

Shining a light on sexual abuse

Lead prosecutor notes increase in reported cases

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

Years into her job as a sex crimes prosecutor, Jaclyn Jenkins is still not always sure what the right answer is.

Umatilla County's lead deputy district attorney has worked with hundreds of victims and their families, but contends there is no formula for dealing with cases.

Sitting in her office, Jenkins looked at the notes and drawings from victims she's worked with over the years that hang on her wall.

"Each of those cases, I can tell you about my victims," she said. "It can't just be a case. You are asking them to do so much."

Jenkins, who has worked for the Umatilla County DA's office since 2009, has handled sex crimes cases since 2014.

She said in the past few years she has seen an increase in the number of cases the office has prosecuted.

"I feel like when I started, my caseload was a lot more mixed with violent crime of a non-sexual nature," she said.

She said she suspects part of the reason for the increase is more people are coming forward.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Umatilla County lead deputy district attorney Jaclyn Jenkins listens to a defense attorney during a pretrial hearing for Charley Lazano last week at the Umatilla County Courthouse in Pendleton.

"Which is excellent," she said. "We are talking about it now, it's not something to hide."

Since November 2016, she has prosecuted 106 sex crime cases, but that number does not include sexual harassment. The majority of victims she works with, she said, are under 16 years old.

In the crime statistics that Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston presented to the city earlier this month, he noted that the number of reported rapes in the city had increased, and was up to six for 2018, through the third quarter.

Edmiston said that number doesn't include other types of sexual assault or abuse.

The victim and perpetrator almost always know each other somehow, he said.

"Generally, defendants in my cases are: boyfriend, dad, grandpa, uncle, babysitter," Jenkins said.

Chasing history

Jenkins said while she may hear a victim's case, it's not always viable for prosecution — and she doesn't always want to put a victim through a trial.

"The hardest thing to say is, 'I absolutely believe you, but I can't prosecute your case because there's not enough evidence,'" she said. "I don't think it's right to prosecute a case if there's not a chance it'll get resolved. They'll get torn apart by a

defense attorney who's doing their job."

Still, she said, she reminds victims that the outcome of the case doesn't erase what happened to them.

"Let's say we charge it, and (the defendant) gets 200 years, which has happened," she said. "That doesn't make it OK. That's what I tell my victims when we start — there is no amount of time that will make you feel vindicated."

She said she leaves the door open in case they want to pursue it later, but won't push a victim if they're not comfortable going forward.

"This system is not made for victims," she said. "This is a system designed to protect defendants."

Edmiston said it can be an uphill battle even if a victim does want to proceed.

"The worst thing that can happen is, somebody makes the decision to report, and the system lets them down," he said.

Hermiston Police Department Lt. Randy Studebaker, who oversees investigations, said most of the incidents they pursue aren't reported immediately.

"They usually report days, weeks, months, years later," he said.

He recalled a case from a few years ago. A girl had been sexually abused in Hermiston when she was 9 or 10, and then moved away. Twenty years passed. Then, her abuser, who had also left town,

was arrested in Texas for a crime against another child. At that time, he made reference to an incident in Hermiston.

"We did a ton of work and matched him with the victim," Studebaker said. "We were within days of the statute of limitations running out, but we found her. She still hadn't told anybody."

The only common thread with these crimes, he said, is that people don't report them, or delay reporting.

"We're chasing history with a lot of these," he said.

SAFE Kits

One of the tools in prosecuting rape cases is a SAFE, or Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence, kit. Oregon State Police announced a few weeks ago that they had recently completed processing a two-year backlog of SAFE kits. Evidence collected from the exam can help determine whether the DNA of a rape or sexual assault suspect is present.

Geoffrey Bock, an analyst with the state forensic lab, told the *Hermiston Herald* that between November 2016 and November 2018, the OSP Forensic Services division had received 67 SAFE kits from Umatilla County law enforcement agencies.

Jenkins said the kits are only sometimes useful.

"So often, it comes down to what a SAFE kit can't prove," she said. "If there was force, if there was a lack of consent."

Stanfield students raise more than \$1,000 for local food bank

Penny drive pays off for people in need this season

By JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
STAFF WRITER

The students of Stanfield Elementary School have been working to make sure no one in their town goes hungry.

Over the past month, students have raised more than a thousand dollars through a penny harvest, and will donate the money to the Stanfield Food Basket during an assembly on Thursday.

The entire school participated and raised \$1,219.16, surpassing their goal of \$1,000.

The idea came from one second-grade student.

While doing a reading assignment in class, Phoenix Davis came across a story about a school in New York that found a way to raise money.

"There was this thing called 'why pennies are powerful,'" said Davis, 8.

He asked his teacher, Kim Harwood, if Stanfield Elementary could do the same thing. The rest of the staff agreed, and the effort turned into a competition between the classes to see who could raise the most money.

Harwood said the teachers made the decision to donate the money to the Stanfield Food Basket.

"The individual teachers talked about the reasons



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Stanfield second-grader Phoenix Davis, bottom center, stands with his classmates and a bin full of money collected in a penny harvest Tuesday at Stanfield Elementary School. It was Davis' idea to start the penny harvest that netted a total of \$1,219.16 for the Stanfield Food Basket.

we're doing a penny drive, and helping others. Especially this time of year, people are in need," she said.

Though the students were excited by the competition aspect — with the highest-earning class getting a pizza party — Harwood said they also talked about the impact the donations would have locally.

"They were listing people that needed food," she said.

"The fact that it was somewhere close, it hit close to

home."

Some of Harwood's second-graders said they asked their parents to help out, while others donated money of their own.

"My parents have a jar filled with money, and I asked them for some of that," said Avah Viesca.

Sophie McFetridge said she found \$2 in her backpack, which she donated to the penny drive.

"I grabbed some of my money, but made sure I

didn't get rid of all of my money," Davis said.

Though he said he hoped his class would win, he was more happy to be doing something nice for others.

Davis' mom, Kalie, said her son always takes the initiative to raise his own money.

"Phoenix does extra chores to earn money for when we go on vacation or when he really wants a new toy or game," she said.

But he saved that money

once he came up with the idea for a penny drive.

"The first week of the penny harvest he came home and dumped all of his allowance money into a bag so he could donate it," she said. "He has a heart for helping people."

Toni Eddy, the board chair of the Stanfield Food Basket, said she and other food bank members were moved by the students' efforts.

"It had everyone in tears," she said.

Eddy said the food bank serves between 120 and 150 families per month. It is open the last two Mondays of each month from noon to 4 p.m. During November and December, it is open every Monday.

She said families can take whatever they need, but they give out food based on the size of the family. They stock fresh, frozen, dried and canned food, and try to provide enough food for families to make five or six meals between each visit to the food bank, to supplement food they can buy with their own income or from other programs.

She said Safeway donates fresh produce and groups will contribute, as well.

"Most of our donations come in the form of food," she said. "We have a couple of sources that contribute on a regular basis."

They also apply for grants, and get donations from CAPECO and the Oregon Food Bank. Donations from schools and community members also help.

"We use the monetary donations to fill in the gaps," she said. "So if we're getting a lot of grain products, we may need to buy more canned food," Eddy said.

They also use it for special occasions.

This year, they gave away whole roasted chickens for Thanksgiving.

The Stanfield Food Basket is at 405 N. Sherman St., Stanfield, and is open to anyone who lives in Umatilla County.

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