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All The Good The SAAFE House does for Huntsville

Since attending Sam Houston State University in 2017, I have noticed many organizations actively involved in the Huntsville community. One in particular is a non-profit organization known as the SAAFE House. The SAAFE House, which stands for sexual assault and abuse free environment, is a shelter that allows victims of domestic violence to get back on their feet through the different services that they offer. I recently had the opportunity to interview with the volunteer coordinator at the SAAFE House, Kathryn Hays, to gain more information on the services they offer victims, how volunteers for the SAAFE House help them provide these services to victims, and was not only shown how their contributions are positively impacting the Huntsville community, but have also been fortunate enough to see it first hand through actively being involved in my sorority, Alpha Chi Omega.

As stated above, Kathryn Hays is the volunteer coordinator for the SAAFE House here in Huntsville, Texas. She explained that the services offered for victims at the SAAFE House include the basic living necessities such as food, water, clothing, a safe shelter, face to face crisis assistance, legal advocacy along with individual and group advocacy, referrals, and most importantly, different skills and resources to help them live an abuse free life. Hays also went on to explain that since the SAAFE House is a non-profit organization, in order for them to continue to offer these services for victims, they rely heavily on volunteers for funding and to help them carry out some of these services.

The volunteer process for the SAAFE House is lengthy, but is necessary because the information of victims is confidential and this process is put in place to ensure that these victims are kept confidential for their own safety. The process includes the application, interview, references, background check, and orientation. Once these five things have been completed, then an individual can begin their volunteer work at the SAAFE House through either their support services, clerical work, the resale shop, or through direct services. The support services at the SAAFE House includes volunteers organizing their pantry and cleaning/ arranging the play therapy room and other rooms where victims may enter. The clerical work includes volunteers helping administrators file, answer phones, and handle finances and personal records of victims. The resale shop includes volunteers selling different items such as clothes, shoes, toys, living room decor, kitchen utensils, and much more. Lastly, the direct services is a bit more complex because it requires a 40 hour training plus the orientation, whereas the support services, clerical work, and resale shop only require the orientation. The reason for this is because volunteers for this service work directly with the victims. Volunteers for the direct services can be used as forms of transportation for other people, taking care of children while they or their guardians are in sessions, and being advocates for the victims. An example of a volunteer being an advocate for the victims would be a medical support advocate where they meet clients at the ER if they have been sexually assaulted and essentially are their voice and help them understand the system when they may not know. All of these services offered through the SAAFE House are extremely important for the victims, and in order for them to continue to be offered, volunteers truly are needed to allow the SAAFE House to continue to operate.

The SAAFE House is positively impacting the Huntsville Community in more ways than one, but the number one way that they are making a difference in Huntsville is through how

much awareness they have brought towards domestic violence that has ultimately allowed other individuals and organizations to do the same. I have gotten to see this impact first hand through my sorority hosting events for the Huntsville community to come out and make donations pertaining to toiletries, non-perishable items, clothing, etc. for the SAAFE House, and to help raise money for them as well. I also got to see this impact last year through being invited to attend the mayor of Huntsville's proclamation declaring the month of October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Without the SAAFE House continuously advocating, educating, and providing services/ resources for victims, there would not be such an outpour of community support from other offices and organizations such as Alpha Chi Omega and the Mayor's office. Since the SAAFE House is persistent in helping victims of domestic violence, it allows others in the Huntsville community to see all the good that they are doing and only leads to them wanting to help as well. Ultimately, with the volunteers and other organizations that help out with funding for the SAAFE House, they are helping them educate the public and shed light on the dark subject that is domestic violence. Through seeing and hearing about the community effort towards the SAAFE House, this will hopefully allow more victims to feel comfortable enough to come forward and seek the support that they deserve and need.

The SAAFE House does so much good for not only the Huntsville community, but especially for the women and families surrounding Huntsville that may need extra help and resources to leave the abusive relationship that they are in. They are continuously working to better their services and facilities to provide these victims with the best experiences possible. Through their volunteers and community support, they are able to make things happen and give everything back to these victims that have already lost so much.