



Iowa Domestic Violence Helpline Taking Calls

Iowa Domestic Violence Helpline, a statewide domestic violence call center, began taking its first calls on October 1, 2015. The call center, a product of the Iowa Attorney General's Office, is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. All services provided are completely free and confidential. It will be a great resource for victims and survivors, as well as an asset to the state.

Several things took place leading up to this launch. The first of which was determining a need for the call center. The Iowa Attorney General's Crime Victim Assistance Division put together a committee to study the needs of Iowa victims and survivors. Upon the conclusion of these studies, recommendations were established. Agencies were given the opportunity to submit proposals in an attempt to secure the contract to develop and operate the new domestic violence call center. Shari Kastein, Executive Director at Family Crisis Centers, submitted the chosen proposal.

Iowa Domestic Violence Helpline is unique in comparison to any statewide domestic violence hotline. For starters, all individual programs within the state are able to roll their phones to the Helpline whenever needed. A key factor setting the Iowa Domestic Violence Helpline aside is its 24 hour wake, expert staff. The caller will get the full attention and help they deserve. The goal is for no call to go unanswered. The Iowa Domestic Violence Helpline will serve as a model for statewide domestic violence hotlines across the nation.

As a survivor who once found herself in isolation on the street with no one to call, Shari Kastein launched a state model that would create a pathway for victims and survivors of domestic violence. Kastein developed a domestic violence call center that would generate a direct linkage between service providers and victims and survivors. Kastein pledges the new Iowa Domestic Violence Helpline will serve thousands of victims and survivors each year.

The Iowa Domestic Violence Helpline currently has a staff of about 15. Going forward, this number could increase depending on individual program needs and the overall call volume. The staff has undergone extensive training leading up to launch. Leadership staff studied with the National Domestic Violence Hotline in Austin, Texas, who also provided some trainers on site. Training included many hours of face to face, interactive training with both the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault. Staff also received training from many of the culturally specific groups from around Iowa, increasing their awareness of differing cultures and assuring that every caller receives the support they need. The final days of training involved role play calls from trained professionals. Those professionals debriefed staff after each call.

Why would a victim choose to call the Iowa Domestic Violence Helpline over emergency services, such as 911? There are many answers to that question. Some victims may call because they need to talk about the past hurt they have experienced. Some callers may be searching for resources without wanting to disclose their personal information; the Helpline is completely confidential. While some

callers may be searching for assistance when calling law enforcement, they are also searching for that support. Iowa Domestic Violence Helpline advocates can be that support that they may not have or may feel uncomfortable sharing with someone they know.

The Iowa Domestic Violence Helpline is now operating full time with a professional, compassionate staff. Not only can victims and survivors of domestic violence call in, but so can concerned family members, friends and more. The advocates are ready and able to help. When a victim or survivor calls in, they can expect that there will be no fees and no judgement – but a listening, caring person.

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence, or even if you're unsure, call the Iowa Domestic Violence Helpline at 1.800.770.1650. For more information on services, what to expect when you call, and more, visit www.survivorshelpline.org. You can also find the Iowa Domestic Violence Helpline on Facebook and Twitter.