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The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay Gives Voice to Victims and Survivors of Sexual Assault

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month and several events are scheduled to honor victims and survivors

By [Deborah Bostock-Kelley](#) | [Email the author](#) | April 10, 2011



April is Sexual Violence Awareness Month.

According to [RAINN](#) (the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network), every two minutes, a man, woman or child is sexually assaulted in the United States.

But local officials say the profile of a rapist is no longer a masked stranger waiting patiently in bushes and dark alleys.

"The vast majority is an acquaintance and within your race and your socio-economic (group). It's your neighbor, your friend, your boss – it's generally a situation of power," said Amy Bustin, Victim's Advocate at the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay. "Someone has power over another person and they take advantage of that situation."

The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay offers comprehensive sexual assault services, free forensic medical exams, counseling, and a free legal advocate service to rape victims. To learn more about the Crisis Center's Sexual Assault Services, call 2-1-1, or visit www.crisiscenter.com.

Whether it is self-blame, guilt, humiliation, fear of reputational loss or not being believed by friends, family or law enforcement, 60 percent of all attacks go unreported.

"Our number of exams has gone down," said Michele Wykes, Director of Sexual Assault Services. "Rapes have not gone down. That says a lot."

Members of the community are doing their part to help the cause as well.

Last week, during her second annual [Walk in My Shoes tour](#) across Florida, Lauren Book - a sexual abuse survivor, advocate and founder of [Lauren's Kids](#) - was an honored and returning guest of the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay.

At the Center's celebration barbeque, Lauren was taken on tour of the facility and did a book signing of her new memoir "[It's OK to Tell](#)."

As a child, Book endured physical and sexual abuse for six years at the hands of a trusted nanny, who is serving a 25-year prison sentence. "It's OK to Tell" details Book's ordeal and how she turned pain into determination to help other sexual assault victims.

Book's 1,000 mile, 39-day walk is quite significant. She was inspired two years ago by a man with diabetes who was walking to raise awareness and lose weight. She thought if he could raise awareness, so could she about sexual abuse during Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

"We walk every day for 1 million survivors of childhood sexual abuse," explained Book. "There are 39-million sexual abuse survivors, and the number is growing every day. And those are the ones we know about. Every day we walk for a million people."

Book is not just about walking to raise awareness about sexual abuse, but also to promote changes to Florida law to enhance victim's rights. One of her stops is the steps of the capitol in Tallahassee for the "Lauren's Kids Rally in Tally."

Book is promoting the Walk in Their Shoes Act, an act which outlines the protection for sexual abuse victims. The act aims to enhance the Rape Crisis Program Trust Fund, provide assistance with relocation for victims of sexual crimes, offer Internet safety/health education, and provide quick HIV tests for offenders and more.

"During the walk, one of the things we've talked about is sensitivity training for officers (dealing with rape victims)," Book said. "I am going to call some of the people we work with and see if it's not too late to add that to our bill ... We can make true change in the state of Florida and make it a safer place for our children and families. That's our ultimate goal."

In 2010, four legislative bills were passed to protect sexual abuse victims due to the efforts of Book and those who joined her walk.

A native Floridian, Book began walking this year in Key West and will end in Alabama.

"We are heading all the way to Tallahassee by way of the panhandle and stepping into Alabama," said Book. "We want to show that we are symbolically stepping into another state making change, creating that awareness – that we can cover the entire state and make a difference for all people of Florida."

According to national statistics, one in three girls and one in five boys are sexually abused before the age of 18. Book hopes this walk will help bring these statistics to light.

More importantly, Book wants to make sure everyone understands the importance of telling.

"Our number one message is it is okay to tell," said Book. "Beyond that, it's about getting people to realize what's available to them at the different centers throughout the state. It's about making a difference, healing, and empowering others."

Survivors, family and friends are encouraged to join in any part of Lauren's state-wide walk to raise awareness of sexual abuse.

For more information on Book or to join her walk, visit laurenskids.org to register. Donations are also accepted. Visitors also can write to Lauren and follow her progress on Twitter at [@LaurensKids](https://twitter.com/LaurensKids), Facebook at [Lauren's Kids](https://www.facebook.com/LaurensKids) and YouTube at [Lauren's Kids](https://www.youtube.com/LaurensKids).

Other events this month include: *the Sexual Violence Task Force of Tampa Bay, in collaboration with the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, will host "Take Back the Night" on April 16. The event symbolizes a woman's inability to walk alone at night without fear. It includes a music fest, community resource fair, performance by the University of Tampa choir, a men's pledge, and silent empowerment march, and concludes at 8 p.m. with candlelight vigil and a survivor speak-out.*

FAST FACTS

1 out of every 6 American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape.

Approximately 33 percent of rapes were committed by someone known to the victim.

- 73 percent of sexual assaults were perpetrated by a non-stranger.
- 38 percent of rapists are a friend or acquaintance.
- 28 percent are an intimate relation.
- 7 percent are a relative.

93% of juvenile sexual assault victims know their attacker.

More than 50 percent of all rape/sexual assault incidents were reported by victims to have occurred within 1 mile of their home or at their home.

- 4 in 10 take place at the victim's home.
- 2 in 10 take place at the home of a friend, neighbor, or relative.
- 1 in 12 takes place in a parking garage.

43 percent of rapes occur between 6 p.m. and midnight.

Victims of sexual assault are

- 3 times more likely to suffer from depression.
- 6 times more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.
- 13 times more likely to abuse alcohol.
- 26 times more likely to abuse drugs.
- 4 times more likely to contemplate suicide.

***The above information was gathered from the following sources:** National Institute of Justice & Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence Against Women Survey, U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement, U.S. Department of Justice, National Crime Victimization Survey, World Health Organization, National Institute of Justice & Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence Against Women Survey.

