

Hello, my name is Whitney Brothers and I am one of the Nurse Site Managers for Central Dakota Forensic Nurse Examiners. I have worked with CDFNE as a sexual assault nurse since 2016.

I have been invited to share with you today some information regarding our organization and specifically how it relates to the SANE bill grant. CDFNE is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization that performs medical forensic exams for patients who are reporting sexual assault. CDFNE's headquarters is in Bismarck, but we have expanded locations to include Minot, Dickinson, and Williston. Throughout those four regions, we currently have about 22 nurses working to provide services to patients in those areas. Our mission is to provide professional, compassionate, and timely collection of forensic evidence for survivors of sexual assault across the lifespan. Our patients can include anyone from a newborn infant to an elderly patient and all ages in between. Our organization provides forensic medical services which can include collection of evidence including DNA samples, taking photographs of any injuries present during the exam and assessing the patient's health and wellbeing.

2019 was the first year the SANE funding was included as a line item in Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem's budget. This money totaled \$250,000 for all the SANE services throughout the state of North Dakota. That money was allocated to the different SANE programs through a grant process. CDFNE completed the application process and with the money we were awarded two years ago, we have been able to provide services to over 760 victims who have experienced sexual violence. Keep in mind, I am only able to speak to the number of victims that our organization sees, this is not a total number for the state of North Dakota. In addition to CDFNE, there is a fully staffed SANE program in Jamestown, two in Fargo, one in Grand Forks and they are working to develop one in Devils Lake. There is also a small number of SANE nurses practicing in scattered areas around rural North Dakota.

Taking a closer look at the statistics, in 2019, across all four locations of CDFNE we served 439 victims. In 2020, we served 321 victims. In total, over the past two years, we have provided services to 760 sexual assault victims in the western part of North Dakota. These victims are of all ages, including babies,

small children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly. Now let me put that into perspective, over the past two years, we have seen 760 victims, there are 730 days in two years, so we have been able to provide services to more than one patient per day over the past two years. One of the reasons we can provide services to these patients is due to the money that we received from the SANE grant program. We are extremely grateful for this money and all that it has allowed us to do for the patients in our communities throughout western North Dakota.

CDFNE is proud to announce we have now opened a clinic in our Bismarck office where we will be able to see the patients, we saw in the hospital for follow up care. Unfortunately for victims of sexual violence, follow up care has been a struggle for multiple reasons. One of the reasons patients do not receive follow up care is that they do not want to have to tell another person about what has happened to them, forcing them to relive their experience over again. Often, they do not want this to be a permanent part of their medical record. Sometimes they are not able to afford follow up care or testing. But because CDFNE was awarded money from the SANE grant to help cover the costs of SANE services, we are now able to allocate some of the other grant money we received and put it towards opening this follow up clinic. This clinic has been on the drawing board for a quite a few years now and we are extremely excited to open our doors and see how we can continue to serve patients in our community. We are specialized in sexual violence and we are focused on providing compassionate care to these victims. Our staff saw them initially, so we know their story, they do not have to repeat it, they do not have to relive it. Our clinic will be focused on follow up care, including a full head to toe assessment, providing reassessment and documentation on any injuries that were either present at the initial exam or might not have been present but are present at the follow up exam. For example, some injuries related to strangulation often take time to appear. We will provide testing for sexually transmitted infections and we are able to provide a range of other services for certain preexisting health conditions. Through this follow up clinic we are excited to help close the gap for these patients who otherwise might not have received the follow up care that they need.

At this time, we will only have a follow up clinic in our Bismarck location, but we hope in the future that we can expand these services to our other locations, including Minot, Dickinson, and Williston. Our goal would be to provide follow up care and services to each of the 760 patients we have seen over the past two years.

I wanted to talk a little bit about being a SANE nurse. When people hear that I am a nurse, they seem to always get this excited look on their face and say "Oh! Where do you work? What kind of nurse are you?". Honestly, I am always a little hesitant to respond. Normally I say, "Well I work part time at Sanford on their observation unit" and then I pause and say, "I also work part time as a SANE nurse" and people will say, "A SANE nurse? What's that?" I tell them it stands for sexual assault nurse examiner, so I work with patients who have been sexually assaulted. Immediately the excited look on their face goes away, they avoid eye contact and respond, "Oh that must be really hard. Why would you want to do that?". That got me thinking, why do I do this? Why do I choose to be a SANE nurse? Where I am called in the middle of the night from the local hospital saying there is a patient who needs to see me? Or I get a call and must leave a family function because there is a patient requesting an exam. Why do I put myself through those emotional and sometimes stressful, lengthy exams that can take anywhere from 4-6 hours? Why do I get all stressed out about testifying in court? And I know why. It is because of the patients who at the end of their lengthy 6-hour exam, that was filled with high emotions and reliving trauma, ask if they can give me a hug? The patients who say thank you, thank you for being here for me. For the parents who brought their child in for an exam because they found out someone is assaulting their little one. For the teenager who is scared to tell her parents because she thinks she will get in trouble. For the elderly patient crying "Why me? Why would anyone do this to an old lady like me?" All these patients are the reasons why I continue to practice as a SANE nurse. And on behalf of these patients and SANE nurses across the state, I would like to thank you all for including us in the budget and allocating money so that we can continue to serve these patients who otherwise might not have anyone. Thank you.

