

It's All in the Cause



OASIS . . .

In the Community for Good

In April of 1978, a group of concerned members of the High Country community acknowledged a wide gap in services for those fleeing the violence of domestic abuse or dealing with the traumatic aftermath of sexual assault. Those community members included law enforcement, clergy, social workers, medical professionals and other service providers, and from their initial concern has come thirty-two years of “Opposing Abuse with Service, Information, and Shelter” (OASIS) with thousands of survivors and their children receiving support through crisis response, direct services, referrals, shelter, advocacy during medical and legal processes, case management, partnering through community collaboration, and support groups.

During those first years survivors were sheltered in safe houses at varying locations. Then, in 1988 OASIS purchased a house, situated at a confidential location, that serves as the current shelter, where up to twelve survivors and children can find safety, support, and the connection to critical services on their way to violence-free and independent living. However, the shelter is sorely in need of updates, so OASIS will be embarking on a major renovation of the existing shelter in upcoming months.

While many may be familiar with OASIS’s services, the community is often less aware of the outreach and prevention education provided by staff members. OASIS regularly speaks in local schools and to students and faculty at Appalachian State University as well as Caldwell Community College. Staff also meets with civic groups as well as both adults and youth in faith communities, offering education and training while encouraging everyone to join in the original and ongoing mission: ending the cycle of violence in the High Country.

In April, the agency will be busy with various outreach activities focusing on Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM). This annual observation, sponsored and promoted by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, invites community members to become more aware of the prevalence of rape and sexual assault, and to consider how they might use their influence and opinions to effect true and lasting change. Teal ribbons will be available at the OASIS office and at participating business such as Panera and Black Bear Books, and from several faith communities. Special displays at the Boone Mall are being planned by members of OASIS’s Prevention Committee, a group that meets to foster the “primary prevention” of sexual assault by addressing such topics as gender role stereotyping and myths surrounding sexual assault. The group also discusses ways to increase bystander behavior among peers, and invites men to become allies and partners with OASIS and the efforts to combat sexual violence. Men’s groups, such as Dads & Daughters, the White Ribbon Campaign, and Men Can Stop Rape, are becoming more vocal about bringing an end to sexual and domestic violence.

From the beginning, OASIS has been well supported by the community, and numerous collaborations have been part of its history. Currently, OASIS is part of a group called SART/DART, which stands for Sexual Assault Response Team/Domestic Abuse Response Team. The group meets monthly for updates and trainings and to discuss ways to improve services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. SART/DART is made up of representatives from the District Attorney's Office, the Watauga County Sheriff's Office, the Boone Police Department, the Blowing Rock Police Department, the ASU Police Department, the ASU Counseling Center, the ASU Health Center, and Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) from Watauga Medical Center, staff from Blowing Rock Hospital's emergency room, and OASIS.

Friday, May 7th, OASIS holds its Eighth Annual "Midnight at the OASIS" event, the organization's largest fundraiser. While those in attendance will be treated to heavy hors d'oeuvres from the chef at the Meadowbrook Inn and enjoy a cash bar and dancing to the music of Laditude, the most important part of the evening may be the stories shared by survivors. While it would be tempting to think domestic violence and sexual assault don't happen in this often idyllic community, the occurrences of both are all too frequent. In 2009 OASIS provided services for 266 survivors and 233 of their children, and responded to over 800 callers seeking services or information. In addition, in the past two years OASIS has seen a 20% increase in the need for services.

Clearly, the organization's original mission of ending the cycle of violence has not yet been realized, but OASIS isn't giving up. And why would they, with literally hundreds of committed individuals, business, and partners who give financial support and volunteer their time and energy and creativity with a goal of building a more peaceful and equitable community?

The problem hasn't gone away, but then neither has OASIS. They are well rooted in the community. For good.

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*OASIS, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is located at 225 Birch Street, Suite 4, in Boone. Office, 8-5 M-F: (828)264-1532
24-hour Crisis Line: (828)262-5035.*

Staff

Jennifer Herman, Executive Director

Rebecca Gummere, Associate Director

Kerry Gersonde, Director of Client Services

Lindsey Miller, Shelter Manager

Karen Bibb, Assistant Shelter Manager

Claire Williams, HPRP Coordinator

Hannah Whitaker, Community Services Legal Coordinator

Jenny Fairchild, Prevention Coordinator

Sheila Gentry, Accounting Coordinator

Go to www.oasisinc.org for more information.