

### YOU CAN HELP END THE CYCLE OF SILENCE ON CAMPUS

Most victims of sexual assault do not report the crime to law enforcement. Many never tell anyone. Then because so few assaults are reported – most perpetrators walk free – and survivors don't get the help and support they need.

*I was raped my freshman year of college, as well as two of my sorority sisters. Once a few of my other sisters found out, they started calling us liars because we were "trying to get back at one of the girls who was with my boyfriend." They only cared about themselves and how the top fraternity probably won't want to mix with us anymore because we told the police what they had done. When I had my hearing for my case, my assaulter brought in seven witnesses, including one of my very own sorority sisters, who lied her way through it so he could win. In the end he got away with it from the stand point of my school and I will still have to see him walk around campus. But I am appealing the Board's decision, and I will not stop until he is gone.*

It's time to end this cycle. Your campus can take the lead.

### WHAT IS START BY BELIEVING?

Start by Believing is a public awareness campaign designed to end the cycle of silence and change the way we respond to sexual assault. It was first launched in April 2011. Since then, thousands of people across the country and around the world have made their own personal commitment. This includes many campus professionals:

*My name is Officer Don Kirk. I am a police officer at the University of Utah, Department of Public Safety. When someone tells me they were raped or sexually assaulted, I Start by Believing.*

*My name is Tina Morey. I am a campus sexual assault victim's services specialist. When someone tells me they were raped or sexually assaulted, I Start by Believing.*

*My name is Lauren Barrett. I am a nursing student and a survivor. When someone tells me they were raped or sexually assaulted, I Start by Believing.*

*My name is Susan S. Reutter. I am a Sociology and Criminology Instructor - I present and discuss the issues of sexual and domestic violence and promote advocacy programs. When someone tells me they were raped or sexually assaulted, I Start by Believing.*

But it's more than just a personal pledge. By transforming personal and professional responses to sexual assault, we can help victims pursue justice and healing.



**Failed responses... additional victims.**

**Stop the cycle and make our communities safer.**

## WHY IS THE PLEDGE IMPORTANT?

It is estimated that 1 in 5 women has been sexually assaulted during her college years. Yet decades of research demonstrate that sexual assault victims are often doubted or blamed, and these negative responses have a number of harmful effects. They also decrease the chance that victims will report the crime and reach out for help. You may have witnessed this firsthand on a campus.

*I am a PhD student. I am also a victim of rape. I told people, including the police. People questioned my truth, which made me question myself.*

This is why the message of Start by Believing is so vital - outcomes will only change when campus professionals respond to sexual assault reports from the initial presumption that they are of merit.

## WHAT DOES START BY BELIEVING MEAN ON CAMPUS?

Extensive media coverage on the alarming rates of sexual violence on campus - and concerns about institutional responses - have led to new policies and initiatives to combat this disturbing problem. We applaud these efforts.

However, when victims have the courage to tell a roommate, a resident assistant, or even a professor about their sexual assault - and they are doubted or blamed for their own behavior - victims will shut down before they get the chance to consider their reporting options. Unfortunately, the perception that a victim is lying is often the starting point for many people's reactions.

When we make that assumption, we risk causing the victim additional harm. This can also cut off any realistic chance of properly responding to the report, because victims will likely recant or withdraw their participation in the reporting process.

When we Start by Believing, we create an atmosphere where victims receive the support they need in order to participate in an investigation. When victims fully participate, there is an increased likelihood that a thorough investigation can be conducted. The choice is ours, and the risks are clear. We have far more to gain, and far less to lose, by approaching victims with a perspective of Start by Believing. It is the right thing to do for victims, and best for campus environments.



### TAKE THE PLEDGE

Start by making your own personal commitment to Start by Believing.

- I pledge to Start by Believing when someone tells me about their sexual assault.
- I pledge to help survivors on the road to justice and healing.
- I pledge to end the cycle of silence.

[Pledge now](#)



### SPREAD THE WORD

Then share the message with others. We have all the tools you need. Check out our [personal action kit](#) and [community action kit](#) to learn how to get started.

**Encourage campus administrators to make the pledge:** When the message comes from the top, it trickles down into daily actions that have a powerful impact on the community. You can encourage strong leadership on your campus.



University of Southern  
California Vice Provost,  
Ainsley Carry, Ed.D., MBA



**Partner with community organizations and criminal justice professionals:** In Central Virginia, the Start by Believing Task Force consisted of representatives from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), the University of Richmond, and J. Sargent Reynolds Community College, victim services agencies, area police departments, the Richmond Commonwealth Attorney's Office, the Henrico Commonwealth Attorney's Office, the Office of the Attorney General, and area hospitals.

**Send a campus wide email about the campaign:** At Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), nearly 50,000 students learned about the campaign through a [personal email](#) sent by University President Dr. Michael Rao.

Iowa State University and Ames,  
Iowa Police Department



Brought to you by End Violence Against Women International,  
America's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to  
improving criminal justice responses to sexual assault.

**Set up a display where students can learn about the campaign and make the pledge:** In Central Virginia, 33 pledge stations were set up across the community. As a result, over 1,600 Virginians made their own personal commitment to Start by Believing.



**Conduct a presentation** on sexual assault, and show the [Start by Believing slideshow](#).

**Make a video of why everyone should Start by Believing:** Sam Houston State University created this excellent [video](#) of students and professors banding together to pledge their commitment.

**Host a competition to motivate people to make the pledge:** The Central Virginia Start by Believing Task Force hosted a [video challenge](#) to get various groups to declare why they Start by Believing. See all the videos for yourself.

**Use social media:** At Iowa State University, Delta Sig Brother Steven Tallman showed his support of #StartByBelieving. Let your virtual audience know about your commitment to Start by Believing. And don't forget to use #StartbyBelieving.



**Use creative marketing to reach students:** Come up with a message that will reach students, faculty and staff and add the Start by Believing logo, like this example from Iowa State University Police Department!



**Write an article for the campus newspaper**, such as these articles in the [Iowa State Daily](#), and [Michigan Daily](#).

**Formally proclaim that your campus is a Start by Believing campus.** Arizona State University became the first in 2014 and many others followed their lead. To get you started, check out this [sample proclamation](#) from the University of Michigan.

**Want some help?** Give us a call or send an email to [info@startbybelieving.org](mailto:info@startbybelieving.org). We're here to help your community join the thousands of others transforming our response to sexual assault. Thank you for becoming a Start by Believing ally!

