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Three Perspectives of Domestic Violence

by Allison Boomer and Jill Tanner

Domestic violence was a major causal factor in the murder of **35** women and children in the first four months of this year (2010). That sobering statistic was shared by Jayne Downing, Executive Director, Mid-Valley Women's Crisis Service, who was one of the three individuals participating in the Mary Leonard Law Society Continuing Legal Education Program entitled *Three Perspectives of Domestic Violence*.

Jayne has a wealth of experience working with both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. She explained that social workers evaluate domestic violence as a pattern of behavior in which the abuser uses emotional and physical abuse to control and weaken the victim. It is often difficult to distinguish between a truly isolated event and pattern of violence. Nevertheless, Jayne identified some of the key characteristics typical of abusers and some of the common behaviors that abusers use to control victims.

Abusers are often very charming; they know how to lure a victim into a relationship and bring her back time and again. Surprisingly, abusers are also very much in control of their behavior; domestic violence rarely occurs because the abuser lost his temper. To illustrate this attribute, Jayne noted the fact that, when police are called to the scene of domestic violence, the abuser is often very calm while the victim is visibly upset. Because abusers are both charming and self-controlled, abusers are often successful in convincing judges to give them sole custody of children; they will often behave well in front of a judge and seemingly comply with court orders.

Early in a relationship, an abuser will likely seek out sensitive information about the victim, such as whether she has been hurt by someone in her past. He will probably act outraged at an affirmative response, but will ultimately use this information against the victim at some point in the future. Abusers will use other tactics to keep a victim in the relationship, such as isolating her both socially and geographically, or threatening to have her children taken away. Finally, Jayne reminded attendees that, while it is tempting to ignore indications of abuse given the uncomfortable nature of the topic, it is crucial that friends and family talk to victims about obvious injuries or other signs of abuse. Victims rarely acknowledge that they are in an abusive relationship, but it is important nonetheless that others ask how they are doing and let them know that help is available.

Amy Queen, who is an Assistant Marion County District Attorney and a domestic violence prosecutor, knows that domestic violence cases are unique. The uniqueness arises from a love relationship that has morphed into one person, an abuser, controlling the other, a victim, through geographic or social isolation, and emotional and economic abuse. Amy disclosed the formation of the Domestic Violence Team that brings law enforcement (Salem police), officers of the court (district attorneys), and trained volunteers together to jointly educate the community, advocate for victims, and prosecute crimes, including assault, menacing, strangulation, harassment, stalking, and kidnapping, among others. Victims often argue against criminal prosecution, fearing that all the abuser's threats including physical violence and gaining sole custody of the children will be the outcome of a legal action. Amy, a 2004 Willamette University College of Law graduate, emphasized that her role is to talk to, not judge, victims and to be allowed to enter into their world so she can effectively educate judges and juries about domestic violence and the impact on victims, including children.

Both Amy and Chris Sielicky, a Marion-Polk Legal Aid attorney since 1991, discussed how to use the law, specifically The Family Abuse Prevention Act (FAPA), to protect a victim from domestic violence. Amy stated that sometimes the “only thing” victims “can get is a restraining order” to protect them against unwanted contact by a family member or partner. Chris emphasized the importance of “safety planning” when a victim decides to leave the abuser and how to keep children and the victim safe. Chris referenced the publication (co-sponsored by the Mary Leonard Law Society) entitled *Domestic Violence Community Resource and Legal Information Guide* and specifically, *Steps for Getting a FAPA Restraining Order*.

Each presenter in his or her own way acknowledged that victims need to be repeatedly reminded that domestic violence is not their fault. Here’s what you can do about domestic and sexual violence:

Take Action Now. Make a Difference for the Future.

As a leader in our community, you can make a difference! The following are some suggestions from those who work with victims and survivors on a daily basis in Oregon:

Immediate Response:

1. **Victim Support:** If you talk with someone who discloses abuse, there are three simple and easy things to say that can help: *“You deserve to be safe. This is not your fault. There is help available.”* Refer victims in Marion County to Mid-Valley Women’s Crisis Service at (503) 399-7722 (or toll free at 1-866-399-7722). Outside of Marion County refer victims to their local service provider or the national 24-hour confidential domestic violence hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE. Remind them they can call 911 immediately in an emergency.
2. **Community Action:** Speak out in your community about the effects of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. Send a clear message that by joining together, our communities can make a difference for victims and their children. As a community leader, you have a unique opportunity to indicate the importance of a coordinated community response to end violence. Victim advocates, law enforcement, prosecutors, child welfare caseworkers, health care providers, civil attorneys, educators, and others all have an essential role to play in preventing violence and providing safety. Coordination of these roles is vital – ask how your community’s response is coordinated. Contact your local domestic violence service provider if you would like help in speaking out.
3. **Program Support:** Visit your local domestic violence crisis program and learn what they are doing right now to end violence in your community. Offer your help. (A list of programs in each county can be found on the DHS website at <http://www.dhs.state.or.us/abuse/domestic/gethelp.htm>).

Beyond the Immediate Response:

1. Help build a long-term coordinated community response to domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking throughout Oregon;
2. Get training on domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking, and encourage others to be trained as well. This training is most important for anyone working with or providing services to people who may be victims. Your local crisis program can provide this training, often free of charge;
3. Propose and support legislation that provides shelter and core safety and prevention services to victims, and holds abusers accountable. Examples include:

- Adequate state funding for shelters and services to victims, to ensure that assistance is available to victims on an equitable basis across the state;
- Placing domestic violence advocates in DHS Child Welfare offices, to ensure that safety is available for victims and children at the point of crisis;
- Requiring employers to have workplace violence policies in place to provide training regarding appropriate response to these issues;
- Establishing a statewide policy person to coordinate our state's response to violence;
- Providing prevention education and safety response training in our schools.

**Thank you for your concern.
Together, we can help keep Oregonians safe.**

**Brought to you by Mid-Valley Women's Crisis Service
and the Oregon Alliance to End Violence Against Women.
Please feel free to contact us for more information or with any questions.
Contact persons: Jayne Downing 503-378-1572 or Sybil Hebb, 503-936-8959**

Mary Leonard Law Society (MLLS) thanks Jayne, Amy, and Chris for an informative and educational program. MLLS appreciates the continuing support of Willamette University and the April 20, 2010, use of the Ford Hall Boardroom.

