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Lancaster, PA

Task Force Organized for Child Sex Abuse Prevention in Plain Communities

A new Plain Communities Task Force, successor to the Task Force that met from 2011 – 2014 to develop a Lancaster county institutional response to child sexual abuse prevention in Plain Communities, was organized in early 2020 by two of the 2011 Task force members, the Hon. Dennis E. Reinaker and Linda Crockett, now the director of Safe Communities in Lancaster. The group began meeting virtually each month just after the March pandemic closures.

The impetus came from several factors, including numerous Plain women breaking the silence about the sexual violence they suffered as children, several high profile media stories in 2019 on sexual abuse in Plain communities, and the report by journalist Sarah McClure of Type Investigations published by Cosmopolitan Magazine in January 2020. The widely read report told the stories of several Amish survivors. McClure described these women as the tip of the iceberg of the large number of survivors she interviewed during her investigation, most of whom spoke of being silenced, threatened, and shamed by their communities.

“Almost as soon as it was published, Plain survivors began contacting me”, noted Linda Crockett, who was quoted in the article along with Judge Reinaker. “They are still fearful of being named, but they want their stories to be told and changes made in the way abuse is handled. The time seemed right to organize another task force to move beyond what we could accomplish the first time around. While sexual abuse is prevalent in all communities, there are specific barriers to disclosing and accessing trauma-trained therapists, as well as evidence-based prevention education, that are unique to Plain Communities.”

The Task Force will focus on lowering those barriers, starting with prevention education and better access to trauma-trained counselors with the cultural competence needed to work with sexually abused Plain children.

Other members of the Task Force, including a few who also participated in 2011, are Alice Yoder, Executive Director, Community Health, Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health; Mandy Billman, LSW, Director, Sexual Assault Prevention and Counseling Center, YWCA Lancaster; Brittany Leffler, Counselor and Educator, YWCA Lancaster; Ann Martin, Esq., Gibbel Kraybill & Hess, LLP; Scott MacDerment, Parole Officer, Sex Offender Unit, Lancaster County Adult Probation/Parole Services; and community members Gene and Nancy Forrey, and Mary Boll.

The group plans to gather information and invite input before fine tuning its goals. Designated contact persons for the Task Force are Mandy Billman of the YWCA Lancaster 717.393.1735 X254 and Linda Crockett of Safe Communities 717.560.9991.

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