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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OPEN ARMS NOTES DISTURBING INCREASE IN SEXUAL ASSAULTS

FINDLAY, Ohio (2/9/2009) – Open Arms Domestic Violence and Rape Crisis Services reports an increase in the number of sexual assaults handled by the county’s Sexual Assault Response Team through the Blanchard Valley Emergency Department in 2008. Hancock County’s S.A.R.T., in place since 1996, handles the sexual assaults of victims over the age of 13. “In the past we typically average between 21-26 reported sexual assaults a year at the ER,” said Beth Meeks, Executive Director of Open Arms. “In 2008, we responded to 32 sexual assaults. This is a 30 percent increase.” Although the numbers are small there was a disturbing trend in the last quarter of 2008 when 19 of the assaults were reported.

“In the last six months of 2008 reported sexual assaults were double what they were in the corresponding months of the previous year. This is a highly unusual time to see a spike in numbers since winter is characteristically the quietest time of the year for sexual assaults,” Meeks explained.

These assaults correlate closely in time to the economic downturn. The National Institute of Justice recently completed research indicating that crimes in families triple during times of financial strain, and after times of unemployment they quadruple. According to the National Center for Victims of Crime, over 70% of sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows.

It does not appear that this trend is relenting any time soon. Already in January of 2009, a month that is typically devoid of sexual assault reports, there have been 5 reported rapes of victims ages 13 and over handled at the Blanchard Valley ER. Members of the S.A.R.T., including Sexual Assault Nurses, law enforcement detectives, Open Arms personnel and prosecutors have begun meeting and declared a Task Force which will be examining all the processes the team is currently using to address the problem.

“We are evaluating not only what might be the root causes of this problem but how best to equip ourselves through training, staffing and best practice interventions to handle the increase in cases,” says Meeks.

Open Arms Domestic Violence & Rape Crisis services is a nonprofit agency supported in part by the Hancock County United Way. Open Arms provides six program services to those living and working in the greater Hancock County community. The six programs include Rape Crisis Services, Child Advocacy, Violence Recovery Project, Outreach Services, the Harmony House Visitation & Exchange program, and Emergency Shelter Services. The 24-hour Crisis Hotline is 419-422-4766. Join us at our blog at openarmsfindlay.blogspot.com for updates on our everyday life here at Open Arms.

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