

Taking Aim at Abuse

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reasons why he has remained working in the profession over the past 12-years.

"Every case that I work on has a victim attached to it, and a lot of how well they are going to do in the future depends on how diligently we work on our cases," he said.

According to Walker, there is not a moment of his day when he isn't on call to help police officers and clients make the tough decisions.

"You have to have good judgment, a good memory, and common sense doesn't hurt," he said. "We work under a system where we try to identify where power and control are as the basis of abuse. The general strategy includes long term education."

He said, however, while behavior can be changed, success doesn't come over night.

Walker said there are two populations he works with, including those whom are convicted of a crime and placed on probation instead of going to a correctional institution, and those whom have been released from prison, and require supervision within the community.

Our job is really two different functions at the same time, he said. "One, we hold them accountable for the conditions of supervision that court or the parole board set. Our second job is to promote behavior change."

It is cross-cultural, said Walker. "It doesn't fall into a single socio economic strata. Domestic violence is a fairly pervasive problem, not just in Portland, but really around the world."



PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Stuart Walker works the domestic violence unit at the Multnomah County Department of Community Justice. Named Oregon's parole and probation officer of the year, he said violence against a spouse or domestic partner is a fairly pervasive problem, not just in Portland, but around the world.

Walker grew up in Arlington, a small town in eastern Oregon, where he graduated from high school. After taking some college classes, Walker said he still had yet to find a career that truly spoke to his passions, so he joined the Army.

"In the service I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, so wherever I landed I would take some classes," he said.

One of his professors was a parole officer, who helped Walker realize that this was a career he wanted to pursue.

"When I was finishing up my

degree I interned at a probation office in Corvallis, and everything matched up with what I wanted to do," he said. "I felt it was really important work."

Walker said the job has changed the way he perceives the world. "You look at society a little bit differently," he said. "I have worked on domestic violence cases almost my entire career, and you begin to develop a sense of when your relationship might have some abuse. So you see it even when it is not people you are working with."

Walker described these situations as moments when individuals use power and control over someone else by force. "It gets harder not to notice," he said.

According to Walker, there are 125 parole officers in Multnomah County, and nearly 500 officers for the entire state of Oregon.

Although cyclical, Walker said the metro area is currently going through a spike in domestic violence homicide incidents, which have taken place over the last couple of years.

"Lethality in domestic violence is really difficult to predict," he said. "But I'd say over the last two years, there has been an above average amount of murder suicides, where the batter is murdering the victim and quite a few have involved children."

Walker said, however, when a homicide occurs, most individuals will go to prison for a long time, if not life.

More common cases include incidents of strangulation, harassment, assault and restraining order violations. At any given time, Walker has between 25 and 30 cases.

In an effort to reduce the numbers, Walker said risk assessment is a main priority.

"We are looking for behavioral predictors that would suggest areas we need to focus on," he said. "We call them criminogenic needs because the biggest driver of criminal behavior is criminal thinking, anti-social peers, anti social behavior, and a criminal history."

He uses tactics of intervention to "push" someone from anti-social to pro-social behavior.

"Any improvement is a win, but sometimes it is difficult because we are measuring it over a long period of time," he said. "There is no quick fix for someone that has spent a lifetime developing beliefs that cause them to get stuck in the criminal justice system."

According to Walker, researchers all over the planet are working on how to reduce criminality, and how to reduce acts of domestic violence.

"Every year something new comes out, and we get closer," he said. "But the real key, one of the things we are doing right now, is programming focusing on cognitive behavior interventions. This is just a fancy way of saying that thoughts drive behavior."

If you are going to make a change with any population, it is going to be by addressing thinking and doing it in a very systematic way, he said.

Although there are some cases where women are the perpetrators of domestic abuse, Walker said the main clients he works with are men from all different backgrounds.

He also said anyone in need of resources or information on how to receive help, to call the Portland Women's Crisis line at 503-235-5333 or toll free at 888-235-5333. If you are in immediate danger, call 9-1-1.

"That is the starting point for anyone in Portland looking for help," he said. "They are a great resource."

Other resources for those experiencing abuse, include the Multnomah County Mental Health Crisis Line at 503-988-4888 and the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE(1-800-799-7233).

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