

# Domestic violence: Clatsop County saw 1,784 calls for services in 2016

Continued from Page 1A

prevent victims from coming forward. Some of those issues can be more severe depending on the victim's economic status, gender, race or sexual orientation, but the violence exists across all demographics.

"If someone's going through it, you really lose sight of hope," Lilley said. "I mean, you kind of try to get through the next day at the most."

Those who have experienced domestic violence are more prone to accepting it as reality and allowing it in future relationships. People who haven't often hold out hope that they can change their abuser's behavior.

"They just break them down, and they break them down systemically over a period of time to be able to have them in a position where they can really do whatever they want," Bradshaw said.

Lilley, 28, said abuse occurred regularly over her three-year marriage. She said her husband had complete control of the finances and would tell her to keep issues in the family. After growing up in a supportive, loving family, it was her first encounter with domestic violence.

"It is someone that you love and you care about and that you can see they're struggling," Lilley said. "You think, 'Well, OK, if I can just stay strong, everything's going to be fine.'" Lilley had twice separated from her husband before returning home. She told very few people about the abuse. In the midst of the efforts to save her marriage, her sense of self-worth evaporated.

As Lilley and her daughter sat in the back of a police car minutes after the 2013 attack, she was far from relieved.

"You just sit there and you kind of just spin," Lilley said. "I was filled with so much shame of, like, 'How did I get here?'"

## Risk

Most domestic violence victims don't call police before someone else, such as a neighbor or their child, does it for them, Bradshaw said. Encouraging victims to do it themselves can be tricky.

"It doesn't ever work coming from family," Bradshaw said. "It always has to come from peers, and it always has to be a decision they make."

Police, by default, are often the first contact victims have with someone who can help them leave the situation. They typically ask a range of questions to determine how much risk of further violence victims face and help establish a preliminary safety plan.

"We're scary. We're the government," Bradshaw said. "I think building that trust is huge."

After the abuser's arrest, the district attorney's office focuses on easing victims through a court process they may or may not support.

"We will always press charges if we have the information there," Bradshaw said. "They may want to work with me. They may not work with me, but I am there to support them as much as I can with the understanding that the perpetrator is being prosecuted."

While it does not occur in the majority of cases, victims



Brooke Lilley coaches the team through a drill.

Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian



Brooke Lilley reacts as one of her players scores a goal during practice.

often recant what they've told investigators, especially as self-blame sets in. It's one of the reasons victim's advocates attempt to build trust early in the process.

Both during and after court cases, judges typically issue no-contact orders between victims and defendants. After Lilley's ex-husband was convicted of fourth-degree assault and menacing, for instance, they were not allowed to contact each other. He was, however, granted supervised visits with their daughter, which made Lilley uncomfortable at the time.

"That was really hard for me because I was like, 'OK, you realize that my kid is, like, my world,'" Lilley said.

Victims can request a revision of the no-contact order, including one that prohibits only offensive contact. But the district attorney's office typically opposes these revisions for fear of further vio-

lence or recantation, Bradshaw said.

"Working with victims of domestic violence is one of the most challenging things we do in our office because it takes a victim so long to leave," he said. "They need coaching. They need support, and they might need that every day for a while."

## 24-hour crisis line

The Harbor, the county's only nonprofit domestic violence crisis center, offers a 24-hour crisis line, a shelter that can house victims and their families, information referral, funds and support classes.

"Being here to help people realize they're worthy of self-care," said Molly Pringle, the organization's executive director. "It's not the fault of a survivor to love someone who is hurting them. In fact, we see that as a strength."

Victims are sometimes in

touch with The Harbor for a sustained period of time before leaving their abusers. The county saw 1,784 calls for domestic violence services in 2016, according to state Department of Human Services statistics.

But The Harbor's new shelter, which opened in July at a secret location, can house only four victims and their families.

"I would love to improve capacity," Pringle said. "At least double would be awesome, especially getting these resources for South County."

The Harbor has an annual budget of \$765,000. About 60 percent comes from the government, mostly the state, while the rest is collected through grants and donations.

"We definitely have our eye on pushing this need," Pringle said of expanding shelter options. "I don't think that that is something that can happen overnight. It'll be a

couple of years."

The nonprofit and the district attorney's office, despite having separate goals, can work closely together, Bradshaw said. While the district attorney can refer victims to The Harbor, the nonprofit could provide information to help victims be more aware of what a court case would entail.

"I think we can do that because we have a small community," Bradshaw said. "If they can have a good experience in one of the most difficult times in their whole life, then I think we have a better chance of helping that victim along to a life where they are not subject to abuse or coercion."

Long-term housing, one of the county's most persistent issues, is also a concern for victims seeking to leave abusive relationships for good.

The federal Violence Against Women Act, originally signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1994, was updated in 2013 and fully implemented by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2016.

The law, which provides protections so domestic violence victims are not denied housing after suffering abuse, will lapse in December if not renewed by Congress.

## Healing process

Lilley divorced her husband soon after the 2013 attack. Five years later, she has a job at Astoria Credit Works, coaches her daughter's soccer team and recently remarried.

But the healing process didn't happen quickly. On top of her ex-husband's court case and custody and restraining order hearings, Lilley went to a personal counselor and accessed services from

the county's crisis center.

The abuse has had lasting effects. One of the most common moves her ex-husband would make during fights was chasing her from behind before making physical contact, Lilley said. To this day, she prefers walking behind people and has had panic attacks when hearing footsteps to her rear.

"A lot of that is being able to know what you're capable of and not putting yourself in positions that you don't need to be in," Lilley said. "Over time, you learn yourself and learn to adapt with it."

Lilley views the world "a thousand times different" after the abuse. Increased awareness of domestic violence and support for those who claim to be victims would go a long way toward encouraging them to seek help, Lilley said.

While recognizing that many people aren't ready, Lilley decided to speak out so that others may find the hope she once struggled to find.

"It sucks because it's such a hush-hush thing, like, 'Oh, that person was abused. Don't talk about it,'" Lilley said. "It's something that we should be able to talk about and verbalize that it's not OK."

She hopes her daughter, who remembers some of the fights between her parents, will learn boundaries and how to remove herself from abusive situations.

"No matter where you're at, no matter what road you've come to, you always have a choice, and you can always choose to get out," Lilley said. "It might not be easy, and it might suck for a really long time, but you can make a better life for yourself as long as you're willing to make the choice."

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