

## Letter to the Editor – March 2013

As the trial of two high school football players charged with rape gets underway in Steubenville, the national spotlight has returned to this small Ohio town. While this may seem to be an isolated incident, sexual assault occurs with alarming frequency in communities everywhere, including Tuscarawas County. Approximately 743,000 adult women in Ohio are survivors of rape. One in four girls and one in six boys are sexually victimized before age 18.

The Steubenville case reminds us that there are many things individuals and communities everywhere can do to support survivors and encourage the prevention of sexual assault. We adults must commit ourselves to modeling respectful behavior for our youth by prioritizing appropriate social behavior (including online), academic learning, and responsible citizenship. We must resist fostering a sense of entitlement among athletes of all ages, and we must not tolerate illegal, sexist or demeaning behavior from each other, our leaders, or our youth.

I challenge each of us to choose to believe survivors, reserving judgment and blame, and support them in accessing the services they need to obtain justice and healing. There are always survivors of sexual assault or abuse in our midst, whether we realize it or not. A loved one may even be a survivor without our knowing it. Our words and actions have a tremendous impact on them. If you are a survivor, know that you are not alone and that help is available by calling our 24-hour crisis line at 330-339-2504.

Amid the spotlight on Steubenville, we all have a valuable opportunity to reevaluate how we can prevent sexual assault and support survivors in our own communities. Let's take this opportunity to do something and support a healthier, safer environment.