

By Kris Konick Special Correspondent Where do you go when you've been told to keep quiet? Where can you turn when you feel in your heart it's time to heal? Come in to the warm and inviting living room of the S.O.A.R. Ministry Center. This is a place where journeys begin, where new endings are written to stories that before held only hurt, condemnation, and a host of other consequences most would not even relate to events that happened earlier in life. Who knew one quaint living room could hold so much?

S.O.A.R. (Survivors Of Abuse Restored) Ministries was founded 13 years ago with a call to help women who were survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Leslie Thomas, Co-Founder, Board Member, and Support Group Leader, had walked into a pastor's office at Northside Christian Church 13 years ago, never having told anyone her story. She had come to let her church know that something needed to be done about the issue, to help women to recover and she was promptly told that she was the perfect person who should do just that. In disbelief, she went forward with another member and the very first support group session was held not long after with six women attending. Leslie and a couple of other leaders held ongoing support groups where women would share their testimonies and the ministry continued to grow and flourish as a very serious need had finally found a place to be met.

To date, a whopping 500 women have pursued recovery through S.O.A.R. support groups and other ministry functions. So how does the ministry work and what does it have to offer someone who is ready to heal? Support groups are held on Monday nights and Thursday nights. The Monday night support group is a closed group meaning that women make a 13 week commitment to meet, study, and share together. They use structured, Christ-centered curriculum to walk them through each step of the process. Closed group journeys generally begin in February and September. There is also a "drop-in" open group that meets on the second and fourth Thursday of every month. The open group requires no level of commitment but is just that, an open door for any woman seeking a safe place to share and learn. Each entry begins with an interview to help the women determine their best course based on the individual situation. There are currently support group meetings offered in three separate places, at the ministry center in Floyd County, as well as one location in Harrison County and one in Crawford County with a total of around 60 women (combined) meeting weekly. So as you can see, the ministry has continued to grow by leaps and bounds.

One such event was a point in time during 2010 when support groups and other ministry functions were moving along well but had felt a call to "more." More meaning what?

A small group met, prayed, and received their answer. While the ministry was flourishing, there came a need for a "place." There were often times when women needed support on more than just group nights as the events of life ran their course. So they met in restaurants, in vehicles, wherever a safe zone could be found to offer the extra support needed. The "more" was a "place", a ministry center. And as it turned out, not only did God provide the answer to prayer but already had all the resources readily available and the S.O.A.R. Ministry center was opened that same year.

The S.O.A.R. Ministry center is a wonderful and inviting place filled with people and resources

available for anyone looking for answers, education, healing, and a host of other benefits that come from what they call “finding your voice.” As childhood victims, most were told to keep quiet and to never speak of things that had occurred leaving scars locked away resulting in changes to who the individuals see themselves as and how they relate to others.

So why take the journey relating to something that may have occurred “so long ago”? How could it possibly even be relevant so much later in life? Keeping quiet and harboring the shame and guilt often associated with childhood sexual abuse can manifest itself in a multitude of ways. Victims have been known to face all types of self-destruction including: addictions, anger, eating disorders, depression, low self-esteem, bad relationships, crisis pregnancies, marital problems, self-harm, and isolation just to name a few. Events may have been so painful or so long in the past that they are kept separate and hidden away but those events have lasting effects on the individual on an ongoing basis if not dealt with properly. So no matter where you are in life, it would seem that recovery from childhood sexual abuse is desirable if not entirely necessary. According to the S.O.A.R. website:

“One in every 3 women are sexually abused

by age 18.

Sexual abuse in childhood results in adulthood relational problems, depression, and anxiety.

Over 90% of women in jail in the U.S. are victims of childhood sexual abuse.

Childhood sexual abuse occurs across all ethnic, racial, socioeconomic and religious lines.

Childhood sexual abuse is a significant problem world-wide.

The roots of sexual abuse grow into adult problems.”

In addition to support groups, S.O.A.R. Ministries facilitates an annual campout, crisis intervention, mentoring, interviews with women just released from prison, education for spouses and families, pastoral guidance, Bible study, and a Winter Retreat. The one area S.O.A.R. Ministries has not yet expanded into is youth. Support groups are for women age 18 and older as there are many legal issues pertaining to minors. If you are a minor who needs help or you know one please contact S.O.A.R. Ministries or visit their website at <http://soarministry.org/> to be put in touch with the appropriate place to get help.

The ministry also holds annual fundraisers, S.O.A.R. Festival and the Healing Hearts Banquet to raise ministry support and awareness. The Healing Hearts Banquet takes place in March with the S.O.A.R. Festival scheduled in September, this year on Saturday, September 7th from 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. This will be the third annual S.O.A.R. Festival. The event is held at Fairmont Park in New Albany and it provides a day chock-full of family fun! There will be a dunking booth, carnival style games and prizes, a cake walk, face painting, food, and an auction/raffle. The ministry is still in need of donations, financial donations, small prizes (candy and/or small toys), larger items of value that can be auctioned/used for raffle, and cakes. You

can contact the ministry center directly at (812) 590-2426 to donate. All donations appreciated.

Recovery is different for each individual. According to Board President Cathy Jo Summer's blog on the website "At Survivors Of Abuse Restored we walk with women through their recovery from childhood sexual abuse. For some the journey is a series of steep mountains and deep valleys for others it is a path with foothills." So what does success look like? While steps along the path may be challenging, there is much good. As stated, it starts with finding your voice and then so much more. S.O.A.R. Ministries provides a safe place of acceptance and affirmation. And the results of healing are as numerous as the previous set of negative consequences that are being overcome. Success might look like graduations as a result of newfound confidence and higher self-esteem, or marriages as the result of learning to trust when it before seemed undesirable and impossible, it might be looking into the face of a newborn always hoped for but never imagined again because trust had been so severely damaged. Self worth, better relationships, stronger marriages, freedom, joy, life accomplishments such as graduations, marriages, babies, etc... can all be found on the road of healing. And the results of healing often look like women giving back. Women who have found their voices, often are empowered to help even more women find theirs. Many SOAR support group participants have stayed with S.O.A.R. as volunteers, have gone on to found ministries of their own, some have become therapists all with the intention of bringing about life change to women who carry the burden and shame of being a childhood sexual abuse survivor. You will find many of them who have gone from silent to boisterous at the upcoming S.O.A.R. Festival. Women who once were held captive in silence, who had previously never even spoken to a family member, now proclaim their victory to complete strangers with the hope of helping more.

With statistics as high as 1 in 3 women, the chances are great that you are or know someone who is a survivor. Don't live another day in silence. Choose to walk into the S.O.A.R. Ministry center or give them a call and start your own journey to true healing and freedom. You can reach the ministry at (812) 590-2426. A caring counselor would love to talk to you and help you decide which path is best for you. Life has many facets and is one interesting journey. As Board President Cathy Jo Summers also writes on her blog at the website, "Do we ever stop healing? I hope not. On the journey up the mountain we reach plateaus where we find peace and rest. But, I am grateful the healing never ends this side of heaven." The more healing found, the more freedom gained. Call S.O.A.R. Ministries today or walk into the ministry center anytime Monday – Thursday from 11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. You can also find a lot of valuable information on their website at <http://soarministry.org/>. One way or another get in touch either to find healing no matter how unimportant it may seem or how long ago events occurred, find a place to serve by volunteering and reap the reward of seeing true joy and freedom found, make a donation today either to the upcoming S.O.A.R. Festival or a financial donation (which can also be done through their website) that will make a lasting impact on lives of women and generations to come by breaking the cycle of defeat. Finding voices, changing lives one beautiful step at a time.