



PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The North Knox Area Ministerial Association (NKAMA), The City of Bicknell, and Hope's Voice announce their success in garnering \$30,000 for the creation of the Bicknell Community Garden (Garden) to be constructed across from the Fire Station this summer. Funded by an Indiana State Department of Health, Rape Prevention and Education (RPE) grant awarded through the Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV), the Garden is a collaboration between diverse partners to implement a strategy designed to prevent sexual and other forms of violence in the community.

The Garden will be available for community groups to grow a variety of vegetables, herbs, plants and flowers for local use by the food pantry and other NKAMA projects. The Garden will serve as a safe space for community members to gather, nurture neighborhood bonds, and further a cohesive, mutually-supportive culture. It will include raised growing beds, easily navigated pathways, decorative fencing, seating areas, and a small out-building for storage. The Garden will be well-lighted, handicap accessible, and will have city-provided water access. Final plans for the design will be completed by the grant partners by early April, with basic site preparation scheduled to begin in March.

The majority of the RPE funding will be used to purchase the physical materials for the Garden. Additionally, Hope's Voice has assigned a project manager to coordinate and communicate the project to the community. While the intention of the collaborative effort is to establish a large volunteer base to sustain the project, both Hope's Voice and NKAMA note that initial project management and dedicated staff time is necessary to actually launch the project.

"We are extremely pleased that Hope's Voice was able to garner this funding," said Thomas Estabrook, Bicknell Mayor. "Community gardens are an environmental strategy to connect people in ways that actually make a community safer. Consistent with our blight reduction project, this Garden continues our efforts to create safe spaces that the people of Bicknell can enjoy and socialize in."

Seth Alexander, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Bicknell, said that the land, owned by NKAMA, has been idle for over 15 years. "We're delighted that Hope's Voice and ICADV committed resources to this project, enabling us to deploy the property in a manner that serves multiple purposes – food supply, community connectedness, and enhanced public safety."

Melissa Haaff, Director of Hope's Voice, explained that sexual violence should be viewed through a public health lens, recognizing that primary prevention – encompassing population-based strategies, policies, and actions – is essential. Public health is concerned with community-wide approaches rather than traditional strategies focused on the individual. This data-informed, evidence-based approach promotes social norms that protect against violence, provide opportunities to empower and support girls and women, and create protective environments.

According to Ms. Haaff, "This partnership represents the most progressive efforts in violence prevention to date. Creating safe community space fosters community connectedness which in turn, serves as a strong protective factor against violence. We are grateful for the favorable consideration by ICADV and the partnership it has launched."

Hope's Voice was established by Children and Family Services in 2012 to provide services to survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Prevention services were the first efforts initiated by Hope's Voice at its founding.