

Survivors' stories

Three women reflect on what it means to escape the grip of domestic violence

BY ALEX ZIELINSKI
STAFF WRITER

Statistics can carry a lot of weight. Like the fact that nationally, one in every four women will be the victim of domestic violence. And the fact that such violence takes lives, destroys families and costs the nation billion in health care costs and lost wages. In Oregon, annually, 18 people die each year from domestic violence, including men, women and children.

When the Gateway Center for Domestic Violence opened its doors in September 2010, it was intended as a one-stop hub for both victims of domestic violence and their families. A collaboration between the city of Portland, Multnomah County, and public and private agencies, the center has quickly become a crucial refuge for families across the county seeking escape and guidance. From helping victims file for restraining orders to leading teen therapy sessions, Gateway has left a resounding impact on its clientele.

Even what all we know today about domestic violence, it remains one of the most underreported crimes in the nation. But for as many victims who walk into Gateway, survivors walk out. To commemorate October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Street Roots spoke with three survivors about their journey to move beyond the violence they experienced.

Mary*

Mary first came to Gateway last winter after her husband kicked her and her three young children out of their home. Her husband wanted to move his old high school girlfriend in. They were in the way.

"I was in a state of crisis," says Mary. "My husband had crossed the line from verbal to physical abuse. I never thought it would get that far."

This was a transition that Mary had heard about in the few domestic violence groups she had attended prior to Gateway, but never saw it happening in her relationship. Denial, she found, was an easy front to hide behind.

"It's like what they say about Satan," she says. "He won't kill you, he wants you to kill yourself."

But, within days, she saw immediate



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