**YWCA’s Jessica Matthews Continues Advocacy Mission as Whitman’s New SAVA**

Education and advocacy are two principles Jessica Matthews holds dear.

Well before Matthews stepped on Whitman’s campus as the college’s new sexual assault victim’s advocate, her fervor for social justice and advocacy for marginalized populations had already began to shape her career trajectory.

In 2012, Matthews traveled to Malawi as a member of the Peace Corps to organize a men’s prison program centering on HIV prevention and violence.

“It was an overall health and wellness program with a focus on violence prevention, HIV prevention, HIV treatment and care,” Matthews said. “We had a natural medicine and gardening component of the project as well.”

Upon returning to the states in 2014, Matthews settled in Seattle working at the tuberculosis control clinic at Harborview Medical Center. The duties Matthews performed during her four years at Harborview mostly consisted of administrative duties, a stark contrast from the mostly hands-on work completed in Malawi.

In 2018, Matthews joined the YWCA and replaced Hailey Powers as Whitman’s SAVA.

“Basically, the definition of an advocate is to help with whatever survivors need at the time, going from high priority items to helping with more long-term things,” she said.

As an advocate, Matthews assists a survivor of an assault with accompanying the survivor to the hospital, standing with them as a rape kit is performed, connecting them with counseling, and helping them through the process of filing a police report or a report with the college.

Prior to Matthews arrival, Hailey Powers had been Whitman’s first SAVA; she held the position for two years. Because the SAVA is employed by the YWCA, Matthews is not a mandatory reporter.

“One thing that's unique about me is that I am privileged and confidential,” she said, “I don't have to report to anyone, aside from extreme circumstances where someone told me that they were planning to harm themselves or harm someone else. Aside from that, I never have to report anything to the college or to anyone else.”

During Matthews 9 months on campus, she has focused her efforts on ensuring that students, faculty and staff are aware that the SAVA is still a resource for the Whitman community.

“My hope is that we dispel this myth that the position was eliminated and that more and more students become aware of who I am and what my position is,” Matthews said.

Matthews is a graduate of Colorado College where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in sociology and education. She earned her Master of Public Health degree at Oregon State University. While in college, Matthews helped to organize Take Back the Night events and worked as a peer health graduate assistant.

Matthews spends approximately 20 hours per week focusing on Whitman campus work, which includes outreach and events, as well as meeting one-on-one with clients. Appointments can be made to meet with Matthews in her office in **Hunter 406** generally Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., though she is willing to meet with students in the evenings and the weekends if that is more convenient for them. She can be contacted by phone at 509-526-3032 or by [email](mailto:sava@ywcaww.org).

“There are lots of resources out there. If you're comfortable, talk to someone that's in a position to help you,” she said. “Talk to a friend definitely, but also talk to someone that has the potential to connect you with resources.”

Please note, the YWCA has advocates available 24/7 through their crisis line: 509-529-9922. All advocates at the YWCA are trained in both sexual assault and domestic/intimate partner violence crisis response.