

northwest

Domestic Violence Experts Convene in Washington County

Focus on sexual minorities

by Sarah Dougher

A broad coalition of educators, law enforcement and service providers met Dec. 2 in Wilsonville to discuss domestic violence in the sexual minorities community at a conference titled "Working Toward Equality."

About 200 people attended the event, which was chaired by Washington County Circuit Court Judge Nancy W. Campbell.

The premise of the conference was that although domestic and dating violence occurs among sexual and gender minorities at the same rate as it does among straight couples, it is far more underreported, and the services available to prevent and prosecute it are minimal.



Washington County Circuit Court Judge Nancy W. Campbell convened the conference on same-sex domestic violence.

The event was co-sponsored by the Western Community Policing Institute, Domestic Violence Intervention Council, Washington County Circuit Court, Williams Project (funded by the Gill Foundation, John McDonald and Robert Wright) and Voices Set Free.

According to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 6,523 sexual minority domestic violence incidents were reported nationwide and in Ontario, Canada, in 2002. It is estimated that 25 percent to 33 percent of sexual minority relationships involve domestic violence. Rates of domestic violence in queer relationships are generally in line with rates in the straight population.

Portland Mayor Tom Potter welcomed the assembled group after conference participants had a chance to mingle and get information from local and regional organizations.

To set the stage, a demographer and a lawyer, Gary Gates and Brad Sears, provided an overview of the sexual minority population statewide and the most significant constitutional law cases affecting the rights of queer Oregonians. They noted that there is limited empirical research exploring sexual minorities nationwide and that gay and lesbian demography represents uncharted territory.

Using some tricky statistical work, Gates, author of *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas*, showed how the 2000 census could be used to gather a smattering of information but added that the information is still deeply flawed. This is problematic because census analyses can inform many important policy debates, among them marriage rights, retirement/Social Security issues and military service.

After this overview, Loree Cook-Daniels of the American Society of Adult Abuse Professionals and Survivors described domestic violence within the culture of gay and lesbian society, particularly the implications of this minority status on people experiencing domestic violence. She noted that homophobia in the United States has created a culture where queers protect people who they see as allies—including abusers—because they don't want to make the "community" look bad. This is particularly significant for people who came of age in the 1940s and '50s and experienced much more overt violence and oppression from society at large.

Abusers in the queer community have additional tools for domestic violence because of social stigma. Abusers can threaten to "out" someone, and because there are few community property laws for queers,

Anti-Violence Resources

- National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs: www.ncavp.org
- Gay Men's Domestic Violence Project: www.gmdvp.org
- Forge: www.forge-forward.org
- Survivor Project: www.survivorproject.org
- Pride Project: www.prideproject.org

one partner can control finances. Additionally, isolation might be easier because of previous or threatened loss of family and friends, credible threats that one won't find another lover (particularly potent for elders and trans people) and internalized homophobia or transphobia, which might make victims believe they deserve abuse because of who they are.

"Queer groups may discriminate against you if they know you are an abuser or a victim, sex-segregated support groups may not work for trans people, shelters and support groups may not welcome lesbians or people battered by women, and there are no shelters or support groups for male and trans victims," she noted.

Conference presenters involved with law enforcement encouraged a "collaborative, multidisciplinary approach." This involves enforcing mandatory reporting of same-sex domestic violence, encouraging victims to seek police and court involvement, promoting extended family involvement and providing shelter alternatives.

This conference, the first of its kind ever held in Oregon, was certainly a good step in creating a more open, constructive approach to the special issues faced by the sexual minorities community with respect to domestic violence. 10



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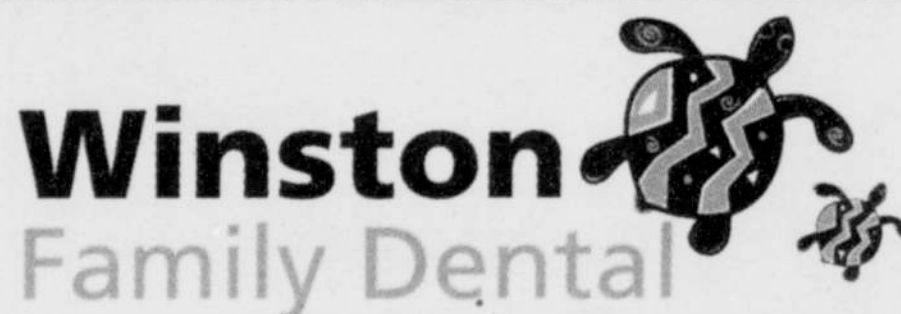
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