

Snapshot of Success: Cache County, Utah

Standard Intro

“Every two minutes a woman is sexually assaulted somewhere in America”

“More than one million women are stalked each year”

“Nearly one out of three murdered women die at the hands of an intimate partner”

“America is responding”

Snapshot Transcript

Narrator: In 1994, Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act to address the problems of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. This landmark legislation created new federal crimes and provided resources to help states, tribes, and local communities focus on victim safety and defender accountability. These resources have made a real difference. In Cache County, Utah, VAWA funds are helping a community transform its response to sexual assault.

Scott L. Wyatt, Cache County Attorney: Well, back in 1994 in this county, there was a group of us that did some research because we were frustrated with what was happening with the prosecution in this area, and we discovered that for at least seven years, there had not been a single rape case filed, where the victim was an adult woman, and we decided that something had to be done about that. There were a group of police officers, a group of individuals who were involved in the shelter for women and others who all came together and said, we've got to change this. It appeared that the only way to change it, because everyone had tried to convince the prosecutor to start taking these things more seriously, the only way to do it would be to put a new candidate up to run for county attorney. I decided to run. I should tell you that at the time that I ran, we were featured in Glamour Magazine as being one of the worst counties in the whole country so far as prosecuting rapes against women, specifically rape. We decided that this was going to change, and it was going to change in a hurry. We ran this campaign and beat an incumbent, which isn't easy to do around here. Then once I'm in office and all these other people that have been supportive and helpful start coming around, we say, what are we going to do to fix it? We organized the local taskforce of professionals and different agencies that grew into nurses and police officers, prosecutors, psychologists, counselors, people from the university. Then we started seeking resources so that we could actually do what we were trying to do. Now, we live in a county that's relatively poor tax wise, and there was just no way that we were going to get more people in our office from those who are in control of the budget. When we sought an application for funding from VAWA, we sought funding for two things. One, a victim advocate and secondly, a prosecutor. And we received funding for both of those. Now we go from three prosecutors in the office to four prosecutors in the office. The fourth prosecutor is handling nothing but acquaintance rape cases. The victim advocate is handling the advocacy side for the victims on those

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same cases. At first, we were doing public education programs, but now we're very busy.

Rebekah F. Alpisa, Coordinator, Cache County Victim Services: We started from zero, we started from people receiving no notification of their rights to women, never having any kind of services or referrals. And we've gone from that to serving thousands of women every year. What we have done is we have tried very hard to create a system that intervenes for the victim from the very first moment of the assault, from the very first time that she tells someone. We have tried to make sure that that person knows the appropriate steps to take. If they're a pastor or if they're a counselor, or if they're a school teacher, that they know exactly what steps to take and who to call and what resources are available.

Narrator: Cache County's initial response to sexual assault is focused on collecting evidence without causing more trauma to the victim. When a victim reports, a team of professionals responds. Creating a sexual assault response team has positively impacted both victims and investigations.

Sgt. Steve Milne, Utah State University Police Department: The experience of being on a SART team is like night and day. You know, 18 years ago, given the conditions we were under, there wasn't a SART team. You had a victim that would come in and report. The police would start doing their stuff and their investigations. You might meet with the county attorney, who at the time was understaffed. And as you start doing your stuff, the victim would get lost in all of that. And pretty soon with everything they're dealing with, they didn't want to continue with the case, the cases would be dropped, and it made it real difficult. Now with the team, everything starts rolling right at once and again, the victim is taken care of.

Diane Crockett, RN, CEN, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE): We couldn't do this if we didn't have the team. When we get the initial call that there has been a rape occur or an alleged rape occurs, our central dispatch, where our police are, they will beep out the SART nurse who's on call. They'll also beep out a victim's advocate. At the same time a police officer or a detective will come. Usually, we'll meet at our clinic and sit down with the patient. Through that joint effort, we'll get all the information we need from the victim that night. She'll have to tell our story one time and one time only. We collect the evidence and she's home in 2 hours. It just makes it much nicer.

Donald G. Linton, Chief Deputy Prosecutor, Cache County Attorney: What we've done in the last couple of years, I think we've taught ourselves; we've taught our community, we've taught everybody in this office and our police forces that there are some really horrible crimes of a sexual nature. They're perpetrated against women. In the past, those women have just walked away, and they've suffered, and we've done nothing about it. And the men that have committed those crimes, have continued to commit them just against that particular victim but against others. As we've prosecuted some of these cases, and as the community has seen, some of the things that go on and the way that these men will manipulate and groom and lure young women into situations that are very compromising so that they can rape them. With that exposure, there's been a little bit of

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understanding that's developed as we've started to understand these things. We've started to believe that it happens. And the more we believe that it happens, I think the more commitment our community shows in alleviating the problem. That's what I see happening here. (Speaking to a Jury) And so I'm here now to ask you to do what you swore you would do at the beginning of this trials, to decide these facts fairly and to decide them honestly. If you analyze these facts fairly and if you analyze them honestly, you know, first of all that both of them can't be telling the truth and second of all, that she is telling the truth.

Scott L. Wyatt, Cache County Attorney: Rape is rape, is rape, is rape! You know, we don't say this was an acquaintance burglary or a stranger burglary, we just say this was a burglary. But in the rape context, we often refer to them is as a stranger rape or an acquaintance rape, or date rape, or marital rape. It's all the same thing. It just so happens that in our area, most of those rape cases are cases by acquaintances. And the word acquaintance to us includes marital. I think that that's probably one of the greatest crimes that we've got a very, very serious assault done by someone that the victim trusted and had confidence in. What a horrible crime. Throughout the country, prosecutors and police officers are saying we can't win those cases. They're impossible to win, and by saying that, we're sending the loudest message that we could send, that is, that you can rape a friend, because no one will prosecute you for it. We've turned that around in our county, and it's very clear that if someone is raped by an acquaintance, the police officers will investigate it seriously. The advocates in the community will treat them very well and we will prosecute them and we're getting convictions. We're convicting over 80% our acquaintance rape cases.

Narrator: Cache County's approach is working in the years prior to VAWA, no adult sexual assault cases were filed, but all that has changed. In 1999 alone, 65 sexual assault cases were filed in Cache County. But that's just part of the story.

Scott L. Wyatt, Cache County Attorney: A trial is nothing more than an education. We're just trying to educate defendants, and we're trying to educate juries. And we're trying to educate the public that if you engage in this activity, you're going to prison, because we don't stand for it. This isn't really a prosecution of one case after the next, after the next, this is a community revolution. This is an awakening. This is saying you cannot rape women in our county even if you know them, even if you're married to them. We don't stand for that.

Rebekah F. Alpisa, Coordinator, Cache County Victim Services: Before we were able to receive VAWA funding, women in the shelters and women who had been brutalized were told, quite frankly, by responding law enforcement officers, not to bother to even consider that there is going to be a prosecution of this case. They frankly told victims it would be very unlikely that their cases would ever reach court. Advocates in the shelters were telling women that it wasn't even worthwhile reporting a rape because nothing would come of it. Today, we have exponentially increased numbers of women who are reporting crimes to police because they know that they're going to be treated sensitively. They know that their needs will be met. This makes them better witnesses. This makes the justice process

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work, and this means that victims of crime actually do have a voice in the system if this is going to continue, given our rural area and given our reduced resources. If these efforts are going to continue to matter and make a difference in women's lives, then we are going to need to continue to receive the funding that our communities, although so supportive, are really unable to provide.

Sgt. Steve Milne, Utah State University Police Department: If we lost the Violence Against Women Act, we would go back to the way things were before. You would have people that wouldn't come in and report. You wouldn't have the staff there to pursue these things to prosecute these things. We would lose the SART nurses, and I wouldn't blame my own daughter if she's in a situation like that, I would probably say, look, it's a tough road, I don't know if it's going to be worth it, you're going to be left out there in the dark.

Diane Crockett, RN, CEN, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE): Our program would go, Colposcope would go, we would be back to looking at patients with magnifying glasses and flashlights and not taking any pictures, documenting any injuries. I don't think victims would be as willing to come forward. In fact, I know they wouldn't be because there wouldn't be any place for them to go.

Scott L. Wyatt, Cache County Attorney: It's my hope. It's a strategy that we have. It's our goal is to convince the budget controllers in our county that this isn't fluff, you know, this is really, really important so that if there does come a time that the funding disappears, that they'll understand how important it is. But we're not there yet and I don't know how long it's going to take us.

END

Standard Outro:

This program is dedicated to the survivors and victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking whose courage, strength, and commitment to these issues have inspired and informed us all.

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