own communities.

*For more information, visit: [www.vday.org](http://www.vday.org)*

**24-Hour Crisis Hotline: 540-434-2272**

# A Collins Center Christmas

Make this a season of hope for children in our community

Saturday, December 19th  
10 am — 12 pm

Join us for carriage rides,  
visits with Santa,  
music, hot drinks & cookies,  
children's activities  
& handmade ornaments

All proceeds benefit the Child Advocacy Center  
of Harrisonburg/Rockingham County

165 South Main Street  
outside the Collins Center  
and the Massanutten  
Regional Library



Event sponsored in part by:



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# Operation Fuzzy

## Offering Comfort After Trauma

By Polly Franks

*First Published on October 1, 2008 in The Franks Foundation Newsletter*

Let's face it. Nobody has a good time in the Emergency Room - ever. Patients simply don't show up there because they're having a great day. Sexually abused children, most especially, who turn up in the E.R. need as much comfort as possible during their forensic medical examinations and interviews.

This is why we at the Franks Foundation launched "Operation Fuzzy" on Sept. 11, 2007.

We deliberately chose this date as a small way to honor the countless unsung heroes of Sept. 11, 2001. The Franks Foundation - founded in 2006 - is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting America's kids from sexual predators. As the mother of two daughters who were attacked by Richmond's notorious "Bandanna Bandit" several years ago, I have been searching to find a tangible, effective service for my Foundation to provide for these young victims of crime. Thus, "Operation Fuzzy" was born. This is a program which provides "comfort kits" - stuffed animals, child-themed pillowcases, pads of drawing paper and crayons for children to draw or write on when they arrive in emergency rooms. Because my daughter was born at St. Mary's Hospital in Richmond, Virginia, I decided that this was the place to begin this program



The contents of these "comfort kits" are the brainchild of Bonnie Price, R.N., lead forensics nurse examiner at St. Mary's Hospital. The stuffed animal allows the child to point to where they have been harmed and in turn allows the forensic nurse examiner to show the child where they will be examined. We feel that it's important that the children be encouraged to pick the animal they want so that they have a little bit of choice in the midst of a situation which is so completely out of their control. The stuffed animal is also something the child can hold onto for comfort during their examination. Drawing pads and crayons allow the child to give a history of their abuse in a non-threatening way. The child-themed pillow cases allow the child to carry these new items all together when they leave the hospital. All of these "comfort kits" are for the children to keep, and need to be brand new so these children don't feel second-hand in any way. The Franks Foundation wants these children to know that they are loved and cared for during what is probably the worst day of their lives.



*Operation Fuzzy expanded its services to include Rockingham Memorial Hospital in 2008. We are grateful to the Franks Foundation for their support of the work of the Collins Center and the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners at RMH. The Collins Center used to provide comfort kits and stuffed animals for child victims, but can now put that funding towards other important services. Each comfort kit costs approximately \$25 to create. If you are interested in donating to Operation Fuzzy or in more information about the Franks Foundation, visit their website at: [www.franksfoundation.org](http://www.franksfoundation.org).*



*Polly Franks, Executive Director of the Franks Foundation*

**Concerned that someone you know may be at risk to abuse a child? Get help from the new Stop It Now! Online Help Center at [www.stopitnow.org](http://www.stopitnow.org)**

## Support the Collins Center



YES, I want to help the Collins Center's holiday wishes come true by helping those affected by abuse, sexual violence and mental health issues in our community. That's why I've enclosed my gift of ...

\$10    \$25    \$35    \$60    \$\_\_\_\_\_ (other)

Donor Name(s)

Address

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Phone Email

I would like to charge my gift to my credit card

Mastercard    Visa    American Express

Card number

Expiration Date

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO:  
The Collins Center  
P.O. Box 1473  
Harrisonburg, VA 22803



To make a donation online through PayPal, visit:  
[www.thecollinscenter.org/volunteer/donate/](http://www.thecollinscenter.org/volunteer/donate/)

## Christmas Wish List

The Collins Center wishes to thank current donors and those who have provided in-kind donations to help carry out the mission of the agency. You may now make monetary donations to the Collins Center using PayPal by visiting our website: [www.thecollinscenter.org/volunteer/donate/](http://www.thecollinscenter.org/volunteer/donate/)

If you would prefer to give a tangible gift, here is our current Collins Center "Wish List":

- Comfort item for child victims testifying in court (example: new stuffed animal)
- Provide supplies for one adult survivor in Art Therapy Support Group (a \$20 donation)
- T-shirts, sweatshirts, and lightweight pants sizes M and up for victims to wear home from an emergency medical exam when clothing is needed for forensic evidence
- Small toys or prizes for child therapy clients

## Act Now While Supplies Last...

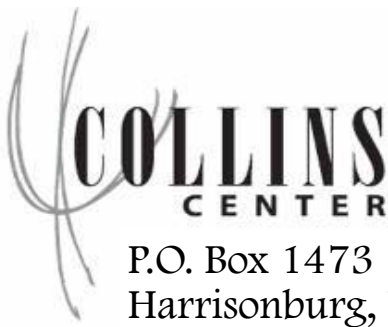
For the winter season, we are offering handmade, ceramic snowflake ornaments for monetary donations of \$5, \$10, and \$15. Stop in to see our Christmas tree and purchase an ornament to support the Child Advocacy Center.

*The Collins Center staff wishes you...*

**Happy Holidays!**



**Make a Difference ~ Make a Donation**



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*The Collins Center is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization funded through generous community donations and state, federal, and private grants. All crisis & CAC services are free and confidential.*

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The Collins Center encourages healthy relationships and promotes the safety and well-being of individuals and the community through its programs:

The **Sexual Assault Crisis Program** advocates for those affected by sexual violence through crisis services, support groups, and medical and legal accompaniment services.

The **Prevention Programs** work to strengthen relationships through education in order to end violence in our community.

The **Treatment Program** strives to provide quality, accessible mental health services in our community.

The **Child Advocacy Center (CAC)** is a multi-disciplinary partnership promoting the safety and well-being of children through prevention, treatment and a coordinated response to child abuse.

## Contact the Collins Center

**Physical Address:**  
165 South Main Street, Suite D  
(across from the public library)

**Send Mail To:**  
P.O. Box 1473  
Harrisonburg, VA 22803

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**Office Phone:** 432-6430  
**Treatment Center:** 432-0773  
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**24-Hour Crisis Hotline:** 432-2272

