

SIUSLAW OUTREACH SERVICES

SPEAKING OUT AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

submitted by Judy Schwartz, President, SOS Board of Directors

The month of October has been designated as Domestic Violence Awareness Month. It's unfortunate that a month needs to be set aside to remind us that the issue of family and intimate partner violence is pervasive and is becoming a major health crisis in our society. Not only abusers and victims are affected, but children, families, elders and friends of the victim, who may also be threatened and abused.

There are complex reasons for domestic violence and here in

our rural community several factors play a significant part: lack of affordable housing, lack of jobs, homelessness, inability to access mental health and supportive services and a major uptick in drug use, particularly the use of methamphetamine and heroin. Stress itself is correlated with major health issues which have an impact on healthcare and community systems. Despair and stress can be triggers for drug abuse and can result in violence as well as aberrant behavior. Often, victims are drugged by their abusers to guarantee their compliance. Many homeless women, already vulnerable and devalued, become victims of violence. There has been an upsurge in sexual slavery and sexual trafficking associated with drug use and addiction. Abusers are using more sophisticated forms of harassment and surveillance, utilizing newer technologies to monitor phones and computers thus guaranteeing greater control over their victims.

How can we as a community respond? A strong and public stance needs to be made against domestic violence. Families are

the most important social unit in our communities and historically many felt that family problems should remain hidden within the family, not to be publicly aired. Many of us are in a position to speak out, to strengthen families, to have zero tolerance for any violent behavior that we observe. Our silence sends a message that violence in the family or against individuals

is normal, and that it's to be expected. Damaged and broken people and families need our services and support. An important first step is to acknowledge that domestic violence is an issue needing our attention. It not only hurts those involved in its cycle but whole communities as well. During Domestic Violence Awareness Month let's begin the conversation and the work needed so that ultimately healing is possible



IT IS ABOUT RESPECT



We have a cultural problem in the United States... the decline of civility and devaluing of human life, in other words...a lack of respect. As Executive Director of Siuslaw Outreach Services and Siuslaw School District volunteer and coach, I have noticed over the years we are losing an understanding of the word "respect." I recently asked a group of young adults and teens to define the word respect. There was a puzzled look on their faces follow by deafening silence. Finally one

young individual glibly said, "Respect means be nice and don't say anything mean or tell someone they are wrong." Our youth are being raised less by parents and more by social media and entertainment. The message being taught to our youth is you can say or do just about anything you want without consequences. If there are consequences or repercussion their reaction is often, "you don't respect me." Social media and entertainment is not the sole cause of this decline. As you look through history, social media and entertainment is somewhat reflective of what is going on in homes and schools today. Although it is not necessarily the main cause for a lack of understanding what respect means, social media and the entertainment industry often perpetuates and reinforces this unhealthy view. It is more reflective of a darker cause, that our youth are being raised in homes where domestic violence or other forms of abuse is the norm. Youth living in these environments think this is how everyone else lives. For many of their peers it is the norm. Like all forms of abuse, it is cyclical. Later in their adulthood they handle their relationships with the same level of contempt and treat their significant other as a possession rather than a partner. Youth who witness domestic violence are six times more likely to physically abuse their own children.

Some statistics from the US Census Bureau and US Department of Health to consider;

48% of children born in the United States were born to unwed mothers and fatherless homes.

46% of all marriages end in divorce. Many are forgoing marriage altogether out of fear of divorce.

The average length of marriage is 8 years.

75% of those in substance abuse treatment programs witness or experienced domestic violence.

3 million youth witness domestic violence each year.

62% of males ages 11 to 14 who witness their mother being abused were injured while trying to protect their mother.

23% of youth who attempted suicide experienced some sort of domestic violence.

1 in 3 women and 1 in 7 men have reported being a victim of domestic violence. It is estimated that only half of the victims report such violence for a variety of reasons. In some cases they think it is the norm because they grew up in a home filled with violence.

The decline of the stable home is evident. I wish I could say these national statistics did not demonstrate what is going on in our quiet peaceful community but, I can't. These stats are right in line with what we are seeing in our own community. In 2017, Siuslaw Outreach responded to 299 victims of domestic violence and 13 sexual assaults. In some case, it was youth reaching out for help.

All this demonstrates nearly half our youth are being raised with a false sense of what a healthy and respectful relationship is. So let us look back at the word "RESPECT." What does that really mean? Why is it such a hard word to define and apply to our lives? I'm reminded of the lyrics of the song by the late Aretha Franklin, "R-E-S-P-E-C-T, find out what it means to me." Respect seems to

mean something different to everyone. For many, respect seems to mean, "you will agree with me and do what I say" or "you will admire me" or "let me do what I want when I want." We also seem to feel as a society that respect must be earned. Many say, "I have worked hard so, you will respect me." Some view respect at a right because of the position they hold. Thusly, the focus seems to be on themselves, how they feel and about controlling their situation. Interestingly, these are the same words and comments that abusers say to their victims.

I would like to challenge our community to consider the follow;

First define respect as a verb in the sense of communicating with civility, demonstrating patience, listening to different points of views and to learn and grow from those differences, appreciating the responsibilities and stresses of others particularly those in charge and putting the needs of others ahead of your own.

Second, to define respect as a noun in the sense that it is a gift, to be given freely and to be cherished and responsibly cared for by the recipient.

Actively demonstrate and model respect as defined above in all our relationships. Particularly for our youth.

Recognize abuse. Let others know that a home experiencing domestic violence and other forms of abuse that it is NOT the norm. That they do not have to accept and live with that. That there are those out there who care and willing to support them.

Over the past few years domestic violence has been on the rise. I firmly believe that if we as a community took this approach, so many of our societal problems, in particular domestic violence, would be far less prevalent. I ask you, "Are you willing to accept the above challenge and be part of the solution?"

Bob Teter
SOS Executive Director

No town is immune, reflections on domestic violence



When I was asked if I would contribute an article about domestic violence I was sure I could easily prepare something. And as I thought about it, going over my thirty-three years in law enforcement several ideas came to mind. I could write about various stories involving domestic violence that have stayed with me over the years, and I could relate some of the very personal issues that I think about almost every day, as a person, a father, a husband, boss, and most importantly friend.

You learn early in your police career that some of the most dangerous and most unpredictable calls involve domestic violence. That's because it is left only to the imagination what people can do to each other, physically and mentally, that would surprise most people...the real tragedy is it WOULD NOT surprise people who have been involved, sometimes in the most minor of ways, but nonetheless they would only really be shocked by your ignorance.

Police tactics will always tell you that it is very unsafe to try and deal with a violent situation by yourself. Often it has been referred to as "tombstone courage" by police trainers and coaches. I have had this drilled into me by the police departments I have worked for, the police academy, and many of the police survival seminars I have attended. But when it comes right down to it, in the middle of the night, when you are first officer at the residence of a domestic violence call, your cover officer is miles away, and you can hear sounds of a very physical altercation, often one-sided, dynamically and horrendously happening in front of you, often the tactics go out the window.

The main call that comes to mind is waiting outside of a residence, nothing special - ranch house in the valley, in a normally quiet neighborhood. I could hear lots of yelling and screaming, both from a man and a woman inside, as I am standing near the front door, waiting for my cover officer who is only two minutes away. As I'm waiting and trying to look through the window, I start to hear body impacts against the inside walls. More screaming and yelling inside as I am giving the updates on my portable radio. The front door is a decorative three panel door, the kind where all three panels are inset a bit. Suddenly a woman gets forcefully thrown through the door from the inside and lands on the front porch. I remember seeing the splintered wood and broken door pieces covering her and the outside porch area. Her husband, we later found out, comes storming out of the hole in the door to continue his attack on his wife. He had not observed me there and I was able to easily grab him and get him in handcuffs without any real problem...mostly because he was so surprised. The story is chilling but the really sad part to me, as a relatively new officer, was that the wife would only say that she fell down. She never told me she had been injured by her husband in

any way and did not want to press charges. The husband, very intoxicated, claimed he didn't know anything about what had happened. Thru the years I've seen this same scenario, to a lesser or greater extent, replay hundreds of times. Often the event is fueled by alcohol use by at least one of the people involved. Usually the male half of the fight was the aggressor but not always.

My next very memorable call involved, again, the call of a family dispute, this time at a large apartment complex. I had a cover officer with me this time and a recruit officer in training. The apartment was quiet when we arrived and ultimately we knocked on the front door. A very small slender man answered the door, in only a bathing suit, and asked what he could do for us. I noticed he was wet from head to toe; his feet were so wet he had left foot prints on the floor leading up to the front door. I advised him that we had been called to a family dispute at this location. When I began questioning him, I noticed he started slowly swaying back and forth. As he was trying to answer (he was also very intoxicated) I saw blood dripping from under his chin to the middle of his chest in big flowing drops. Two of us reached out to hold him up as he began to lose his balance. We assisted him to sit down on the sidewalk in front of his apartment door at which time we could see that his throat was slashed from ear to ear and he began to bleed heavily. Upon interviewing witnesses, we learned that the victim had been swimming with a female in the pool at the apartment complex. The man's girlfriend discovered this, went to the pool, grabbed him out of the water, broke a nearby beer bottle, and slashed his throat. According to the witness she then told the man to go back inside. In the end he survived and she went to jail. It took five officers to get her arrested and in the car.

So there are two stories...even though I think of them only on occasion, stories just like these, and often much worse happen everyday...statistically about every minute of every day in the United States. No town is immune, no matter how quaint. Every one of these incidents should alarm us, every one...but they just don't. First responders, police, fire, and ambulance, will tell you they get a regular diet of family disputes, resulting in domestic violence calls for service almost everyday. Larger populated areas will have multiple calls per day. The number of people affected by domestic violence is almost impossible to calculate; the spouse, partner, child, relative, neighbor etc. could be affected by a full range of possibilities, from intimidation to homicide.

I don't have any great answers or advice, but domestic violence cannot ever be kept a secret. Refusing to acknowledge domestic violence is a huge part of the problem. The psychological and physical issues are very complex, and people who are involved cannot deal with their problems alone. To try and give advice using phrases like "you should just leave him" or "never let him/her treat you that way", doesn't even scratch the surface.

The police often become the "protectors" who get called in middle of the night, in the middle of alcohol fueled fights and arguments. When victims just want the chaos to stop, we are the only hope that some people have to keep them safe. And once that momentary stability is established, we need support service organizations such as Florence SOS to assist that person in gaining a better life.

Tom Turner
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