

Business and personal: domestic violence is everyone's issue

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Personal loss and business cost calculated at awarenessbreakfast



Lysetta Hurge-Putnam, executive director of Independence House, lights a candle for each domestic violence death in Massachusetts last year, as volunteers representing each lost life stand together in a line. The memory ceremony closed the domestic violence awareness month breakfast Oct. 21 at the Cape Codder in Hyannis.

By Teresa Martin

In a morning of both emotional swings and clear-stated fact, the Cape's annual Domestic Violence Awareness Month Breakfast delivered on its promise of awareness and education Friday morning.

After seeing the data and hearing personal testimony, the 40+ breakfast attendees left the Cape Codder with a clear message: the cost of domestic violence hits business bottom lines and personal life every day, all around us.

Chilling numbers

Lysetta Hurge-Putnam, executive director of the Hyannis-based **Independence House**, set the tone by reporting that her agency alone served more than 2500 people last year - all victims of domestic violence. Here. On the Cape.

Keynote speaker Courtney Cahill, director of the domestic violence unit for the Plymouth County District Attorney's Office, and president of the board of **Employers Against Domestic Violence** (EADV), picked up the theme citing a 2008 CDC study that looked at the cost of domestic violence.

The nation-wide study found 1 in 5 employed adults were victims of domestic violence - and the cost created by the abusers' actions went far beyond their victims' well-being. The abusers created 1.4 billion days of lost productivity for business and \$3.8 billion in medical and mental health costs, as well as an undocumented amount of legal expenses.

She also noted that the Washington State Domestic Violence Task Force determined that the number one cause of injury for women in this country is, no, not automobile accidents, but domestic violence. Domestic violence lies behind 35% of all emergency room visits by women.

Control issue

Too often people both underestimate and misunderstand domestic violence. "It is about having control, not about loss of control," said Cahill.

This pattern of control takes place through emotional, financial, and verbal, as well as physical means, she said.

Victims are victims not the cause

All too often, victims get blamed for causing the violence. "We've all heard people ask - 'well, why doesn't she just leave him?'" said Cahill.

- Some batterers endlessly apologize and their victim keeps a flicker of hope alive that things can and will change.
- Some hold the purse string, making it impossible for their victims to leave. Cahill cites examples where victims trying to leave are blocked from accessing money in joint accounts, whose abuser puts a hold on credit cards, and who throughout the relationship control all funds.
- Threats against children, family, and friends provide abusers with another control tool, making it difficult for a victim to 'just leave'."

"Abuse can only stop if you stop the abuser," she said firmly.

So what's a workplace to do?

Given the enormous costs, a business - no matter how small - needs to address the issue. Even the smallest 3-person company can work with local agencies and police to craft a policy that includes confidentiality and practical response. The EADV also provides resources and direction.

Companies hold legal liability as well. For example, OSHA regulations stipulate "a workplace free from recognized hazards" and has been triggered by non-response to domestic violence -- not just by hazardous chemicals and sharp spinning blades. A spouse making threatening calls to the workplace is considered a "recognized hazard" - in both the abuser and the victim's workplaces.

It Happened to Me

"It is a silent killer. Verbal and emotional abuse can kill you," said 'Kelly' standing in front of the group after Cahill provided the data and putting a face on the reality of the impact and costs of domestic violence.

Kelly dated a physically abusive boyfriend in high school, left that behind, and then met and married a man who seemed so nice and was so different from her high school beau.

Through tears, with a voice that started out quivering but steadily grew stronger as she talked, she told of her initial love for her husband, and then how over time her reality became surviving and protecting her three children. She described spending a 22 year marriage kept on a financial allowance gained each time by begging and groveling for it, and of living with constant verbal and emotional attacks and threats.

"Make the abusers accountable for their actions," she told the group. "That's the most important thing we can do."

Death

For 23 people in Massachusetts last year, death was literal. For the past 11 years, the breakfast has concluded the same way: with lighting of memory candles.

This year, as a member of the Independence House staff read each name and short history, Hurge-Putnam lit a candle and a volunteer stood to join a line at the front of the room.

In the dimmed conference room, candlelight flickered brightly, reflecting off the cards printed with the names of the men and women lost to domestic violence last year. By this light, by the light of 23-lifecandlelight, no one could mistake the cost.

Teresa Martin is a well-known Cape Cod technology and business leader who served as C.E.O. of the Cape Cod Technology Council and was a founder and officer of the OpenCape Corporation, which is dedicated to fixing the Cape's dropped cell calls and upload issues. Read Teresa's techblog, Cape Eyes on CapeCodToday.com [here](#).
