

# Advocates for Victims of Violence Reaching Out to Those in Need

Advocates for Victims of Violence, Inc. (AVV) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the elimination of domestic violence and sexual assault in Prince William Sound and the Copper River Valley.

Their mission statement simply states, 'Advocates for Victims of Violence is dedicated to ending domestic violence and sexual assault in our communities by providing direct services to victims and their families, and effecting social, political and legal change.'

AVV serves an area the size of Ohio. While the shelter is located in Valdez, the AVV service area encompasses the entire Copper Valley. From South to North, AVV's services area is almost 200 miles long and includes 18 towns and native villages.

The vastness of the AVV service area combined with often difficult access causes challenges. It is not uncommon for both road and the Valdez airport to be closed due to high winds, heavy snow, poor visibility, or all three combined.

In good weather, the drive time from Valdez to Mentasta Village, the northern most AVV service community, is nearly four hours. Another AVV community, the native village of Tatitlek, is off the road system entirely and has no regular air or ferry service.

Despite these challenges, every effort is made by local advocates to get victims to safety.

AVV was founded in 1981 and, for over 25 years, has reached out to those in need. AVV traces its history to the late 1970s when community concern for battered women fostered small, local discussion groups sponsored by



*AVV supporters, Rowena Palomar and Jeanne Wilson participate in a Peace Walk and candle light vigil to promote Sexual Assault Awareness Month/Take Back the Night. Photo Courtesy AVV*

the Valdez Women's Resource Group.

In the winter of 1980, a support group for women in crisis was organized. In January 1981, Advocates for Victims of Violence was granted non-profit status.

Later that year, AVV began receiving funding for advocate staff from the State of Alaska. In addition, the City of Valdez granted funding for the renovation of the old Episcopal Rectory to serve as office and shelter space.

In June 1983 the facility was dedicated, and began serving as a location for victims.

In 1995 AVV Board and Staff recognized that the facility no longer met the needs of our communities and began strategic planning to relocate.

In November 1999, AVV relocated to a new facility better suited to the needs of the populations they serve. The current facility has ADA accessibility and boasts group and conference rooms as well as larger shelter and office spaces.

Domestic violence and sexual assault have a tremendous impact, both physically and emotionally, on victims and their families.

Many times, neighbors, co-workers and even family members are never aware that violence is occurring, since batterers will often go to great lengths to hide their use of violence.

Isolation allows the perpetrator to maintain power and control over the victim. In order to break this cycle of violence, communities must ensure that it is safe for victims to reach out for support and assistance.

AVV now offers many positive services for victims and their families.

At the forefront of those services is the provision of safe shelter for victims. These services are guided by a philosophy of empowerment. Having a safe environment, victims can fully explore their options, develop their resources, and make the best choices for themselves and their families.

AVV has a seven bed shelter in Valdez which houses women and children, but they also assist men who are abused and find them safe shelter.

Advocates provide information on legal services, Pro-Bono programs, health information, referrals, and an open ear for victims to share their stories. A 24-hour crisis line is monitored by trained and caring staff.

In addition, by offering prevention services to the general public, AVV strives to foster a social environment that works collectively to prevent violence and support those in need.

In addition to the shelter in Valdez, in January of 2008, AVV opened up a Rural Outreach office in Glennallen to better serve the population in the area.

The primary focus of the Outreach office will be to provide prevention services to youth in the Copper River



*ABOVE: Local youth enjoy rafting during the 2007 AVV Chugach Challenge Day Camp. RIGHT: Youth hiking at the 2007 Trust Walk Day Camp. Photos courtesy AVV*

Valley; however, staff will be able to serve individuals with one on one assistance and advocacy, whether it is finding a safe home, relocating to the shelter in Valdez or legal advocacy.

Over the years programs have expanded to address concerns of residents in the AVV service area.

AVV's Youth Program is recognized statewide as one of the best in Alaska. During the summer of 2006, AVV's Trust Walk Summer Camp served as the pilot for other agencies in the state hoping to provide this service to other communities. Other programs, such as Express Yourself, Girls Time and Teen Talk have become consistent programs offered to community youth.

Beginning this year, in commemoration of Women's History Month, AVV is presenting the First Annual Valdez Women of Distinction Award.

Women of Distinction awards recognize women who have made a significant contribution to their communities and to the advancement

of women in our society.

With the help of major contributors, such as BP and Larry and Janice Reynolds, AVV is pleased to bring the Women of Distinction Award to the Valdez community with a Celebration and Dinner to be held on March 29th, 2008 at the Valdez Civic Center. To find out more about AVV or to purchase tickets for the Woman of Distinction Award Ceremony, please call 835-2980.

AVV depends on their volunteers to help make their programs successful and are always looking for more. Currently, AVV has over 20 active volunteers who provide assistance for various activities, whether it is serving on the Board of Directors, helping with agency fundraising or community events, building maintenance, or general office assistance.

If you would like to be involved, give AVV staff a call. Volunteers are placed based on their skills and interests.

They can use help in areas such



as web design, writing articles for the agency newsletter, serving on committees, organizing fundraisers, lawn maintenance, or donating household items.

If you or anyone you know is living with domestic violence, there is help available. You can begin by calling AVV's 24-hour crisis line at (800) 835-4044 to find out what resources are available.