

## Men hope to raise awareness of domestic violence

By Susanna Graham-Pye

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Sometimes good comes out of bad.

This past fall's footage caught on a surveillance video showing an NFL football player in an elevator knocking out his girlfriend, then dragging her unconscious body into a hallway drew national attention to domestic abuse.

"The video was horrific," said Wellfleet Police Chief Ron Fiset. "When you don't actually see abuse, it's easy to think maybe something was going on that you didn't know about, that somehow, as awful as it sounds, someone deserved to get hit, or brought it on themselves. Words aren't as powerful. For the average person it's hard to grasp [physical abuse]. But seeing it, there was no getting around how horrible it was. And it went viral."

The repeatedly aired beating brought home the reality of abuse and started a significant conversation, Fiset said.

Seated last week at the table with Fiset were Chris Morin of Independence House; Shirley Smith, chairman of the Outer Cape Committee Against Domestic Abuse and Brian Renard, community coordinator for the Cape Cod and the Islands ManKind Project.

While the group concluded the NFL was saving face with its "No More It's a Women's Issue" campaign, all agreed encouraging men and boys to speak against domestic violence is positive change in public perceptions and attitudes about domestic violence.

This Sunday, May 31, the ManKind Project is sponsoring a No More Men's March to raise awareness about domestic abuse. The Cape Islands ManKind Project is currently about 20 men strong. The group works to help where it can, offering a ride here, a yard cleanup there, Renard said. The group does what it can to help the community with the goal of challenging "social norms for masculinity," by "asking members to step outside of the man box." The march is taking the notion to a larger audience.

"We hoped to pick a spot that was central on the Cape, and perhaps a little more visible," Renard said. While women are welcome, Renard said, the aim is to have a large gathering of men whose presence in support of the cause will be a powerful message that that many men are active in the effort to end domestic violence.

The walk begins and ends at the Barnstable Youth and Community Center. A rally featuring a number of speakers follows the march. All of the proceeds will benefit Independence House.

More and more men speaking publicly against domestic violence and abuse is another step forward in the slow evolution of cultural attitudes, Smith said.

"When I started years ago, things were completely different," Fiset said. "The attitude was that it was OK to slap your wife. If we were called we'd go in and calm the situation, separate the couple. It was called the cooling down period."

While much has yet to change, everyone agreed today's legal reaction is stricter and swifter, and social acceptance of domestic abuse is waning.

Each year, Independence House works with thousands of people, mostly women and children, who are victims of violence from partners or family. Those victims continue to struggle with the psychological and physical snarl that tangles around domestic abuse: finances, a house, a pet, children, stigma, history, fear and, in many cases, love for an abuser. All of this makes escape anything but easy. Last year, 9,000 people used Independence House services.

"Thank God people have Independence House," Smith said.

Morin, who came to work at Independence House four years ago, helps bring awareness of dating and domestic violence to area high schools through the "MVP" program. Mentors in Violence Prevention, teaches signs of abuse, and gives young adults tools to help. Another program Independence House assists area schools to implement is the Enough Abuse Campaign, a grassroots effort to fight child sexual abuse.

Today, Fiset said, police receive a great deal of training in the cycle of abuse. On-call judges are available around the clock to help with restraining orders. Courthouse advocates are highly visible and readily available for those seeking safety and justice.

"We've evolved as a society," Fiset said. "We've raised the bar, and we'll raise it some more. The 'No More' movement, the ManKind project are raising the bar. Rome wasn't built in a day. It's one brick and another brick and another in building this road."

Events like Mankind's "No More" March are "critical," Smith agreed.

"Don't be silent," she said. "If we give [abusers] silence, they win."

### If you go...

**What:** Men's march and rally to raise awareness about domestic abuse and funds for Independence House

**When:** Sunday, May 31, 1-4 p.m.

**Where:** Starts at the Barnstable Youth and Community Center, Hyannis, travels down High School Road extension and North Street; onto Barnstable Road, Main Street, Bassett Lane and back to the community center

**Who should go:** ManKind Project invites men, boys, businesses, social and civic organizations, houses of worship, men's groups and clubs, fraternities.

**Register:** online at [http://indhouse.ejoinme.org/march](http://indhouse.ejoinme.org/march;);

**Speakers:** Boysen Hodgson of ManKind Project, USA; Lysetta Hurge-Putnam, executive director of Independence House; the Rev. Stephen Cordry, Cape Cod Interfaith Coalition president; Michael O'Keefe, Barnstable County District Attorney and Ben Atherton-Zeman, activist/performance artist