

## **Northern Arapaho Sacred Shield Program**

*Donovan Antelope*

The Sacred Shield Northern Arapaho Tribe Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Program is one of the tribal programs established to help victims of domestic and sexual abuse.

Sacred Shield is dedicated to the empowerment of victims of violence through advocacy , education and support. They empower their clients to affirm their own strengths and to choose to live a life free of violence, affiliation, color, or financial status. Sacred Shield promotes a just, safe and peaceful society on the Wind River Indian Reservation. They strive to improve the safety for Native women who experience battering, sexual assault and stalking. All services offered by Sacred Shield are free, confidential, and non-discriminatory.

If Native women have been physically or sexually abused, threatened, had personal liberties restricted, or have been a victim of domestic violence, they are entitled to assistance. All victims of domestic violence have the right to file petitions through Tribal Court for the following help:

Protection Order which is for 90 days, orders “respondent not to abuse the victim,” to stay away from the victim’s home, work and school, orders not to communicate with the victim in any way, temporary custody of children, orders for both parties to not damage or destroy joint property, and temporary possession of home.

Sacred Shield offers one-on-one support with an advocate, crisis intervention, shelter, food, and clothing, referrals, assistance in filing compensation forms and legal advocacy.

Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior used to establish power and control over a spouse or relationship partner through fear and intimidation, often using the threat of physical violence. Usually domestic violence occurs when one person in the relationship believes they are entitled to control the other.

The abuse of Native American women in Indian Country is alarmingly high and the number of cases rise each year. Native American women experience violence at

rate three and half times greater than that of the national average. Every hour of every day they are the victim of physical abuse.

These findings are very disturbing, especially in a culture where women are supposed to be held in high respect. For the Northern Arapaho Tribe, women are mothers and grandmothers, without them we wouldn't have life. The Arapaho tribe in the past held their women at a high level of respect and honor, in some cases they are held higher than men. But after the deconstruction of cultural ways due to Americanization, Native American men in the early 1900's began to treat women no longer as equals but as their personal property. The introduction of alcohol and drugs also helped with this deconstruction of respect for Native Women. Sacred Shield and other tribal programs are trying to bring back that respect for women through education and awareness.

Sacred Shield is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. They are there to provide any and all assistance for victims of abuse. Women do not have to live with abuse and feel there is nothing they can do. Sacred Shield opens the doors of safety for women and provides the services and tools for them to become empowered and have a voice of their own. For any victim of domestic violence or sexual assault can contact Sacred Shield at 307-857-3965.