

# The Valley Breeze

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## Speaker on a mission will share story of abuse with parents March 8

By [LOUISE TETREAULT](#), Valley Breeze Staff Writer

NORTH SMITHFIELD – Claire Silva is on a mission.

Her cause, childhood sexual abuse.

Silva readily admits it's not a topic that's easy for others to contemplate, never mind talk about. But then, it's her mission to speak with groups, parents, and educators about her children's experience as the victims of childhood sexual abuse at the hands of their older stepbrother.

"You always think it's going to happen in someone else's family," said Silva.

Because of that, Silva has written, "A Child's Heart Speaks: Surviving Sexual Abuse," a book about her family's experience and offering her insight and experience with the topic.

As part of her mission to educate the public, Silva offers to speak to groups for free. She will make a presentation to parents and educators on Wednesday, March 8, from 7-8 p.m. at Scouter's Hall, Main Street. The evening is sponsored by the North Smithfield Prevention Task Force.

Silva's sons were ages 5 and 2 when she discovered they were being victimized by their older stepbrother.

"He terrorized them with horrible tales of monsters telling them if they ever cried or told, these beings would know and these beings would come to kill them," said Silva.

When she discovered the truth, Silva set out to gather information from national interviews with adult survivors seeking to gain knowledge so she could be the most supportive parent to her children.

Her presentation will include information on what sexual abuse is and how it happens, how to recognize a perpetrator, how to keep children safe, how to talk with your children in regards to prevention as well as when abuse is suspected, signs of sexual abuse, healing from the trauma, and helping survivors and families.

Today Silva says her children are doing very well.

"They're kids again," she said.

Her stepson is in a treatment facility and while she does not have any contact with him; her husband does.

According to Paulette Hamilton, director of the task force, an estimated 49,565 Rhode Island children will be victims of sexual abuse before the age of 18.

Silva has worked in Massachusetts and Rhode Island providing substance abuse and violence prevention since 1991. She is currently the executive director of the YWCA of Greater Rhode Island and a consultant for the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention.

Even with her background, Silva said she ignored her own intuition because she didn't think children were capable of these crimes.

Today, she hopes her willingness to speak up will help others listen to their inner voice and that her book will help prevent the crime and provide resources to help families and survivors.

For more information about the event, call Hamilton at 766-3881.

To find out more about Silva, visit her Web site, <http://www.claireilva.com/>.

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