22nd Annual Courage Walk

Thank you to all those who came out to support the 22nd Annual Courage Walk! This year, participants raised over $4,000 - money that will support victim services in the First Judicial District and help with the maintenance of the "Courage Garden", a memorial garden for crime victims and Jefferson County employees.

Deputy Fosler & K9 Jessie - named after Jessica Ridgeway

Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Mounted Patrol

District Attorney Pete Weir & Cheezo

Each dove is in honor of a loved one
"The Courage Walk is a time to honor the strength and courage of the survivors we have come to know in the aftermath of crime"

~ Jefferson County Sheriff Jeff Shrader

Kick Off Speech

"Remember everything you have faced, all the battles you have won and all the fears you have overcome."

~ Deputy District Attorney Katie Kurtz

* Keynote Speaker

* Please see the last pages for the full speech from the Keynote Speaker
New additions to the Courage Garden

In honor of Sgt. Dave Baldwin
Jefferson County Sheriff's Office

The Bee Condo

In honor of Agent James Davies
Lakewood Police Department

Link to the Courage Garden Website!
http://couragegardenplants.com/
Good morning. Thank you all so much for being here today.

When crime happens, we are all affected by it. We may be directly affected by it or we may be affected by the as surrounding community members. Either way, our lives are altered. That alteration might be slight. It may change the route we drive home at night. It may make us hug our children a little tighter. Or, the alteration in our lives might be huge. We no longer have a car to drive home, or we no longer have our child to hug. This is where courage comes in.

Courage is defined as strength in the face of pain or grief. Courage can mean standing up for yourself and saying you deserve better, or courage can mean standing up to the person in Court and speaking your truth.

Courage can also mean finding the strength to get out of bed in the morning and facing the day.

I have had the privilege to work in the Human Trafficking field for the past several years and I’m very grateful to be part of the newly formed Human Trafficking Unit here in Jefferson County. I’m very proud of the work Jefferson County is doing to address the incredibly horrific victimization that trafficking victims endure and I’d like to tell you a little bit about that today.

Most people hear the words Human Trafficking and they imagine foreign nationals, smuggled across borders. What surprises most people is that our trafficking victims are actually children born and raised in Jefferson County. These are members of our community, children in our community who are being forced into horrific situations and are victimized in the most brutal of ways. When I make contact with these victims, they often tell me, they just don’t feel like they belong in this world anymore. And, so when we intervene, when law enforcement gets involved, when victim advocates start doing their incredibly important work, it’s not just about preparing them for the court process or helping them heal, it’s about rebuilding this child back into the beautiful human being they once were, so that they do feel like they belong in our world. It’s incredibly hard work, but it is also incredibly important work.

As community members, we all have a responsibility to each other, to take care of each other. We had a training conference last year to train our first responders (victim advocates, law enforcement, human services caseworkers) on how to work in the field of human trafficking. At that conference, one of our amazing victim advocates asked our survivor panel, “Where did we miss the boat? What are some missed opportunities where we could have intervened?” Our survivors recounted stories of going to the hospital ER with wounds and broken bones and no one asked where her parents were. Another survivor recounted a story of all of the sudden having fancy clothes, and fancy electronics and her teachers never stopped to ask how she got access to these things because she had been poor all her life. The message from our victims was, dig deeper. If it looks like I’m not okay, ask me why? Take an investment in me, find out how I’m doing. If you ask, if you show me that you care, I might just tell you about these horrible things that are happening to me. No one has cared enough to ask.
We are changing the course of that today here in Jefferson County. Since 2013, we have started amazing programs that are focusing on the sexual exploitation of children and other horrific forms of trafficking. We have multidisciplinary teams working together as a team, to make sure our children, and other victims, are taken care of and protected. We are educating community members so that they no longer look the other way, so that they dig deeper.

We are working on legislation to strengthen our ability to prosecute offenders, we are working on legislation to better support our victims of trafficking, we are working on better ways to identify children at risk in hopes of preventing exploitation, and when we are finding children and victims of exploitation, we are making sure we have the necessary services and resources to make that person whole again. Judge McNulty recently said something very poignant at the sentencing of one of the most horrendous human traffickers I've seen in a very long time. He said, “I don't know how this happens in our community. I don't know how something so horrible, can happen in this amazing community. But, it cannot happen again and it will not happen again.” We, as a community, are empowering others to stand up and say, we will not tolerate this in our community and it will not happen again in our community.

Healing is a process. We don’t expect our trafficking victims to be miraculously healed over night and we don’t expect you to either. Long after the court process is done, you still have that healing wound. And you walk around with this wound every day and people may not see it, but you know it is there. You feel it. Some days it feels like a paper cut, other days it feels like your heart is falling out of your chest. Those around you might not know what to say to you, or how to approach you, so they shun you altogether. Some people may say, “Hurry up and heal.” Rose Kennedy once said, “It has been said “time heals all wounds”. I do not agree. The wounds remain. In time, the mind, protecting its sanity, covers them with scar tissue and the pain lessens. But it is never gone”.

From every wound there is a scar. And every scar tells a story. A story that says, “I survived”.

We see this with our trafficking victims, and we see this with victims of other crimes as well. Healing is a process. Take your time. The message to you today, is you are not alone. Although the court process may be over, we are here by your side and we will walk with you, and we will hold you up, when you want to fall down. You never need to apologize for how you choose to survive.

Courage doesn’t always mean we’ve won. Unfortunately many of those in the justice system know that all too well. The justice system isn’t about winning, it’s about standing up for what is right. Courage is about standing up for what you believe, speaking your truth, holding your head high and doing the right thing. You never know how strong you are, until being strong is the only choice you have.

Let us go forward today, facing our fears, healing our wounds, holding our heads up high. Let us treat each other and those around us with compassion and love. You are all here today, not because you are victims, but because you are survivors. You can do the impossible, because you have been through the unimaginable. The pain you feel today will be the strength you feel tomorrow. Let us engage as a community to dig deeper and to help others. Whenever you find yourself doubting how far you can go, just remember how far you have come. Remember everything you have faced, all the battles you have won and all the fears you have overcome. You are amazing.