

Summer/Fall 2018

news

Advocating for Victims of Domestic Violence



Equinox Advocates, from left to right: Karen Harmon, Jordan Vanina, Danielle Schepisi, Morgan Winters, Jenna Hoefler, and Brianna Wiederhold.

Every year, more than 2,000 people affected by domestic violence turn to Equinox for help. Equinox provides Albany County's most comprehensive domestic violence (DV) services, including court advocacy, safety planning, counseling, case management, and the county's only emergency shelter for victims and their children.

Leaving an abuser is often a frightening, complicated and dangerous process. Abusers can be accomplished manipulators, threatening to withhold access to children, to money, and to family and friends. The daunting prospect of navigating the legal system is one of the many obstacles that may prevent a DV victim from obtaining legal protections or from leaving.

A team of Equinox Advocates is there to help overcome that obstacle. Advocates are not lawyers, but they are a knowledgeable and valued part of the legal system who work solely on

behalf of DV victims and their children. They help victims understand the steps of legal actions and what to expect. Their supportive guidance helps make the process less intimidating, and helps reassure victims that they will not have to go through it alone.

Advocates are nonjudgmental and work to build trusting relationships with clients. They listen to the experiences and circumstances that led the individual to seek help, and offer options and support. Do they need to petition for an order of protection? Do they need to file for child custody, or for spousal and child support? Do they need other services, such as counseling or emergency shelter?

If the abuse hasn't been reported yet, the Advocate can accompany a victim to the police department. In Family Court, they will be a reassuring presence, seated directly behind the victim during their hearings. They are well-known at the Albany County Family

Court and to Judge Richard Rivera who hears DV cases. If a case goes to criminal court, unless the victim has to testify, the Advocate can go to court for them, sparing victims the experience of facing their abuser in court. "If they do need to testify, we tell them 'I'll be there, just look at me while you're talking—don't look at them,'" said Advocate Brianna Wiederhold.

Advocates work out of multiple locations. They can be found in Albany Family Court, in several of the criminal courts throughout the county (Albany, Watervliet, Bethlehem, Colonie, and Cohoes), and they are able to advocate in any town court in Albany County. To be most accessible, they also have offices at Equinox's location at 102 Hackett Blvd., and at the Equinox DV satellite office on Washington Avenue.

Victims learn about Advocates in several ways: from the Equinox DV hotline, the Family Court Clerk, or law enforcement. Equinox has a strong relationship with the Albany Police Department and the county criminal justice system. When police throughout the county respond to DV incidents, they will often send the report to Equinox Advocates so that they can proactively reach out to the victim.

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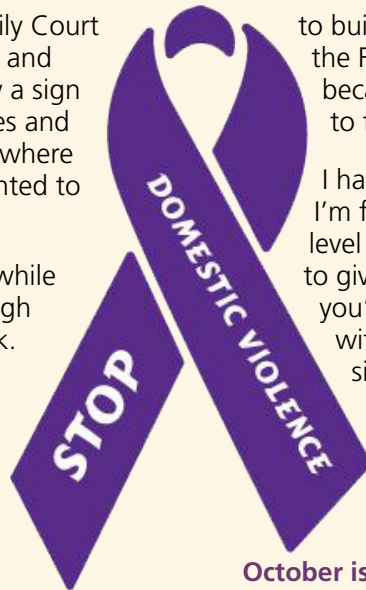
“Equinox Advocates were there, from start to finish”

A domestic violence client describes her experience

When I walked into Albany County Family Court in October 2017, I felt broken, defeated and mostly ashamed and embarrassed. I saw a sign for Equinox Domestic Violence Advocates and felt compelled to walk in. I didn't know where to begin but I knew that I no longer wanted to be a victim.

The Advocates were extremely delicate while working with me as I maneuvered through the overwhelming amount of paperwork. They gave me great resources including connecting me with counselors and DV meeting groups. Their presence was appreciated, and became expected because they were always there when I needed them.

It's a comforting feeling when I would sit in the courtroom uneasy and anxious just to look over my shoulder and see an Advocate smiling back at me, letting me know everything would work out. I was able



to build up my confidence as I navigated through the Family Court system and other legal challenges because Equinox Advocates were there, from start to finish.

I have built up so much strength and courage and I'm forever thankful to Equinox for your sincere level of compassion for women. I look forward to giving back to an amazing agency for all that you've done and continue to do for me, starting with referring other women who've experienced similar circumstances.

Thank you again for being who you are and doing what you do for the community.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Equinox is out in the community and online working to raise awareness about the prevalence of domestic violence and where to get help.

Visit us at www.equinoxinc.org and facebook.com/EquinoxAlbany.

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Advocates are as skilled in responding to emergency situations—such as helping a victim in need of an immediate “stay away”—as they are in providing patient and ongoing support and guidance. Advocates know that, more often than not, it takes several attempts before a victim of domestic violence ultimately leaves an abuser. That is why Advocates make sure that their clients know that their door is always open. •

If you or someone you know would like to speak with an Advocate, they can be reached at:

Family Court: (518) 694-3600 or the Equinox DV Hotline: (518) 432-7865

It Takes a Community

Like all of Equinox's programs, our Domestic Violence Services are strengthened and enriched by our community partnerships. Since 1995, Equinox has been fortunate to have The Legal Project as a close ally and frequent partner, enhancing legal services at Albany County Family Court and working with Advocates. Legal Project attorneys frequently provide technical assistance to Equinox staff and work on cases together.

Equinox also partners with the Hudson Mohawk Humane Society in the Safe Haven program, which places pets of DV victims at undisclosed foster care locations. It is not uncommon for a person to stay with an abuser because they fear for the welfare of a beloved pet. Safe Haven helps eliminate this barrier that may prevent an abuse victim from seeking their own safety.

SAVE the DATE

May 9, 2019 • 5:30 – 8:30 PM • Shaker Heritage Barn

B. Inspired

A Fun Evening with The Fabulous Beekman Boys
To Benefit Equinox Domestic Violence Services

Featuring:

BEEKMAN 1802

Cooking Demonstration by the Beekman Boys • Samplings of Beekman 1802 Cheeses & Jams with Wine Pairings • Culinary Delectables and Cash Bar • Live Music
• Pearl Grant Richman Pop-Up Store with Beekman 1802 Merchandise and other Gifts
in time for Mother's Day

Special Presentation:

A Survivor's Inspiring Story of Surviving and Thriving

More Information Coming Soon!