

# The VOICE



UNDERGROUND RAILROAD, INC.

Winter 2020



DeAndra escaped a dangerous relationship in January of last year. She began staying with a friend from work—someone her ex-boyfriend had never met. She was sure he wouldn't be able to find her. But the week of Valentine's Day a card arrived in her friend's mailbox. It was addressed to DeAndra.

*"To anyone else it would have seemed innocent enough. It was a card meant for a child. Just a little cartoon bear, holding flowers. The front said "Brace Yourself..." When you opened it up, the little bear popped out of the card like he was going to give you a hug. It said "Gotcha!" This sense of dread just overcame me. My heart fell to my stomach. All because of this little cartoon bear that was supposed to be cute. But to me that card was a threat. He wanted me to know he had found me."*



After receiving the card, DeAndra called Underground Railroad. She was shaken and scared. That weekend, DeAndra moved into emergency shelter so she could reside in a secure building. Court staff helped her file a personal protection order against her ex-boyfriend. She began working with an advocate to safety plan. They outlined different routes to work, and discussed what to do if she came face-to-face with her ex.

A year later, DeAndra has moved out of the area. She is living near family where she feels safe. And she still phones her advocate for emotional support.



## A Note From the Executive Director



Dear Friends,

2020 marks the 10th anniversary of the successful and trailblazing Advocates for Change Luncheon! This event was

the first in Underground Railroad's history to shed the secrecy of domestic violence—bringing the dialogue about abuse to the forefront to create change. For the first time, community leaders and supporters were connected to real survivors whose lives were touched by the work of Underground Railroad. Their emotional stories of courage inspired next-level activism that has raised over \$300,000 in the last decade to support the efforts to eliminate abuse. Looking back over the last 10 years, I'd like to thank all who have attended this event, who have contributed to its financial impact, and who have become part of its legacy to ensure every individual is safe in this community. We hope you will join us again this year, and for many more years to come.

Sincerely,

Christi Birchmeier, Executive Director

# HOLIDAY GIVING



This year, the magic of Christmas was created by you for 247 adults and children who have experienced abuse. Thanks to you, Christmas morning was filled with the smiles, laughter, and happy tears of families you've never met, but had the heart to love. Here are some of their words of gratitude:

*"I can't thank you enough. People like you make the world a better place."*

*"We talked about how Santa might not find us this year. We talked about how it would be enough to be together and healthy. We never expected all of these incredible blessings."*

*"I can't believe someone would love my children like their own. Their childhood has been rough. But today they get to be kids again."*

Thank you for bringing these families moments of joy during a difficult time, and helping them see that Christmas wishes still come true.



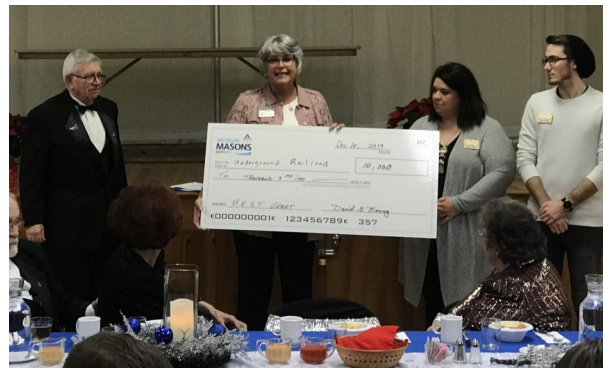


# THANK YOU!



A grant from the Michigan Masonic Charitable Foundation will help Underground Railroad continue its prevention efforts in middle and high schools across Saginaw County. Members of Saginaw Masonic Lodge #77 and Theresa Quezada, the foundation's Donor Relations Manager, presented a \$10,000 B.E.S.T. grant to Underground Railroad staff in December. The donation will help bridge a gap in funding after the Rape Prevention Education grant was not renewed for this year. Each year, Underground

Railroad's prevention curriculum reaches over 2500 students in grades 7-12. The curriculum offers invaluable information about healthy relationships, dating violence, consent, and media messages. Prevention staff also provides education and training to local businesses and organizations, and oversees the Saginaw County Men's Campaign. Many thanks to the MMCF and our local Masonic Lodge for allowing this program to continue!



## NEW PODCAST!

Bringing up domestic violence and sexual assault in conversation usually leads to awkward silence – but not here. Hosts Ally, Cierra, and Shawn are on a mission to spark dialogue and change culture. Each episode will explore topics that affect violence, gender roles, and social norms in America. Listen on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Google Podcast, and Tune In, as well as many other popular podcast listening apps.



**From left to right:** Shawn Schutt from Underground Railroad, Cierra Hessbrook from Bay Area Women's Center, and Ally Gajsiewicz from Midland Shelterhouse lead the discussion on the "Touchy Subjects" podcast.



# FEBRUARY IS TEEN DATING VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

"It's so important to learn the warning signs of abuse, how it looks at the beginning, and how it can get worse over time. There are such high numbers of dating violence, and lots of kids our age never get this information in school or at home. I was able to use what we learned to show a friend some of the abusive things her boyfriend was doing. She's safer now because of it." - Jessi, 10th grade



## HEALTHY

## UNHEALTHY

## ABUSIVE

**Respect** - Treating one another as an equal and whole human being. Valuing each other's thoughts, feelings and opinions.

**Communication** - Talks openly about problems and listens in a non-judgmental way. Affirms and understand each other's thoughts, feelings and opinions.

**Trust and Support** - Believing what one another says. Supporting each other's choice of friends, activities, goals and opinions.

**Honesty and Accountability** - Communicates openly, truthfully and respectfully. Acknowledges and accepts responsibility for one's own actions and words.

**Equality and Fairness** - Making decisions together and mutually agreeing on conflict resolutions where each other's needs are equally met.

**Enjoying Personal Time** - Enjoys spending time with one another while respecting each other's space and privacy when needed.

**Making Mutual Sexual Choices** - Talks openly about consent to one's sexual activities, choices, boundaries and birth control methods.

**Disrespect** - One partner (or both partners) does not always consider the other in the relationship.

**Poor Communication** - Unwilling to talk openly about relationship issues without a fight or not talking about problems at all. Not listening to, affirming or understanding one another's thoughts, feelings or opinions.

**Lack of Trust and Support** - Not believing one's feelings or opinions. Not supportive of one's choice of friends, activities or goals.

**Dishonesty and Lack of Accountability** - One partner (or both partners) is not truthful. Unwilling to acknowledge or accept responsibility for one's own actions and words.

**Takes Control or Unequal Resolutions** - Not making decisions together. One partner thinks their desires are more important.

**Feeling Crowded or Not Spending Time With Others** - Only spends time with their partner or limits partner from seeing others.

**Pressured Into Sexual Activity** - One partner tries to convince the other that they should have sex.

**Mistreats The Other** - One partner (or both partners) does not respect the feelings or physical safety of the other.

**Communicates In A Way That Is Meant To Be Hurtful** - Criticizes, belittles or humiliates their partner.

**No Trust or Support** - Accuse one another of flirting or cheating when it's not true. Refusing to give support in a physical or verbal way to hurt the other person as a result.

**Gaslighting and No Accountability** - Denies or blames the other for any abusive actions or uses manipulation to avoid accountability.

**Controls The Other** - No equality in the relationship. One partner makes all the decisions in the relationship and has all of the power.

**Isolates the Other Partner** - One partner controls where the other can go, see or who they talk to.

**Sexual Assault** - One partner forces sexual activity on the other without their consent.





## LEARN. DREAM. LIVE. RUN.

2020 Coach & Site Applications open February 1st at [gotrsaginawbay.org](http://gotrsaginawbay.org)



At Girls on the Run I learned ...

To do healthy things and make healthy choices.

And just be yourself and not someone else.

And be nice to people.

Thanks for making a difference

Avery

My grade is 5th

## Save The Date

Girls on the Run Saginaw Bay is turning 10! Show your true Girls on the Run spirit and come dressed in cocktail attire sporting your favorite pair of sneakers.

**Date:** Thursday, July 30, 2020

**Location:** Horizons Conference Center

**Tickets:** \$30 (Available at [gotrsaginawbay.org](http://gotrsaginawbay.org))

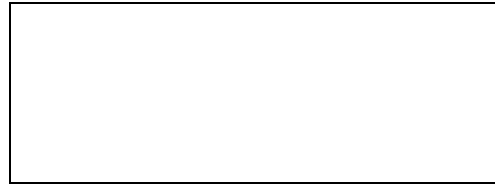


Proceeds  
benefit the  
Girls on the Run  
Saginaw Bay  
scholarship fund





5647 State Street, Ste. A  
Saginaw, MI 48603  
Business Phone: 399-0007



[www.facebook.com/UndergroundRR](http://www.facebook.com/UndergroundRR)



[www.twitter.com/URRSaginaw](http://www.twitter.com/URRSaginaw)



[www.instagram.com/undergroundrailroadinc](http://www.instagram.com/undergroundrailroadinc)



[www.undergroundrailroadinc.org](http://www.undergroundrailroadinc.org)



Underground Railroad, Inc.  
is a partner agency of the  
United Way of Saginaw County

# 10 YEARS ADVOCATES FOR CHANGE

One of our largest fundraising events is celebrating 10 years! Each year hundreds of URR supporters gather together to hear first-hand how URR is changing lives and transforming our community.

You can help us create success stories and continue to be Saginaw County's leading resource for services and education to end abuse. If you are interested in attending, please **contact Karen Sova at [ktesch@undergroundrailroadinc.org](mailto:ktesch@undergroundrailroadinc.org) or 989-399-0007 ext. 100.**



Your investment in URR makes an invaluable impact on this community and families in our region. **While the luncheon is complimentary, guests are asked to consider a financial gift.** Corporate sponsorships are available.

**May 14th**

Doors open at 11:30 am  
Program concludes by 1pm

Horizons Conference Center  
6200 State Street, Saginaw