

“Hello, my name is Molly and I work at a place that helps to keep people’s minds and bodies safe. I work with youth of all ages across Androscoggin County on ways that they can stay safer. One day I may be in a pre-k class talking about personal space, and that afternoon I may be in a college setting talking about consent and healthy relationships. I provide violence prevention education in schools and community settings where youth are, and I have been in this role for about 14 years...”

Above is the introduction that I use in elementary schools when I go in to present violence prevention education almost every day. We do not share the name of our agency (Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Services) until at least 4th grade for comprehension and age related sensitivity. I started as a prevention educator/advocate in 2008 and immediately felt that this is what I should be doing with my work life. In my personal life and downtime, I rescue and rehabilitate animals of all sizes. I am a true giver through and through. In 2016 I took a 2 year break to pursue my passion for rescue horses because to be frank, I was getting a little burnt out as an educator advocate. While the work can be rewarding and having you feel like you have given back to the community, it can be exhausting and cause burnout. One must find ways to “refill their cup”. I returned to the work and same agency in 2019 and picked up right where I left off, in more ways than one...

Allow me to share some of the “real life” struggles that I have in this non-profit work: When I left the agency for a break in 2016 and then returned in 2019, I actually took home less money after I returned, while the cost of living continued to climb. On average in a school year month, I travel with my own car about 350 miles for work to and from schools that I serve. I do get a mileage stipend, but that doesn’t come close to wear and tear of the vehicle, or even the

gas prices of today to compensate for it all. I have a 4 year degree in psychology, 14 years' experience in the field, and have done other "social work" type jobs previous to SAPARS. To put things into perspective, I make less at my job in one year, than 1 year's tuition at the college that I attended....in 2004! I am fortunate that I have a partner that does not work in the field and can help with life expenses, in fact, he covers most of them. A big part of our relationship agreement is money. If this were not my reality, I could not support myself in this area with my current salary. I would be forced to find a different job simply for the pay. I do not have children, but I imagine if I did I also would not be able to financially make it work in the 40-hour week job as an educator/advocate I have now. While the facts above seem harsh and cold, they make me sad for a variety of reasons. Our community desperately needs sexual assault advocates and all that it entails. We provide a free service to folks regardless of income, economic class, race, religion, sex, etc... As advocates, we are in the business of caring, believing, and listening. I believe that the work that we do is genuine, valuable, evidence based, and important. But the gap between the important work that we do, and the people we serve, put up against a capitalist economy is large and vast. This proposed funding bill could help to close that gap, keep employees who are not forced to look for higher paying work, and retain the intelligent, caring and compassionate people our field so desperately needs. Thank you for allowing me to share just a small slice of my life and work, because let's face it, they intertwine.