

## **Pillars Volunteer Spotlight: Saunte` Harden-Tate**

Saunte` Harden-Tate has volunteered with Pillars' Sexual Assault Program for over a year. She is a recent graduate of the Forensic Psychology Masters program at Argosy University.

Saunte on volunteering: "I love being an advocate for Pillars as it gives me the opportunity to help others when they need it most. I believe wholeheartedly that being an advocate is one of my greatest purposes. It is hard to see others hurt in the way in which sexual assault hurts someone, but it is a lot worse to know someone needs help, and you have the power to help them but do nothing! I may encounter some tough moments in being an advocate, but there is no greater feeling than providing some light for someone when they feel lost in the dark."



### **How long have you been volunteering as a crisis advocate, and how/why did you become involved?**

In my early 20s, my friend was sexually assaulted. The experience changed her perspective of herself and her worthiness and had a negative impact on her relationships. Seeing the impact it had on her really motivated me to want to help others in the same situation. I began studying sex offenders as a forensic psychology major. I wanted to understand why people engage in sexual assault. I also took a course called Psychology of the Victim and it really affected my perspective. My personal connection and studies made me want to do more to help survivors of sexual assault and make a difference. I started attending the 40-hour training in January 2012 and began taking hotline calls that April.

### **What has been the most rewarding part of your volunteer experience?**

Just knowing that I am helping somebody. It can be a difficult job—I have spent time on the hotline or in the emergency room with a lot of young girls. Feeling like I'm doing something for them is my greatest motivation. I am the first person to help them begin the healing process. I am able to tell them, this is not your fault; you did not deserve it. It's an honor and a privilege to be able to give a little light back to someone during such a dark time.

### **What is most challenging?**

Sometimes you encounter a client that is so distraught that they don't want to have anybody there. Or, you can feel like you were not as helpful as you could have been, or that they want more than you can give. You just have to do your best to help and leave them with resources and information so that they can reach out when they are ready.

### **What have you learned from your volunteer experience?**

Not everyone responds to trauma in the same way. I am not a super hero—I do my best but understand my limitations.

**Can you tell a story of an individual you have helped through your volunteer position? How did you feel about your experience?**

There are many... I worked with a young girl in an emergency room who had been drugged and assaulted while her mom thought she was out at the mall. Her mom felt like she had failed her daughter. I found myself comforting them both. I kept letting mom know that it wasn't her fault – there are some things as a parent that you can't control. You can't protect your child from everything. I told the daughter that I knew she was hurting... and felt unsafe... but that the horrible thing that happened to her didn't need to control the rest of her life. They were both so appreciative, and thanked and hugged me before I left. It felt great to know that I was able to help not only one person, but two.

**Would you recommend our volunteer program to others? What advice would you give to a new volunteer?**

Yes! I would tell a new volunteer to remember to be you... be human... be sincere and compassionate. Offer support. You will be nervous going out to help someone, but just put yourself in their shoes. How would you want someone to treat you in that situation? You can make a difference.

**What advice would you give to someone who may need help, but who is afraid to reach out?**

This actually happens a lot—many people call the hotline (708.482.9600) on behalf of others to try and help them because the victim won't reach out on their own. People are often afraid to call because of the shame associated with rape in their religion, culture, or community. They are afraid of judgment, afraid of not being believed, afraid of retaliation. I want people to know how important it is to reach out and utilize the support that is out there. It's truly needed if you are going to heal.

**Thank you, Saunte`, for your commitment to Pillars and for sharing your story!**

