



For Survivors, By Survivors



SAFE
Survivor Advocates
for Empowerment



Peer-led
support and
advocacy for
those affected
by gender-
based violence
in Halton
Region and
surrounding
communities.



2026

EMPOWERMENT REPORT

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

LIZA RODRIGUES

BOARD CHAIR



This year has been one of meaningful progress and growth for SAFE.

We strengthened our foundation by welcoming dedicated administrative support, expanding partnerships across Halton and Peel, and taking important steps toward becoming a registered charity. These milestones have positioned us to better support survivors today while building a stronger organization for the future.

We are proud to begin expanding our reach beyond Ontario, with our first presence in New Brunswick and a thoughtful, phased approach to growing across Canada. As we listen to survivors and respond to emerging needs, we continue to expand our programs and services to ensure support remains accessible, relevant, and survivor-led. We have also strengthened relationships with valued community partners, including Achēv and Halton Women's Place, recognizing that collaboration allows us to reach more survivors and create lasting impact. As our organization evolves, we are actively recruiting and welcoming new Board and SAFE Committee members who will help shape our future and strengthen our capacity.

None of this would be possible without the dedication of our committee members, volunteers, Board members, community partners, donors, and, most importantly, the survivors who trust us with their stories and inspire our work every day. Your courage and resilience continue to guide everything we do. While we celebrate these milestones, our mission remains unchanged: to provide survivor-led peer support, advocacy, education, and hope for those affected by gender-based violence.

Thank you for believing in SAFE and for helping us build a future where every survivor is heard, supported, and empowered.

Together, we are creating lasting change.



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SURVIVOR STORY

On April 2nd, 2023 I sent the text message that would change my life forever... "Call 911"



It is difficult to truly describe the events leading up to that fateful morning in a way that captures the reality of our lives during that time. After 4 years of escalating violence I finally broke, though truthfully, I had been broken much longer. What I once described as my fairytale had quickly become my nightmare, intensified by the extreme isolation of the pandemic. My life had become a vicious cycle of verbal, physical and sexual abuse.

I have vivid flashbacks of nights spent wedging myself between our couch and the wall at night, praying he wouldn't find me in his drunken rage. The cold feeling in the pit of my stomach when I heard the slamming door and heavy steps coming down the stairs, where I was forced to sleep on the living room floor with my infant son. I remember the moment when blinking through tears I made out the vision of my daughter woken from her sleep only to see her mother's head split open and the wound gushing blood all over the floor. The fear in her eyes as the man she lovingly called "Dad" hovered over me, forcing me to beg for mercy. I remember the mornings I went to wake my son for school only to find him huddled on the floor by his door, where he had fallen asleep listening through the crack to the intense screams across the hall. The smashed TVs and phones, doors slammed right off their hinges, this became the soundtrack of our lives. Every meal became a war zone, every holiday a minefield we delicately navigated while waiting for the next moment he would explode. We lived in fear and moved through our lives like ghosts - I had accepted that one day this man would kill me.

SURVIVOR STORY

“

My justice is the freedom for my children and I to exist without fear.

My justice is no longer something I wait for, it's who i've become.

”



Yet something within me refused to give up, and in the days that followed his arrest I did the only thing I could to keep my children safe. We left behind our beautiful home, our neighbors and friends and the majority of our belongings as we boarded a flight out of the province. We fled for our lives after finding out he had been bailed out by his family without my knowledge, despite their promises to finally hold him accountable for his actions. They were complicit in the abuse.

I quickly learned that family court is more concerned with protecting fathers from people knowing they are abusive than from protecting women and children from abuse.

My ex was able to use a broken family court system as another arm by which to control and intimidate me. Those that thrive within a broken system are so very often the best to perpetuate it.

Almost 3 years have passed and in that time, I've been forced to redefine what justice means to me. There has been no court room victory, no closure - only survival. And somehow, that had to be enough.

Her name is Chelsie.

She is a survivor and is proud to be a member of the SAFE Committee. She bravely shares her story in the hopes to help other victims of abuse and Gender Based Violence.

SURVIVOR STORY



“ Even when I finally felt brave enough to share my story with peers, I was met with victim blaming. ”

Her name is Catherine.

She is the brilliant and talented artist who created this masterpiece. Like this masterpiece, Catherine is beautiful. She is also brave and courageous.

She is a survivor.

What you'll read next is her incredible story ... in her own words.

When I was 17, I was diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD). At 18, I was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Month's later I was introduced to an individual through a mutual friend who would irrevocably change my life.

This individual went on to sexually abuse me in the following months before I left to attend University, majoring in Studio Art.

SURVIVOR STORY



“ I was unaware he was coercing me. I had never been educated on what sexually coercive situations looked like. ”

My close friends, people I trusted to protect me, were aware of the ongoing abuse. I disclosed to them what he was doing to me and received little concern. In some cases, they were even in the next room while he abused me. At the time, I did not know what he was doing was wrong; I was unaware he was coercing me. I had never been educated on what sexually coercive situations looked like.

In September of 2019 I went to live in residence and attend University. There I was raped by a fellow student, on January 8th, 2020. This student was a friend of mine I had made earlier in the year, someone I trusted, who also lived in residence. I remember waking up in my own blood and not realizing what had happened to me. That morning, I ran to one of my close female friends at the time who took me to the campus health centre. I called my mother who arrived shortly after and took me to the hospital. My boyfriend at the time learned about the rape and told my mother he thought I had hallucinated the whole thing. That I was lying.

At the hospital, I received messages from him telling me to hurry up. Here I was, in emergency, being poked and prodded by staff and he was texting me, not to see if I was okay, just that this was inconvenient for him. At the hospital I was informed that this situation was common and happened quite often to female students.

SURVIVOR STORY



The nurse's comments were so matter of fact, her lack of empathy was disarming. I chose not to charge the student who raped me. I was concerned that he lived in residence and I was terrified he may hurt me. I blamed myself for what happened to me as I had been drinking with friends that night and I was also on Prozac.

The night after my rape, my partner messaged my mother, telling her I deserved it. Not only was I treated callously by professionals who were meant to help me, but also by my own partner. My fears about my abuser were confirmed. Shortly after returning to class, my rapist cornered me in the cafeteria, blocking the only exit in an attempt to speak with me.

I informed the University about the rape and his attempts at intimidation and they responded stating they could only "strongly encourage" me to not be on campus at certain times but could not do anything to limit his access to me. As I had not filed charges, the school felt they had little recourse and were uncomfortable speaking to him about the situation. To say I felt unsupported, and terrified is an understatement; I attempted to take my life in February of that year. I felt alone and directionless. Not wanting to live with this trauma and I feeling like I did not have a way out. When I made it to the hospital and was being admitted, a nurse asked me what I would do if he raped another girl, inferring it would be my fault if he abused another woman. At one of my lowest moments, yet another person felt it was okay to shame and humiliate me. Like I was a bad person for making the personal choice not to charge him.

SURVIVOR STORY



Even when I finally felt brave enough to share my story with peers, I was met with victim blaming. Online, people stated I must have been drunk, and in a short dress. That I must have been asking for it.

When I shared my pain and the conflict I felt about holding him accountable, people would say “well what about his life”. What about mine? What about the trauma that has impacted me so deeply?

With the start of COVID, students in residence, including myself, were sent home. I returned home and continued to struggle with the aftermath of my assault. In March I reached out to friends for support. These were the same friends I had before leaving for university. These friends indicated the individual I had escaped when I went to University had been struggling with a breakup and they encouraged me to speak with him to offer support. I felt he was someone I still cared about, despite our past, so I reached out to him.

We met up at the park near my house. I hoped he would be able to offer support for what I had experienced at university as I would support him with his struggles. He appeared to be sympathetic. I told him about what happened at the University, about the overdose and how I was struggling to process and deal with the trauma. I told him I was scared to charge this individual. He responded by saying how he was sorry that happened and invited me back to his house to speak more as it was cold.

SURVIVOR STORY



“
**These experiences are
one of the reasons I
want to help others;
why I joined SAFE.**
”

This was someone I knew since finishing high school, who lived in the same neighbourhood as I did, shared the same friends. When we got to his room he began to pressure me, saying that me going to university “tore us apart”. He then blamed me for my trauma and the first rape saying “maybe I had wanted what happened to me” that “maybe I liked being raped”. He asked if I wanted him to rape me. I was in shock, disassociated, and begged to leave. I struggled to get up and he held me down, telling me that I “couldn’t leave like this”, that he would “feel bad”. I continued saying I wanted to leave, that I had to leave.

Catherine’s story continues here:

<https://www.survivor-advocates.org/survivor-story-catherine>

After I was raped I could not begin to comprehend what my life would look like in the months and years that had followed, only that I wanted the deep pain and horror to end. I felt isolated and alone, that no one understood what I was going through. I am grateful I have found my voice at SAFE and hope to continue speaking about my experiences to let others know they are not alone. I am currently in the final year of my program, and I hope to become a psychotherapist like my mother to provide support to other survivors within the community.

Catherine is a survivor and is proud to be a member of the SAFE Committee. She bravely shares her story in the hopes to help other victims of abuse and Gender Based Violence.



SUPPORT

We pick you up where you are, and
take you where you want to go



ADVOCACY

Advocating on behalf of people
suffering from gender-based
violence in the forums that matter



FACTS

Provide relevant and timely resources
based on a survivor's specific needs



EDUCATION

Survivor-led education of victims
and the wider community

IMPACT IN 2026

62

Survivors directly supported by SAFE Committee members

19

Events SAFE participated in/hosted

11

Active SAFE Committee Members

48

Workshops delivered

9

Programs

509

Social Media Followers

291

Subscribers to SAFE-News!
(newsletter)

As at: July 22, 2026

THE SAFE COMMITTEE

LORRAINE ROLLO

CHAIR



“Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a declared epidemic in Ontario.

Having SAFE there to provide the survivors voice is paramount to supporting victims/survivors of GBV.

Our unique perspective through our lived experience ensures we focus on the needs and voices of those directly affected by violence.”

The SAFE Committee is the heart and soul of SAFE. The Committee is made up of female-identified and non-binary survivors who are no longer in crisis. Their core focus is to provide support and services for victims and survivors and their family members, educating the community through advocacy efforts and speaking engagements, and providing community consultations to organizations who service victims and survivors.

WHO SAFE SUPPORTS



Victims and Survivors

Female-identified, non-binary individuals who have experienced gender-based violence (GBV) or intimate partner violence (IPV).

SAFE supports these individuals to prevent them from before, during and after experiencing abuse.



Support Agencies and Law Enforcement

Professional agencies and police providing professional services to victims and survivors.

SAFE provides a survivor's voice in each step of engagement.



Community and Government

General public and government representatives.

SAFE organizes events to educate the public to recognize GBV and IPV, how to support those in need, and how we can work together to prevent it. SAFE also advocates for survivors to government representatives at all levels.

THE SAFE COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

SAFE Trail Walks



Hope In Every Step



National Indigenous Day



Halton Pride



THE SAFE COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES



November is
**WOMEN
PREVENTION
ABUSE MONTH**



EDUCATING 1ST YEAR MEDICAL STUDENTS AS A GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) SPECIALIST AND COMMUNITY PARTNER COLLABORATOR

Lead Educator is Lorraine Rollo,
SAFE Committee Chair

Topics include:

- ✓ Forms of abuse, trauma through medical professional treatment
- ✓ Brain injury through domestic violence or intimate partner violence
- ✓ Using correct language in trauma-informed care
- ✓ Deepening knowledge and understanding of what trauma-informed care looks like from a survivor perspective



JUST THE FACTS

- **Every 6 days a woman in Canada is killed by an intimate partner.**
~CBC
- **1 in 8 women and girls globally have suffered rape or sexual assault before turning 18.**
~United Nations
- **More than 11 million people in Canada have experienced Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) at least once since the age of 15. The rates are higher for:**
 - **Women with disabilities (55%)**
 - **LGB+ women (67%)**
 - **Indigenous women (61%)**
 - **Women living in poverty (57%)**
 - **Than for all women (44%)**~ Women and Gender Equality Canada
- **Almost $\frac{2}{3}$ (64%) of people in Canada know a woman who has experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.**
~Canadian Women's Foundation

EVEN MORE FACTS

- **Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) was declared an epidemic in Peel Region in 2023. It is the main reason for referrals to Peel Children's Aid Society, representing roughly ⅓ of all referrals to the agency and 58% of referrals from police.**
~ Dave Irish/CBC
- **In Canada, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men will experience sexual violence in their life.**
~ Statistics Canada
- **59% of transgender and gender-diverse people experience violent victimization compared to 37% of cisgender individuals.**
~ Women and Gender Equality Canada
- **120 (and growing) municipalities have declared Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) an epidemic.**
~ <https://www.buildingabiggerwave.org/actions/gbv-epidemic>

IMPACT STATEMENTS

Names withheld for privacy reasons

The fact that the facilitators are also survivors of DV, the connection was much stronger than what I anticipated.

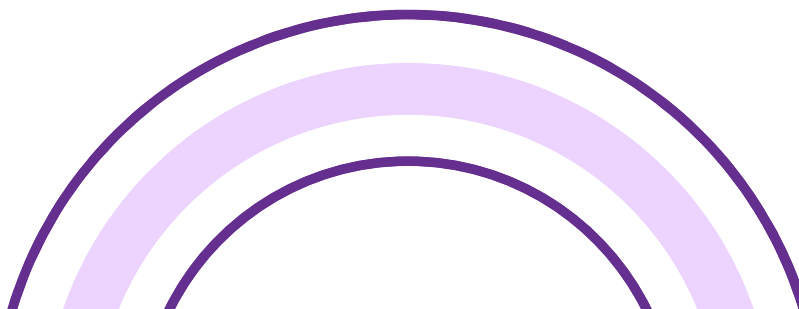
I wish this program was longer.

It made me feel important, heard and cared for.

I always look forward to Wednesday night's program.

I wish more women could benefit from this experience. Something deeply healing about being in a group of facilitators who have walked through the path and survived and thrived. I have made practical changes to my life and self-care/health habits because of SAFE.

I felt accepted for who I am and who I wanted to become based on what I have experienced. I felt no judgment or pity.



IMPACT STATEMENTS

Names withheld for privacy reasons

“

Lorraine Rollo has fearlessly led our committee toward community partnerships, recognition of survivor's voices, and assisted those currently in need. She devotes much of her spare time to this cause as a brave advocate to those who cannot currently speak for themselves.

”

“

**Nice session.
Gave safe space to everyone
to talk.**

”

“

**Very nice session. I got lot of
good feeling of sharing and
hearing someone story.**

”

“

**I work in the medical profession and
have great support and just need to
speak to you from your lived
experience. You just have a better
understanding of where I'm at.**

”

IMPACT STATEMENTS



RISE PROGRAM

Providing Support to Women
Experiencing Abuse

STRONGER TOGETHER:
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
PREVENTION AND SUPPORT

“ Achēv greatly values its partnership with SAFE and the critical role the organization plays in supporting individuals affected by gender-based and intimate partner violence through Achēv's RISE and Stronger Together programs. Together, we provide participants with a coordinated continuum of support that combines SAFE's expertise in safety planning, crisis intervention, and trauma-informed care with Achēv's skills development and economic empowerment programming. This collaborative approach enables women and other equity-deserving individuals to move beyond immediate challenges, strengthen their confidence and resilience, and achieve greater financial independence and long-term stability. Partnerships like this are essential to building safer, more inclusive communities and creating meaningful, lasting change in the lives of those we serve.



Ayesha Bhikha

Senior Director, Programs and Services - Achēv

“ Our partnership with SAFE has been transformative for women healing from gender-based violence. The services, including peer support sessions led by Lorraine, have provided our clients with safety, dignity, and hope as they rebuild their lives. We are grateful for SAFE's unwavering commitment to empowering women and creating pathways to safer and brighter futures.”

Sonja Johnson

Manager Career & Loan Services - Achēv

IMPACT STATEMENTS

“ Through our partnership with SAFE, Achēv’s Stronger Together program has significantly strengthened frontline and community capacity to recognize, respond to, and support individuals impacted by gender-based violence (GBV).

Together, we have equipped board members, staff, mentors, volunteers, and facilitators across organizations such as the Cross-Cultural Community Services Association, Metrolinx, Newcomer Women’s Services Toronto, and the Women’s Centre of Halton with practical, trauma-informed tools that can be applied immediately in their work.

Participants consistently reported increased awareness, enhanced confidence, and greater capacity to provide survivor-centred support within their programs and communities.

This collaboration has also contributed to the creation of safe, empowering learning environments for women, newcomers, and community members. Through webinars and in-person workshops grounded in storytelling, reflection, and open dialogue, participants engaged meaningfully with topics such as healthy relationships, self-compassion, personal well-being, and recognizing the signs of abuse. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with participants expressing appreciation for the safe, inclusive, and validating spaces created through these sessions.

Many participants requested additional workshops and highlighted the ongoing need for these supports within community settings.

“

I have to highlight the workshops that we collaborate with SAFE on are just always absolutely knocked out of the park
Program staff

”

IMPACT STATEMENTS

In addition to educational programming, several individuals have accessed SAFE's peer support services through referrals and program participation.

Feedback from those who engaged in peer support has been exclusively positive, with participants describing the experience as supportive, empowering, and instrumental in helping them feel heard, understood, and connected to appropriate resources.

SAFE's survivor-centred, community-driven approach ensures that participants feel seen, heard, and supported throughout their journey. By empowering both individuals and organizations to better understand their role in preventing and addressing GBV, this partnership is helping to foster a broader culture of accountability, care, healing, and collective resilience across the communities we serve.

Samantha Iyere

Manager, Career and Newcomer Services - Achēv

“

[My peer supporter is] absolutely fantastic....it's cool because she's had similar experiences as I have and it's kind of like talking to like an older sister, you know...she's very supportive and she also like helps me understand...she gets my point of view and she'll be like, "yeah, that sucks!" Like, let's get angry about this, you know? ...It's nice to have someone on your side because ... when I go to my therapist, it's always like, "how do you feel?" And I was like, I want to rage, you know, I want to rage with somebody, right?

Client

”

IMPACT STATEMENTS

“

Halton Women's Place is thankful for our continued partnership with SAFE. From this collaboration, SAFE was able to provide four 8 week programs to our Safe Shelter and Outreach clients. Through their Safe Voices and Safe Space programs, our clients have been able to receive peer support that works parallel to HWP programing; Women are able to share their experience freely with others that have been in their shoes. We are happy to have SAFE in our community and look forward to future collaborations.

Thea Goodings
Logistics Supervisor, Programs & Services

”



COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS



Halton Women's Place
Healthy Relationships • Healthy Communities



**THE WOMEN'S CENTRE
OF HALTON**



RISE PROGRAM

Providing Support to Women
Experiencing Abuse

**STRONGER TOGETHER:
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
PREVENTION AND SUPPORT**

Gender-Based Violence Affects Us
All. So Does the Solution.

CERTIFICATIONS & MEMBERSHIPS



Halton Women's Place
Healthy Relationships • Healthy Communities



FINANCIALS

Survivor Advocates for Empowerment	
Statement of Financial Position	
For the period ending July 31, 2025	
ASSETS	
Current Assets:	
Cash	\$ 3,745
Prepaid Expenses	718
Total current assets	4,463
Total assets	\$ 4,463
LIABILITIES	
Current Liabilities:	
Deferred contributions (Note 1)	\$ 2,000
Total current liabilities	2,000
Total liabilities	\$ 2,000
NET ASSETS	
Without donor restrictions	\$ 2,463
Total net assets	\$ 2,463
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 4,463

NOTE 1: DEFERRED CONTRIBUTIONS – CONTINGENT GIFT

During the year, the Organization received a commitment of \$2,000 from a donor. The contribution is contingent upon the Organization obtaining registered charitable status, which would enable it to issue an official donation receipt for income tax purposes. As of the financial statement date, the charitable status had not yet been granted. Accordingly, in accordance with the deferral method of accounting for contributions, this amount has not been recognized as revenue and is included in deferred contributions on the statement of financial position. Revenue will be recognized once the condition has been met.

NOTE: SAFE's Fiscal 2026 reporting will be available after July 31, 2026 (SAFE's fiscal year end). Balance Sheet and/or Profit & Loss Statement dated May 31, 2026 are available upon request. Email: info@survivor-advocates.org



SAFE

Survivor Advocates
for Empowerment



For Survivors, By Survivors



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ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

MISSION

SAFE's mission is to address and prevent specific barriers faced by victims and survivors of gender-based violence, their families, and their friends by providing:

- 1. Peer support, discussion groups, outreach programs, and workshops catered to the specific needs of survivors, as identified by survivors.**
- 2. Educational programs to and consulting with community organizations about gender-based violence from the perspective of survivors with lived experience.**

SAFE offers a range of peer-led services for those affected by Gender-based Violence in the Halton Region and surrounding communities.

Whether you're looking for emotional support, advocacy, education or connection to resources, our services are grounded in lived experience and built to honour your unique journey.

**You are always believed.
You are never alone.**



Survivor Peer Support

Companionship to recovery



Sexual Assault Awareness

Events, workshops and speaking engagements



Advocating for Survivors

Empowering the survivor's voice



Speakers Bureau

Sharing experiences and educational topics



Public Education

Educational programs for the community and professionals



Resources

Creating resources to assist in existing programs and initiatives

GET IN TOUCH WITH US

If you know someone who may need support, feel free to refer them directly to SAFE via:



info@survivor-advocates.org



www.survivor-advocates.org



safe_advocates



survivoradvocatesforempowerment



survivoradvocatesforempowerment



@SAFE-SurvivorAdvocates