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Overland Park Therapist, SAFEHOME Organization Volunteer Receive Statewide Honors

Topeka, Kan., February 20, 2014— An Overland Park therapist and volunteer with an organization working on behalf of victims of domestic violence have been recognized by the Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence (KCSDV). **Shirley Collins** was presented with the Outstanding Advocate of the Year Award and **Helen LaValley** was presented with the Volunteer of the Year Award during KCSDV's 11th Annual Safe Homes, Safe Streets Awareness Day and Sunflower Safety Breakfast event in Topeka in February.

Since 1995, KCSDV has been recognizing outstanding advocates and allies who are working to enhance victim safety, to increase perpetrator accountability, and to prevent and eliminate sexual and domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking in Kansas.

“We honor both Shirley Collins and Helen LaValley for their tireless efforts on behalf of victims of sexual and domestic violence,” said Joyce Grover, executive director of KCSDV. “Their work is transformative and life-saving in many cases.”

Collins has been in the violence against women movement for almost three decades. She has worked one-on-one with victims and for ten years led SAFEHOME's Clinical Counseling Program which, in 2013, served over 1,000 women, children and men. “Shirley Collins has dedicated her life to supporting and improving the lives of victims of domestic violence. From her early service as the director of a domestic violence agency, to providing state of the art therapy to victims and their children, she never stops looking for new ways to help survivors find the strength, faith, courage, and hope that they don't even realize they have,” said Janee' Hanzlick, executive director of SAFEHOME, Inc., an agency serving victims of domestic violence in Johnson and Miami Counties. SAFEHOME nominated Collins and LaValley for the awards.

“Shirley Collins represents everything that the Juliene Maska Advocate of the Year is intended to be: victim-centered, compassionate, and caring,” says Joyce Grover, executive director of KCSDV. Collins has also championed efforts to train and mentor counseling staff and interns, advancing their skills through training on modalities that are particularly successful for working with trauma survivors. As a result, there are at least 50 therapists in Johnson County who are well-trained on working with victims of domestic violence and trauma.

LaValley remembers the day when there were no shelters available to help victims of domestic violence and the isolation and desperation this created for victims. When LaValley first learned about SAFEHOME and the services provided, she wanted to be a part of it. LaValley has been volunteering for SAFEHOME for almost 15 years, helping with the Speaker's Bureau, crisis hotline, court and hospital advocacy, and much more.

“Helen LaValley is not only a tireless volunteer supporting victims of domestic violence, but she is also an inspiration and cheerleader for the staff,” said Hanzlick. “Helen's enthusiasm, joy, and optimism never waiver, and she inspires everyone at SAFEHOME to live each day knowing that we truly make a difference for victims and their children. Her volunteer work in multiple areas of the agency means that

she is known, treasured and loved by all of the staff for her commitment and passion.”

“Volunteers like Helen are more valuable than gold,” said Grover. “So many lives are positively touched by this one woman – it’s breathtaking. She is so passionate about helping victims of domestic violence that she even schedules work around her volunteering.”

Other award winners at this year’s event included Soroptimist International of Hays, Kansas for the Community Ally of the Year Award; and Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation’s project on behalf of the Tribal Victim Service’s program called SAFESTAR (Sexual Assault Forensic Examination Safety Training, and Resources) for the Project of the Year Award.

Photos available upon request.

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Founded in 1982, the purpose of KCSDV is the prevention and elimination of sexual and domestic violence through a statewide network of programs providing support and safety for all victims of sexual and domestic violence and stalking, with primary focus on women and their children; direct services; public awareness and education; advocacy for victims; comprehensive prevention; and, social change efforts. Learn more at www.kcsdv.org.

SAFEHOME, Inc. is a member of KCSDV and provides services to victims of domestic violence in Johnson and Miami counties. Learn more at <http://www.safehome-ks.org/>.