

# out in the mountains

VERMONT'S VOICE  
FOR THE LESBIAN,  
GAY, BISEXUAL &  
TRANSGENDER  
COMMUNITY  
SINCE 1985

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## guest editor

### April is Sexual Violence Awareness Month in Vermont and Across the Country

SafeSpace is one of many anti-violence organizations planning events in April to raise awareness about the prevalence of sexual violence and to increase support for survivors of these crimes.

You may ask why should the queer community be concerned about sexual violence? Isn't that only something that happens to straight girls when they

and cultural oppression, queer survivors of sexual violence are often left invisible and struggling to heal from sexual violence alone.

SafeSpace organizes against all forms of violence, including sexual violence, because we want this to stop. We want our queer and allied community to embrace all survivors of violence, to believe them, to support their heal-



Kara DeLeonardis

### Everyone is affected by sexual violence because it not only affects the victim; but the victim's family, friends and community often suffer as well.

drink too much at a frat party? Or maybe you do have a queer friend who told you ze had been sexually abused when they were younger, or another friend confided in you about a really "bad date" they once had. But still you wonder how common could these experiences really be?

There are many myths about the realities of sexual violence. Did you know that one out of three girls will be sexually abused by the age of 18? Or that one out of every five boys will become a victim of sexual violence by the age of 18?

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning people are affected by sexual violence just like the rest of the population, in fact we may be more targeted because of our identities. Everyone is affected by sexual violence because it not only affects the victim; but the victim's family, friends and community often suffer as well.

Sexual violence is about power and control, not about sex. Just like our queer identities are about who we are as whole beings, not only (or at all, some would say) about who we choose to have sex with, or partner with. Because in both realms of "taboo" topics there are elements of shame, fear

ing, whatever that might look like, and never blame them for becoming a victim.

Vermont is experiencing a steady rise in sexual assaults every year. Last year, SafeSpace experienced a 25% increase from the year before of the number of survivors we worked with. The Women's Rape Crisis Center experienced a similar increase of 29% in the same year. The Vermont Crime Information Center reported a 58% increase from 2003 to 2004 in the number of rapes committed in Vermont.

These increases of violent crime are of grave concern, and lead us to grappling with reasons for the rising numbers of sexual assaults. Many of us do not believe these increases are merely about more women, men and young people reporting the violence perpetrated against them.

We believe violence may be on the rise due to many factors in our communities, in the broader culture, and in the world. We believe that the many changes that need to be made to end sexual violence in our state and community need to happen on every level and in many different ways.

- On the Individual level** – change is individuals choosing not to use violence.
- On the Community level** – change is supporting survivors and challenging discrimination and violence of all kinds.
- On the Institutional level** – change is justice for survivors and holding offenders accountable.
- On the Cultural level** – change is not condoning violence as an acceptable part of humanity.

SafeSpace invites you to join us in speaking out against sexual violence in our community. We hope to see you at one of the many powerful events during Sexual Violence Awareness Month, including the Take Back the Night speak-out and march in Burlington on April 4th, and SafeSpace's Run Against Rape on April 29th. You can find more information and a full calendar of events at [www.SafeSpaceVT.org](http://www.SafeSpaceVT.org), or by calling SafeSpace at 802-863-0003.

Kara DeLeonardis, LICSW, has been Executive Director of SafeSpace since the organization's inception in 2001.