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# West Valley City Police Department Launches Campaign Urging Support for Sexual Assault Victims as well as New Special Victims Unit

Very exciting things are happening in Utah! In late January, we learned of a new *Start by Believing* campaign in West Valley City, Utah.

Perhaps the aspect of this campaign that we are most impressed with is the outstanding leadership and support from Chief Lee W. Russo. On January 29th, Chief Russo issued a [press release](#) pledging his commitment to best serve the West Valley community by creating a Special Victims Unit. The new Unit will be staffed with highly-skilled and well-trained detectives to enhance the Department's efficiency and effectiveness in investigating sexual assaults and other violent crimes. He states,

*These crimes are typically the most complex and difficult to handle due to the traumatic impact experienced by victims and witnesses. Having investigators specially trained to deal with post traumatic effects, and well experienced in conducting these types of investigations will improve our ability to successfully conduct investigations, support the needs of victims and witnesses, and aid in improving the likelihood of prosecutions and convictions.*

The *Start by Believing* campaign officially launched on January 30th with a [press conference](#).



Building on the momentum, in early February, West Valley City Police Department, the Utah Coalition Against Sexual Assault and the Salt Lake Area Domestic Violence Coalition hosted a [joint press conference](#) in conjunction with a public exhibit of the [Clothesline Project](#) at the state capital. Representative Angela Romero spoke about her resolution to declare the first Wednesday of April each year to be *Start by Believing* day across the state of Utah.



EVAW International  
P.O. Box 33  
Addy, WA 99101-0033  
509-684-9800 Phone  
509-684-9801 Fax  
[info@evawintl.org](mailto:info@evawintl.org)

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Representative Angela Romero, Utah State Capital



Chief Russo, West Valley City PD

To illustrate Chief Russo's commitment to improve the service to, and support of sexual assault victims, we would like to share an excerpt with you from an [email](#) he sent to his staff, announcing the campaign:

*Taking part in the Start by Believing campaign allows us to set an example in our community that says when someone is sexually assaulted in our community, we will start by believing the victim, and you should too. This message does not change the perspective of objectivity required to be a credible professional, nor does our involvement change our intention to conduct a thorough investigation. We know, however, that when victims are approached from the perspective where they are initially challenged, accused of lying, or their behavior is questioned as contributing to the event, they will often be unable - or unwilling - to provide the type of information needed for law enforcement to successfully investigate the case. A*



For more information on the Start by Believing campaign, [visit our website](#) or check us out on [Facebook](#).

#StartByBelieving



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*thorough investigation therefore must ensure that the person is treated with compassion and respect, and that the report is handled professionally - instead of communicating the message (either explicitly or implicitly) that I don't believe you.*

We applaud Chief Russo for his leadership and support of the *Start by Believing* campaign. This type of leadership is critical to reaching the goal of the campaign - which is to change the way we respond to rape and sexual assault in our communities.

*Because rapists attack an average of six times, one failed response can equal five more victims. Start by Believing will lead the way toward stopping this cycle, by creating a positive community response, informing the public, uniting allies and supporters, and improving our personal reactions. The goal is to change the world, and outcomes for victims, one response at a time.*

We are hearing exciting news about campaigns flourishing throughout the country. Many communities are utilizing the campaign during Sexual Assault Awareness month in April ensuring that we will soon become a ***Start by Believing Nation***.

Will your community be next?

End Violence Against Women International

**Vision Statement:** We envision a world where gender-based violence is unacceptable; where perpetrators are held accountable, and victims receive the compassion, support, and justice they deserve.

**Mission Statement:** We inspire and educate those who respond to gender-based violence, equipping them with the knowledge and tools they need to support victims and hold perpetrators accountable. We promote victim-centered, multidisciplinary collaboration, which strengthens the response of the criminal justice system, other professionals, allies, and the general public -- making communities safer.

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