



COMMITTED TO  
PREVENTING SEXUAL ABUSE  
& SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

LANCASTER, PA



SAFE  
COMMUNITIES

## Impact 2023: The Value of a Life

### *A Word from the Director...*

**Safe Communities served 1,725 people in 2023.** That's an impressive number for a small nonprofit, especially one with an executive director still recovering from a near-fatal heart aneurysm in July who spent several months re-learning how to walk, dress herself, and bathe. Yet the numbers served cannot measure our impact, despite the ever-present demands of the metric-driven nonprofit industry where exceeding last year's performance measures, including efficiency and increasing the number of people served is deemed success.



**Our impact is measured one precious life at a time.** What is the value of the life of a little girl who does not suffer the life-altering trauma of years of sexual abuse because of our prevention education? What is the value of the life of a woman who grew up living with a drug addicted mother who trafficked her before she ever reached the age of five?

How shall we measure the efficiency of working with an Amish woman who is breaking the chains of intergenerational abuse in an insular religious culture that punishes women who speak out about what they and their children are experiencing? And how do we value the transformation taking place in that culture when an Amish woman refuses a Bishop's order to kneel and "confess" in front of her church that she was disobedient to the ministry because she expressed concern to a non-Amish friend about the convicted child sex offender who was attending church in violation of his parole? The public courage of that single woman served by Safe Communities has an exponential impact on other Amish women who witnessed her bravery and will one day emulate her.

Each of these lives is infinitely valuable. After my near-death experience last summer where I was granted the rare opportunity for a new chapter in my life, I am even more acutely aware at how much the work of Safe Communities matters.

When I was growing up in a highly religious home where the cardinal rule was never to talk about the horrendous abuse that took place within its walls, there were no organizations like Safe Communities focused on child sexual abuse prevention. When I was on my own healing journey in individual therapy, there were no trauma-informed survivor groups focused on building community.

**I created Safe Communities to be that place.** And as I shift to a different role during 2024, stepping back from executive director into a part time consultative position, I trust that the forces of hope and love that brought this organization into existence will prevail against the forces of despair and cynicism that whisper

***“You can’t stop child sexual abuse! It’s been happening for millennia. And who is going to donate to a cause that makes people feel uncomfortable to even talk about? Besides, there are TOO MANY nonprofits. We don’t need one that focuses on child sexual abuse!”***

Let’s prove them wrong.

Your support is vital as we continue to build Safe Communities into a trusted resource for best practice prevention education, advocacy for Amish women and girls, cultural shifts in religious and other organizations to prioritize child safety, and collective healing platforms where survivors find support, community, and hope. **In the following pages, you can learn what was accomplished in 2023 by our donors, volunteers, and a few amazing foundations! It’s nothing short of a miracle, and a big drink of hope.**

***Linda Crockett***

Founder and Executive Director

January 2024

## **Impact Report 2023 Newsletter, *In this issue:***

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# 2023 Highlights

By Linda Crockett, Executive Director

## In April we hosted a full day retreat, *Resistance, Renewal and Re-Emergence*, for 25 survivors of child sexual abuse.

Survivors ranged in age from their twenties to their seventies, gathering in a beautiful Airbnb in a peaceful, country setting. Most trauma survivors feel a sense of restoration by spending time in nature, and the grounds of the home offered walks along a pond and through woods. A young poet read her work aloud for the first time. Another survivor who is a talented musician gifted us with music reflecting a journey from despair to hope. The day included trauma education, reflection, outdoor time, and sharing food, stories, and making art together. One woman in her 70s with beautiful silver hair stood up during one of the sessions and implored the others to “NEVER GIVE UP”, assuring them that healing is possible.



## Pennsylvania Dutch Interpreters Project

Until we launched this project in early 2023, the court system in Pennsylvania did not have a single native speaker of PA Dutch to interpret for young Amish children alleged to have been sexually abused, or Amish adults moving through the justice system for whom English is a second language and not always well understood. The Project succeeded beyond our wildest expectations, thanks to the persistence and hard work of our Plain community participants. Read the **“2023 Success Story: PA Dutch Interpreters Project”** below to learn how a small group of determined people made history in October!



## Clergy Training

During 2023, we trained over 150 religious leaders on *Sexual Ethics and Boundaries*, and on the *Intersections of Pornography, Child Sexual Abuse and Sex Trafficking*. Each training is 5 credit hours and delivered via live stream to registrants. Our “Ethics” training includes gendered violence and harassment (of clergy women), child sexual abuse by parishioners and clergy, and sexual ethics with adult congregants (i.e., there is no such thing as a consensual “affair” between a pastor and a congregant). Our “Intersections” training delves into the web of pornography and the increasing demand for more violence and younger victims, how children are now being trafficked by perpetrators in their family circles as they live stream child sexual abuse to “tube sites,” and the urgent need to address sexual violence against children in our own congregations and communities.

## Free Public Workshops

We provided 8 free public workshops via live stream with topics that included “Child-on-Child Sexual Harm”, Keeping Kids Safe on social media, Child Sex Offenders, Child Sexual Abuse – What every parent needs to know” and more. In December, we offered a workshop on the increased risk of sexual abuse during the holidays and provided parents and other caregivers with practical tips on keeping their children safe.



## **We transitioned from fiscal sponsorship to an independent tax-exempt non-profit organization.**

We incorporated in October 2022, and continued operating under our fiscal sponsor, Humanitarian Social Innovations, pending IRS grant of our tax-exempt status. On 2/1/23, we received notice from the IRS that we had been granted 501c(3) status. We continued to operate under HSI to finalize all operational details. On 5/15/23, we terminated our fiscal sponsorship agreement with HSI and funds they held on our behalf were transferred to Safe Communities bank accounts.

Our founding Safe Communities board includes seven dynamic women passionate about our mission, and with the experience and skills to steward the organization as it grows. They include: **Karen Bachman**, a former Vanguard risk manager and now a part time pastor; **Paula Knudson-Burke**, an attorney and journalist; **Pamela Riest**, a retired pastor currently serving on the Board of Trustees of Elizabethtown College; **Sherry Sensenig**, co-owner of a small business and former director of an organization serving parents of sexually abused children; **Alicia Haigis**, a public domestic violence survivor and powerful advocate for victims of abuse; **Robin Moulfair**, owner of a tax advisory service\*; **Dawn Harmon**, a pastor serving the homeless population and victims of trafficking.

*\*Robin is exiting her role as a Board member due to health concerns. We celebrate all that she gave to us and wish her Godspeed in healing.*

## **Safe House Initiative**

- Victims of domestic, sexual and structural violence in Conservative Anabaptist communities in Lancaster County lack safe and culturally appropriate places to go for themselves and their children. The Domestic Violence Shelter system is seldom used by Plain victims, largely due to its inner-city location and lack of cultural appropriateness for women from these communities. In addition, the congregate shelter is not set up for victims with 5 to 9 young children, which is typical for an Amish mother.
- To find a solution to this problem, we co-convened a committee that includes representation from public health, social services, domestic violence and sexual assault agencies, counselors who work with the Plain communities, and several Amish people. We began meeting in January and have developed a set of guiding principles and operating standards. Our work will continue in 2024.

## **Social Media 2023 Insights**

### **By Alyssa Swartz, Office Manager**

It's clear that 2023 was a huge growing year for Safe Communities. We worked together to impact our community in as many ways as possible. In 2023, we reached 3X as many people as we did in 2022 by reaching 14K people through our social media posts on Facebook and Instagram. Some of our most popular posts dealt with our programs like the PA Dutch Interpreter workshop, Circles of Hope groups, and our Survivor's Retreat. By strengthening our social media presence, we are connecting with new members of the community to provide education and support. This also helps increase our website traffic and strengthens our fundraising efforts. If you are on social media, we invite you to take a moment and follow us on Facebook or Instagram.



@safecommunitiespa

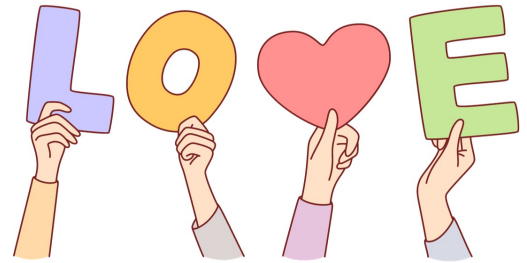


@safecommunitiespa

# Protecting Our Children: A Chore or an Act of Love?

**By Mark Harris, Assistant Director**

We at Safe Communities are no stranger to many of the responses out there by congregations to the requirements of Pennsylvania's Child Protective Services Law (CPSL). The steps for background checks, the trainings for Mandatory Reporting, the tracking to ensure that all staff members and volunteers are in compliance: all of it can sometimes seem daunting. In addition, people who may have been working with children for years may resist these new requirements, having not had to comply with them before the massive changes to our laws in 2014-2015, Grumbling is certainly not unheard of when following up on all the elements of staying in compliance with the CPSL.



Once, when presenting at a church, the Pastor introduced me, and told the congregation that they'd be cutting worship short to hear my presentation. When I began speaking, I pushed back on that a little. I wondered aloud to the congregation if we were indeed ending worship. Perhaps the formal kind of worship with its set structure had ended, but we would be engaging now in a conversation that was meant to improve our ability to protect the most vulnerable members of our community. I can't think of much that is more sacred than that, in the church where I was speaking, nor for that matter in just about any faith community of any tradition. Likewise, in all communities, protecting our children is a solemn and foundational obligation.

That long list of tasks and training is working towards protecting children. If we can present all aspects of this as acts of love for our children, rather than annoying new paperwork, how much better would the response be, and how much more would we be reinforcing the real purpose behind each task?

## A 2023 Success Story: PA Dutch Interpreters Project



***“Their courage and persistence continue to humble and inspire me.”***

*Linda Crockett, Executive Director  
November 29, 2023*

***“I am doing this so I can serve my community, especially the children.”***

**– Amish woman in our PA Dutch Interpreter Project study circle.**

History was made last month when ten of the Amish/ Old Order Mennonite students in our PA Dutch Interpreters Project passed an exam to certify them as interpreters for the Court System in PA! Until we launched this project, the few PA Dutch certified interpreters in our state were non-native speakers, and children had trouble understanding them.

## The Story:

Up until we launched this project in early 2023, the court system in Pennsylvania did not have a single native speaker of PA Dutch to interpret for young Amish children alleged to have been sexually abused, or Amish adults moving through the justice system for whom English is a second language and not always well understood. We learned from our work with Amish mothers that their children, who do not learn English until 3rd or 4th grade, typically would not disclose to the non-native speaking interpreters assigned to them because they could not understand their PA Dutch, and their manner of dress was culturally inappropriate and distressing to the children. This meant cases were prematurely closed, young victims often returned to homes and communities where abuse continued, and mothers punished by religious authorities who viewed the case closures as evidence that the mothers lied.

The opportunity to develop this project came when I spoke at a PA Court conference in November of 2022 about Amish culture and the justice system, emphasizing that language barriers too often blocked young children from access to justice. Court officials contacted us post-conference, saying it was a great source of frustration that despite efforts, they did not have any native PA Dutch speakers in a state with the largest Amish population in the nation. All their outreach had failed, and the few Amish women who took the certification examination did not pass. Given the exam is written at a two-year college degree level and most Amish women only have an 8th grade education, this was not surprising. They asked for the help of Safe Communities. This is a systemic cultural change with potential benefit to abused Amish children and their mothers, so we agreed.

Leveraging our relationships with Amish communities, we held an introductory workshop at a historic one-room school to introduce the program, attended by about 25 Amish. From that pool, we recruited a group of people to apply for certification in 2023. We worked with The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts to simplify the process and get waivers for requirements such as photo identification, which Amish generally do not possess. We set up study circles in Amish homes for applicants to improve their English proficiency, become familiar with the basics of the justice system, practice interpretation, and prepare for the test, developing the curriculum as we progressed through 40 hours of classes, with Safe Communities staff and some volunteers teaching. **History was made when ten Amish applicants passed the examination on October 18.**

There are already cases ready for them to interpret at court, for law enforcement, and in other venues.

This is empowerment through education! Most Amish are limited to an 8th grade education, and generally not encouraged to pursue more. That so many could pass a 140-question exam on court processes and terms written for those with a college degree is a miracle.

We plan to run another group in 2024, and we'd also like to offer the women who are certified the opportunity to meet periodically with a Safe Communities facilitator to help them process the vicarious trauma that is an occupational risk for anyone involved in this work. They will be interpreting for sexual abuse victims, as well as victims of violent crime. The concept of "vicarious trauma" is a new one to them. Many of these women have also experienced sexual violence and they are especially vulnerable to vicarious trauma.

We would welcome any contributions to help support offering these vicarious trauma groups to our newly certified interpreters, or in support of our 2024 PA Dutch Interpreters program.

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## Let our Voices Be Heard!

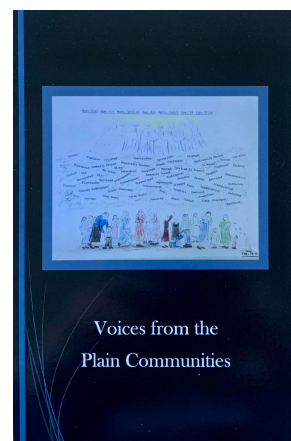
**By Mark Harris, Assistant Director**

Safe Communities is proud to present our first self-published book, *Voices from the Plain Communities*. The book is a collection of stories and poems from Plain Community members who have taken part in our Rachel's Sisters groups, which offer a faith-integrated healing curriculum which addresses trauma and healing. The groups have been a resounding success, and the writings collected, while difficult to read at times, are voices that deserve to be heard far and wide.

Here's an excerpted piece of one of the stories included in the book:

*This collection of stories, poems and artwork is dedicated to the women in the Plain Communities in and near Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The term "Plain" is used to describe Amish and those referred to as Old Order "horse and buggy" Mennonites, who separate themselves from the modern world in ways similar to the Amish. These women are part of a culture that values the opinions, perspectives and traditions that serve and protect men and boys, but often silence the cries of women and girls who are abused within their churches, homes and communities. Despite their suffering, they are some of the strongest and most faithful women I have ever known.*

*They are the change-makers in their communities, the ones who know that it is not the will of God that so many Amish and Old Order Mennonite children are abused, or mothers punished when they seek to protect their children with help from outside their community. And they know the time is upon us when what is done in darkness will be brought into the light. – Linda Crockett, Editor*



The cost of printing a limited quantity of these books was provided by a generous grant from the LMC Legacy Foundation. Copies of the book are available at our offices to pick up at no charge. Please call 717-560-9989 to arrange a pickup.

If you would like a copy mailed to you, please send your request, along with a check for \$8 to cover our shipping and handling costs, to Safe Communities, 313 W Liberty Street, Suite 242, Lancaster PA 17603

A maximum of two books per person will allow us to share the small quantity of books we have with as many people as possible.

Donations are also accepted to help continue the work of Safe Communities and to print more books!

## Following a Calling

### By Saloma Furlong, Volunteer

I had the soul-restoring experience of being a participant at the retreat led by Linda and Mark in the spring. I was already in awe of Linda and her leadership skills, and at the retreat I realized what a lantern-bearer she is. I felt a pull in the direction of adding my efforts to hers to advocate for those who are looking for support in changing or leaving an abusive situation and to support survivors in their quest to thrive.



Linda and I had talked earlier about the significant opposition that those who report child sexual abuse face within the Plain Communities. I left my Amish family and community when I was twenty to escape from abuse. Since then I have found I'm often an interpreter of the very culture I left. I thought why not use what I know to help Safe Communities with the work they're doing.

My husband David and I decided to move to Lancaster County partly so I can follow my calling, and also to be closer to our two sons. Several weeks after our move, Mark called with the news of Linda's significant illness. What a shock to hear what a close call she had. I am so grateful for her remarkable recovery, and that she is still helping to guide the ship of Safe Communities. During this transition of Linda stepping down from her role as Executive Director, I am volunteering. It is remarkable what three people have managed to accomplish, outlined by this Impact Report. The dedication is contagious, and it is gratifying to add my efforts to theirs.

In September, I had the privilege of attending one of the Study Groups for Pennsylvania Dutch Interpreters led by Mark. I was awed by the courage of the participants, knowing that at least some of them were facing opposition within their communities. Mark did a wonderful job of teaching the class, and I was happy to hear that ten of the Study Group participants passed the test to allow them to become certified court interpreters.

I am making connections within the Amish community with those who are inspired by Linda's leadership to stand up and resist how abuse is handled in their congregations. This is incredible. Linda has been accused of helping women find their voices. I'd say she is doing her job.

Getting a closeup view of Safe Communities has given me an appreciation for all your donations and support. Please know your donations are highly effective in supporting the work that Safe Communities does. I've never known such a small organization to have such a big impact. This is made possible by your support. Thank you!

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## Board Profile: Rev. Dawn Harmon

### Interviewed by Mark Harris, Assistant Director

Reverend Dawn Harmon, is a licensed and ordained minister. That calling led her in April 2005 to found and establish the ministry of "A New Beginning Bible Fellowship", a ministry largely based on helping the homeless, previously incarcerated and others disenfranchised and often neglected in society. Her dedication in helping those marginalized have a better quality of life inspired her to join in the efforts against human and sex trafficking with the organizations; North Star, Transport for Christ, Truckers for Christ, Exit#58, and Change Purse.



To further educate and involve the Lancaster County community in the fight against human and sex trafficking, she partnered with Not in My Backyard and Lancaster Theological Seminary for a presentation on human and sex-trafficking and how they can help end it. Reverend Harmon holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering from Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama and Master of Divinity degree from Lancaster Theological Seminary, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

#### ***1. Why is working with Safe Communities meaningful to you?***

As a survivor of domestic abuse and woman of color working with Safe Communities is meaningful to me as I am learning of other resources that I can share with a more diverse community that are in great need. Often these communities consist of women that are unaware of helpful resources such as Safe Communities that have representation for their causes and arms that are willing to extend into their communities to help stop the abuse and bring about healing to those that have been harmed by abuse.

Furthermore, my working with Safe Communities is meaningful to me as I am aware that many women of color are reluctant to report the abuse they experienced due to historical adverse responses from law enforcement in communities of color and /or financial instability when or if the abuser is the breadwinner. Though women of color's reluctance to report the abuse is a reality in our communities of color, being an overcomer and thriver after abuse provides me a platform to help others see they too can overcome, what tried to overcome them as I represent Safe Communities.

#### ***2. What do you most value about Safe Communities and its work?***

One of the things I value most about Safe Communities and its work is the opportunity it has to leave a personal touch of healing into diverse communities of survivors and their heirs, so that the cycle of abuse is cut off as the women learn they have value with or without a man. This is what impressed me with Linda and her work with the Amish women. She gained their trust so they could tell their story then provided healthcare resources as well as other resources for them to remove themselves from the abuser. I know this has not only had an impact on the abused women, but also her children male and female she had demonstrated that abuse is never right. Therefore, the abuse cycle is cut off in their line.



### **3. Why do you believe that child sexual abuse prevention; and healing and justice, making for survivors, are critical social issues to address?**

I strongly believe child sexual abuse prevention and healing, and justice making for survivors, are critical social issues to address. As a worker against human and sex trafficking for the past 15 years, I have seen first-hand how people's lives are and can be destroyed at an early age by adults and other deviant youth if no one is watching for the children and setting laws and boundaries in place. I have also learned that in many sex trafficking situations, the mother or father were once a victim of sexual abuse as a child and once they became a grown up with their own children, they saw nothing wrong with selling or trading their children for drugs, a place to sleep, food or money.

Therefore, we as concerned citizens for other humans' rights must stand up and advocate loudly for survivors healing, justice and child sexual abuse prevention because we have already witnessed and are witnessing what happens to our children when we don't put preventative, corrective and long-term measures in place to keep our youth safe and help them become all they can be, including keeping them safe!

### **4. How do you see your role as a Board member in helping Safe Communities to grow and flourish?**

As a board member, I see my role in helping Safe Communities grow and flourish as I am able to share other resources that can work alongside Safe Communities, since I have been involved with previously as a board member of boots on the ground member.

Thereby sharing Safe Communities goals and activities with these other groups and sharing these other groups goals and activities with Safe Communities produces greater network and possibilities for partnership reaching more communities of people to help stop the inhumane actions of abuse.



## **Your Donations Are What Make this Work Possible**



*We are THANKFUL for the valuable support of our individual donors, gifts from business such as B&G Glass, the Lancaster County Office of the District Attorney, Campaign Against Sexual Exploitation, The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts, and key foundations including LMC Legacy Foundation, The Alpern Family Foundation, Tecumseh Milestone Foundation, Lancaster Law Foundation, The Royer Charitable Trust, and the High Foundation.*

***Your partnership enables us to continue this work! Thank you!***

Safe Communities needs everyday items to keep our programs running. We have created a wish list of our most needed items on Amazon.com. Your aid will help us in continuing our work of educating people about Child Sexual Abuse and assisting Survivors. Please click on the link below to view our wish list.

Don't use Amazon? Here are some other ideas for everyday items that help keep our programs running.

- Postage Stamps
- Thank you cards
- Copy Paper
- #10 envelopes (windowless)
- Address labels (Avery #5160)

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To support us directly, you can click below to give online, or send a check directly to Safe Communities at 313 W. Liberty St., Suite 242, Lancaster, PA 17603

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## Our Mission:

**Safe Communities** exists to prevent child sexual abuse and to help survivors heal and live joyful, vibrant lives.

**Mission: Educate** adults about how to keep children safe from sexual abuse; **Engage** organizations, institutions, and congregations in developing a culture that prioritizes abuse prevention through best practices, policies, and training; **Empower** adult survivors through trauma-informed groups and peer-to-peer learning, sharing information and resources.

## Our Values:

**Respect:** Recognizing the worth and dignity of each person of every race, culture, and socioeconomic status.

**Integrity:** Adhering to moral and ethical principles, keeping commitments, doing the “right thing.” **Social**

**Impact:** Eliminating root causes of systemic social problems so that individuals and communities can flourish. **Equality:** Embracing non-hierarchical models within our organization, and our

work. **Accountability:** Being transparent and accountable to those we serve and our donors.

## Statement on Mutual Respect, Equality and Diversity:

Safe Communities affirms mutual respect, equality, and diversity in our work environment, hiring and community relations. These are reflected in our core values, they are the ethics that guide our work, and are embodied in our relationships.

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*Please share this newsletter with your friends, family, clients, colleagues, organizations, and faith communities to help spread the word that prevention and healing are possible.*

[www.safecommunitiespa.org](http://www.safecommunitiespa.org)

**We welcome your questions about any of these programs.  
Contact [info@safecommunitiespa.org](mailto:info@safecommunitiespa.org) or 717.560.9989**