

PUBLIC SAFETY



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Summit Advocates for Victims of Assault Executive Director Lesley Mumford, left, talks with legal advocate Jessie Sack on Monday. Since 1979, Summit Advocates has been offering assistance and support for people dealing with domestic abuse, sexual assault, stalking and other trauma.

Advocates offer help amid rise in domestic abuse

By Sawyer D'Argonne
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DILLON — As officials continue to urge residents across the state to stay at home to help prevent the spread of the new coronavirus, many living in violent or abusive situations are reaching out for help.

Lesley Mumford, executive director of Summit Advocates for Victims of Assault, said the group has seen a “significant” increase in new clients over the past month as a result of the coronavirus shutdown.

“We’ve all been ordered to quarantine ourselves and stay at home to prevent the spread,” Mumford said. “But home isn’t safe for everyone. There are a lot of people already living in situations where the most dangerous thing to them is the intimate partner they live with. We don’t have the breaks and respites from our partners we normally do — work or social activities — and those tensions can begin to rise with nowhere to go.”

Mumford said Advocates, a group that provides resources and services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, has seen more than 145 new clients this year, including at least 51 in March. For comparison, the group saw 73 new individuals seeking services in the same three-month period last year.

In March, the group has responded to at least 30 crisis intervention calls, wherein an advocate will respond in person to help transport someone to a shelter or accompany them to forensic nursing exams, law enforcement interviews and more. And more individuals are seeking help getting out of dangerous situations than ever before.

RESOURCES

- ▶ Summit Advocates for Victims of Assault crisis hotline: 970-668-3906
- ▶ St. Anthony Summit Medical Center Forensic Nurse Examiner Program: 970-668-3300
- ▶ National Domestic Violence Hotline: call 1-800-799-7233, text LOVEIS to 22522, or chat on TheHotline.org.

Over the past two weeks, Advocates has housed as many as 13 people at a time in the group’s safe shelters, including a number of children. In a more typical week, it’s usually two or three.

“To have that many people was remarkable for us,” Mumford said. “Of course, for those individuals, we’re also providing food and transportation assistance, because often people are coming to us with just what they were wearing in leaving a violent situation. We have to step up and provide all those other needs.”

Mumford emphasized that the organization has been up to the task. In addition to providing safe shelter, food, transportation and crisis intervention services, Advocates also offers emergency financial assistance and a 24/7 crisis hotline (970-668-3906) among other services.

Despite the shutdown, Mumford said, the group also has continued all of its free legal programming, including providing attorneys to represent victims in matters like obtaining protection orders, child support, divorce, visa applications and more.

“We are offering everything we did before (the public health order),” Mumford said. “We’ve just found new ways to do it.”

While Advocates is considered an essential service for the county, it still has had to make some changes to the way it’s operating. The group does have staff at the office and responding to crisis interventions, though

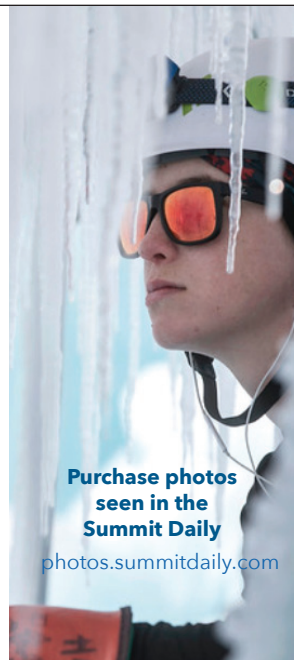
staff also have begun experimenting with new telehealth opportunities and making contingencies for another potential surge of people in need.

Advocates has enacted new measures inside its communal safe house to cut down on congregating as much as possible, including asking individuals and their families to stay in their rooms away from others and delivering prepared food to cut down on mingling in the cooking spaces. The space is also undergoing regular deep cleaning.

If the need does surpass the capacity at the shelter (about 11 beds), Advocates has been working with the Summit County Office of Emergency Management to ensure people won’t be turned away. Brian Bovaird, the county’s emergency management director, said Advocates would be able to access some of the county’s hotel rooms as part of a preestablished plan for “non-congregate” housing in mass sheltering incidents.

Mumford emphasized that all of Advocates’ services are confidential and don’t require law enforcement involvement. Despite the shutdown, they’re prepared to help anyone in need.

“We’re available 24/7, 365,” Mumford said. “If somebody isn’t certain, call. Our staff is ready, willing and able to serve. We’re more than happy to talk something through with an individual. All of our services are here. We’re in full swing.”



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DILLON COMMUNITY CHURCH

DCC’s food bank is open Monday and Wednesday, 4:30 – 5:30 and Friday 1:30 – 2:30, for drive-up service.

We want to hear from you if you need prayer, assistance or need someone to talk to. DCC cares about our community!

Reach us at info@dillonchurch.org



Silverthorne is here to support our community during this difficult time. Visit Silverthorne.org for the latest COVID-19 news, essential town service information and community resources for residents, businesses and visitors.

We encourage you to enjoy our natural surroundings and get outside for fresh air while practicing social distancing.

Stay healthy, stay safe and we will get through this together.

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TO SHARE AND HEAL TOGETHER

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