

Local advocates honored for work helping sexual abuse victims

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SOMERS POINT — L'Oreal Chrisp said she should have died a long time ago, but God kept her alive for a reason.

That reason was to become an advocate for others who have suffered sexual assault and child abuse, Chrisp said Friday as she accepted an award for her advocacy work in honor of Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

“As women, we have to open up more and speak about the things that are against us,” Chrisp said.

Chrisp was one of four local residents honored by Avanzar, formerly The Women's Center, on Friday at the Crab Trap. This was the first year Avanzar decided to honor advocates. Patricia Miles-Jackson, sexual assault program supervisor, said it was a chance to bring together community resources and talk about an important topic.

Atlantic City resident, artist and advocate Valeria J. Marcus, 65, was among Friday's honorees. Marcus, a survivor of childhood sexual assault and domestic violence, has been a local advocate for several years but said it took her until her 30s to begin talking about what happened to her.

“I'm strong now,” she said. “But it's taken me a lifetime to get here.”

Other honorees included Raymond Hollis Jr., a pastor at Friendship Family Worship Center in Egg Harbor City, and Lois Worth, a sexual assault nurse examiner program coordinator for Avanzar. Worth was unable to attend Friday's lunch.

Hollis said those who work to help victims are part of something that must be done to help people heal “from the inside out.”

“When we do work, it's not about a paycheck or what we can get from it,” he said. “It's about reaching people.”

Friday's guest speaker was Tamu Lane, a local activist, artist and director of social justice programming at Avanzar. Lane is also a survivor of sexual abuse and domestic violence.

“Here's what I know about sexual violence,” Lane told the attendees. “It tears up the inner soul of a survivor. It makes you believe you don't matter.”

Lane called for an end to silence on the topic and an end to blaming survivors for their assault. She commended advocates like Friday's honorees for the important work they do.

“When will it ever be eliminated? I don't know, but in the meantime, it's nice to know that we have leaders in our community fighting for us. And this is why we are here today, to honor some amazing people fighting to change the world,” Lane said.

