



SANE Initiative Executive Director: Courtney Underwood

Courtney Underwood was born and raised in Dallas and graduated in the top 1% of her class at Southern Methodist University. During her freshman year at SMU, Courtney learned that Parkland was the only hospital in Dallas County performing rape kits. Dallas was also the largest city in the country without a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program and the largest city in the country without an independent rape crisis center. Courtney's fierce determination to create change has grown into a twelve year campaign to improve sexual assault services in Dallas County. Courtney worked with the Dallas Police Department, The Dallas County District Attorney's Office, and Texas Health Presbyterian Dallas and many city and county leaders for years, and in 2009 Texas Health Presbyterian Dallas formally committed to opening Dallas' first SANE Program. The U.S. Department of Justice explains that the basis of a SANE Program "is the belief that sexual assault victims have the right to immediate, compassionate, and comprehensive medical-level evaluation and treatment by a specially trained professional who has the expertise to anticipate their needs during this time of crisis." During that same time, Courtney co-founded Dallas's only independent rape crisis center, and she played a key role in helping both programs receive millions of dollars in funding. The opening of Texas Health Dallas SANE provided sexual assault victims with the dignity of choosing where to go for treatment, something they never had before, with one of those choices being endorsed as "the best development in victim services in the last twenty years" by The Department of Justice; the opening of Texas Health Dallas SANE also led to a 25% increase in sexual assault reporting in Dallas after only four months.

As a teenage victim of sexual assault in Dallas, Courtney remembers what it was like to search for help in Dallas and to find none. Now, she continues to lead the charge in ensuring that sexual assault victims in Dallas will never again search for help only to find none. Courtney believes that every neighborhood deserves a SANE Program in their community, so she left her full time job in commercial real estate to become The Executive Director of The SANE Initiative, which has proved to be innovative and extremely successful in just its first year. As Executive Director, Courtney has helped in the development, establishment, and opening of The Methodist Dallas SANE Program, marking the first time in Dallas's history that rape kits have ever been available in South Dallas. After bringing attention to problems at SMU, Courtney was chosen by SMU President Gerald Turner to be on The President's Task Force on Sexual Misconduct Policies and Procedures at SMU. And in 2013, Courtney played an integral role working with Texas State Senator Wendy Davis on the authoring and passing of Senate Bill 1191. Courtney provided testimony to the Texas House of Representatives and the Texas State Senate which helped ensure the successful passing of this new law which requires every hospital with an emergency room in Texas to begin providing rape kits, making it against the law to turn victims away. The SANE Initiative is partnered with The Dallas Forth Worth Hospital Council on providing education forums about SB 1191, the first being extremely successful with more than 225 medical executives attending, because education and understanding are key to the successful implementation of this new law. Courtney's work has been recognized in a number of news stories and publications, including stories in the Dallas Morning News, D Magazine, The Observer and in multiple news stories on all local stations. In 2011, Courtney received the Public Safety Leader of the Year Award from the Rotary Club of Dallas and Safer Dallas Better Dallas, The Good Works Under Forty Award from the Dallas Foundation, The Ron J. Anderson Healthcare Servant Leadership Award from the Alliance for Healthcare Excellence, and the SMU Women's Symposium Profiles in Leadership Award. In 2012, The Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA) awarded Courtney with the 2011 Excellence in Advocacy Award, and she received The Taking A Stand Against Sexual Violence Award from Arise! International.