

**THE LOWDOWN**  
**Sheriff Charles S. Blackwood**  
**Compass Center**  
**April 24, 2024**

The Compass Center is a non-profit agency dedicated to assisting people experiencing domestic violence. It provides a variety of services, all geared toward helping people navigate toward safety, stability, and empowerment, whether they are currently experiencing violence or recovering in the aftermath of such abuse. The Center directly helps people in crisis find their way out of unsafe, harmful relationships. It supports victims as they become survivors, and it provides educational programs about healthy relationship skills.

Unfortunately, the Center is reeling from the loss of many traditional funding sources, and it is wrestling to meet the ever-growing demand for services despite a shrinking budget. In the last year, they eliminated five staff roles. They still provide crisis services, but they also had to reduce the number of support and educational programs they offer.

Why do I care? Why should you?

Also called intimate partner violence, domestic violence is a crime that harms our neighbors, their children, and our entire community. I am confident most adults in Orange County know at least one person currently living in an abusive relationship. Though the problem is pervasive, it is shockingly hard to see at times. It might help if we could stop thinking about domestic violence in terms of split lips or black eyes. Violence is much more than physical force resulting in injury. It also encompasses the abuse of power and the threat of harm to more than just the body. Violence includes manipulation, deprivation, sexual coercion, the weaponization of children, and deliberate financial oppression. Sadly, this list is by no means complete. The forms abuse can take are limited only by the imagination of the perpetrator.

A dangerous relationship grows slowly. No one puts, “Looking for someone I can belittle, entrap, isolate, and beat,” in their dating app profile. Usually, by the time the victim realizes how unsafe he or she is, the escape routes available are narrow and treacherous. Some people are so stuck, they don’t ask for help leaving a partner. Instead, they seek advice on how to minimize injury during a beating, or what physical symptoms indicate the need for emergency medical care. Such heartbreaking questions reflect a profound hopelessness.

People tend to think in simple terms, such as, “Victims should just leave.” The Compass Center understands the issues are far more complex. Generally speaking, a victim tries to leave an abusive relationship six times before achieving permanent independence. This statistic is frustrating to many people, but it speaks to the universal difficulty of the toxic relationship dynamic. Additionally, a person who needs to leave a relationship rarely has the independent financial means to do so.

The Compass Center maintains three residential properties for those in crisis. Due to demand, these safe homes are almost always full. Staff receive five to ten additional requests for shelter per week that they are unable to fulfill. With 90% of survivors impacted by financial abuse, it is easy to see why most victims do not have the ability to pay for their own housing. Many choose to return to an unsafe relationship rather than face the dangers of living without secure shelter.

Please join us at a reception on May 5, 2024, at the Sheraton in Chapel Hill. “Breaking the Silence-Building Connections,” an interactive event designed to educate and amplify, will speak of the importance of helping survivors and to our collective need for a safer, more supportive community. Please come meet staff and board members; hear about their passion for this important work. Learn more about the struggles victims face in their relationships and on the path to healing and independence. Explore the Compass Center’s crucial programs and services, including its unique safe homes model for temporary housing.

This event will foster a welcoming environment for building community and breaking the silence surrounding intimate partner violence. Share light snacks and drinks, meet special guests, and enjoy an opportunity to win door prizes provided by community partners. If you can help by making an advance \$20.00 donation, please do, but the Compass Center welcomes everyone interested in the event regardless of financial ability. <https://tinyurl.com/CC-BreakingtheSilence>

The Sheriff’s Office Crisis Unit collaborates daily with staff and volunteers from the Compass Center. We see how hard they work and how much they care. I will be at the event, and I ask you to join me. Some of the stories you hear will surprise you; others will make you angry. All will convince you that this lifesaving, life-changing work is worthy of your support.