

LINKS



Family Sunshine Center

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE • FOSTERING HOPE & HEALING

Winter 2007/2008

Volume 22, Number 4

Domestic Violence Can Be Lethal Message to Victims – Take Threats Seriously



Husband kills wife in domestic dispute. Domestic violence turns deadly for woman and her children. Murder/suicide puts end to years of violent assaults. Domestic violence victim dead, husband in critical condition. These are examples of the kind of headlines that abound throughout the nation, confirming the fact that domestic violence can, indeed, be lethal.

So far this year, residents of Montgomery and surrounding counties have learned first-hand that domestic violence can be deadly. According to Lt. Steve Searcy with the Montgomery Police Department's Domestic Violence Bureau, there have been 13 domestic violence homicides in the City of Montgomery so far this year, but those homicides won't all show up as domestic violence-related in other government reports. "We report these deaths a little differently than the Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) of the FBI. We include deaths that are not included in the CJIS numbers, including children who are murdered in a domestic violence situation, as well as family members who kill other family members in a domestic dispute," Lt. Searcy said. Elmore County has also experienced a number of incidents of deadly domestic violence so far this year.

While the presence of violence in a home always includes an elevated risk for serious injury or death, there are certain times or circumstances that particularly elevate the risk. Lt. Searcy warns that deaths due to domestic violence can spike during the holiday season. "The holidays bring about increased court-ordered exchanges of children, as well as elevated levels of stress, anxiety and depression. This is a mix that can maximize the likelihood of lethality," he said.

Domestic violence experts point to other areas of concern. According to the Alabama Coalition against Domestic Violence, "All battering is dangerous; one push or shove could result in death. However, certain behaviors, actions and words by an abuser indicate particular danger for you." The U.S. Department of Justice publishes the following information as the top five indicators that an abusive relationship could turn deadly.

If the abuser ever used, or threatened to use, a gun, knife or other weapon, your risk of death is elevated 20.2 times. If the abuser ever threatened to kill or injure you, then you are 14.9 times more likely to be killed. If the abuser has ever tried to choke you, your chances of succumbing to deadly force increase 9.9

continued on page 2

A Day in the Life of the Family Sunshine Center

The Family Sunshine Center touches the lives of many people each day. On an average day the FSC serves three women and four children in emergency shelter plus 26 women and 47 children in transitional housing.

Recently, the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) took a survey of shelter programs, which gives a snapshot into services provided over a 24-hour period. Following are the results for the Family Sunshine Center taken from the morning of September 25 to the morning of September 26, 2007.

- 14 crisis line calls were received.
- 15 women and 12 children were living in transitional housing.
- 59 women, 1 man and 7 children received non-residential services.
- Individual advocacy was received by 20 women and 5 children who were living in shelter or transitional housing.
- 10 women were served in group residential advocacy.
- 33 women and one child received non-residential individual advocacy.
- During 3 presentations, 350 people in the community were given training or prevention education.

These numbers do not include batterers' intervention services.



A Message From the Executive Director



Dear Gentle Reader,

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate our staff and inform you about numerous improvements and changes made in Program Services in the past fiscal year.

First, the Exodus Community was given a grant by Wachovia Bank to create a learning center and implement a Career Assessment and Development program for its clients. Under the leadership of Marjorie Baker, program director, Dr. Carolyn Thomas and her associates are meeting with the Exodus clients to map out educational and employment plans that fulfill their aspirations. Wachovia enabled us to acquire Discover software designed to accomplish this. Eight women successfully completed this program during FY 2007.

Second, the FSC received a three-year grant from the U. S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women, to provide financial assistance to battered women for six weeks of child care payments, rent and utility deposits, bus vouchers and gas vouchers. We were also granted funds to employ a housing specialist to assist clients with developing housing plans and to develop cooperative agreements with housing providers to arrange temporary safe shelter. The grant also allows us to continue providing furniture and household items to families entering the Exodus Community.

We also continue to take lifesaving services into all seven counties the FSC serves. We have counselors in Autauga, Butler, Chilton, Crenshaw, Elmore, and Lowndes counties at least one day per week. Our strongest allies in this effort remain the Autauga, Elmore and

"Dear Gentle Reader" continued on page 3

"Lethality" continued from page 1

times. If the abuser is violently or constantly jealous, then your chances of being killed escalate 9.2 times. If the abuser has ever forced the victim to have sex, the lethality probability increases 7.6 times.

Other risk factors for lethality include an abuser who: threatens suicide or fantasizes about suicide; considers that you belong to him/her; idolizes you and/or depends heavily upon you to sustain him/her; believes you will leave and cannot imagine life without you; and/or begins to have little regard for the consequences of his/her actions.

Because research indicates that battering increases in frequency and severity over time, it is important for victims who do not leave at least to consider safety issues. For instance, during an argument, or if you feel tension building, avoid areas in your home where weapons might be available – the kitchen, bathroom, bedroom or workshops. If there are weapons in your household such as firearms – lock them up! Having a gun in the home adds to your danger. Know where there is a safe exit from your home – a window, elevator or stairwell. Discuss the situation with a trusted neighbor if you can. Devise a code that will prompt them to call police. Always keep a packed bag ready. Place essential items for daily living – medical records, children's immunization records, birth certificates, passports, other critical documents, an extra set of keys, etc. – in a safe place, with a trusted friend or family member. And, know where you would go to be safe if you have to leave. "For victims in Autauga, Butler, Elmore, Chilton, Crenshaw, Lowndes and Montgomery counties, part of their safety plan might be to become familiar with the services that we provide at the Family Sunshine Center, and to commit our crisis line number, 1.800.650.6522, to memory," said Center Executive Director Karen Sellers.

Health Links

The Charge of the Light Brigade

In the early fall, Family Sunshine Center employees made a big decision – they decided to focus on their health and wellness. A committee was convened and members began to develop goals and objectives for the Wellness Committee. The committee subsequently became the "Light Brigade." The committee chair, Maggie Howard, became active immediately, calling in volunteers from the community to talk about weight loss and exercise resources available to staff members, in-service presentations were made about exercise, health and nutrition and a weight-loss program was started. "We've had a lot of fun with our 'Biggest Loser, Biggest Gainer' weight-loss campaign," Maggie said. By the end of November, staff had recorded a loss of 68 pounds collectively, and had walked 119 miles. "We feel that this is substantial progress, especially given the fact that we were dieting over Thanksgiving." The weight-loss campaign features three teams representing the administrative, shelter and counseling divisions of the agency. These teams are competing to lose the most pounds and/or raise the most money. Team members are asking friends and relatives to donate a certain amount of money per pound lost before January 31, 2008, the scheduled end of the competition. However, team members are looking to extend the dieting regime past the deadline into the spring. "We are very excited about this effort. Not only will it be great for our staff members, but the agency should benefit from healthier employees, as well," said Barbara Lemley, business manager.

Volunteer Links

Generosity Was In Abundance During the Holidays

The FSC would not be able to provide holiday assistance to its clients without your generosity. And this year, as always, the community really stepped up. Several different groups provided Thanksgiving meals to 127 adults and 348 children. As of the writing of this newsletter, not including shelter residents, 71 women and their children were adopted for Christmas, and more than 80 women were provided gift baskets. In addition, many groups and individuals helped out with logistics, such as gift wrapping, transporting clients, filling gift baskets, and more. Thank you, thank you, thank you!



St. John's AME Church Lay Organization officers delivered toys.

There will be a full list of those who helped us out in the next issue of LINKS.



ALFA wrapped gifts for children who would be attending the client Christmas party. The group also provided toys, as they do every year.

Thank You, Volunteers! September 1 – November 30, 2007

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"Dear Gentle Reader" continued from page 2

Crenshaw County domestic violence task forces and their members.

Finally, a grant to the United Way from the U. S. Attorney's Office, Middle District of Alabama, enabled us to partner with AUM's Crime Prevention Clearinghouse and Division of Continuing Education and the Montgomery County Task Force on Domestic Violence to conduct a Stalking Conference, which was made available to all law enforcement in our service area. More than 100 law enforcement officers and other professionals attended this targeted training.

Regrettably, one of the FSC's programs, which has operated since 1988, had service cutbacks. EVEN, the perpetrator intervention program, has been losing referrals for the past five years. Established under the assumption that program participants would pay for the service, the decline in program participants has necessitated the elimination of three of the five groups we provide. Board President Jeanie Holloway is making it a priority to explore and resolve the continuing loss of referrals to this program. "We feel that the EVEN program is a vital element of our mission to stop the cycle of violence in families. I am committed to renewing the strong relationships with the court system that sparked success in this program when it was established," Holloway said.

In closing, it is important to note that the new resources coming into the agency are tied to new initiatives, leaving us with the continuing challenge of searching for operating funds to maintain existing services. Even so, FSC staff continues to assess service needs of battered women and abused children and develop strategies to fill in the gaps, and to be faithful to the mission established 16 years ago by a group of dedicated community volunteers.

'Til next time,


Karen Sellers

Volunteers continued page 4

Volunteers continued

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September 1 – November 30, 2007

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The Family Sunshine Center is a River Region & Chilton County United Way Agency.

Our Mission: To end family violence and foster hope and healing. To offer immediate response and a safe haven in crisis. To provide advocacy, counseling, and support for families to empower them to lead safe and violence-free lives. To promote community awareness through education and training.

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Kids Helping Kids

The summer drought was in full force on August 4th as Wilson Price Barranco Blankenship & Billingsley (Wilson Price) gathered at Eastdale Mall to promote "Kids Helping Kids." Their annual art contest for children up to 12 years old prompted thoughts of the holiday season with hopes of cooler weather and rain in the months to come.

This event was designed not only as fun for children, but profitability too! Kids who participated were competing to win a \$500 savings bond and to have their artwork displayed on the front of the 2007 Wilson Price Christmas Card. It was a big hit at the mall drawing in a constant stream of families with children eager to be creative.

Wilson Price maintains a strong sense of community and community involvement. Their firm and its employees enjoy hosting this event and believe that families in the River Region benefit from hearing more about the services offered by the Family Sunshine Center. The FSC is represented at the event itself, and the agency's missions is printed on the finished card.

This effort is the brain child of Belinda Ressler, who continues to organize it each year. "The FSC is my favorite charity, which makes this effort a labor of love for me. I am so proud that the people I work with share the same commitment to this mission as I do," Ressler said.

This year's art contest winner was 12-year-old Min-ji Kim. The front of the finished card is displayed above.

