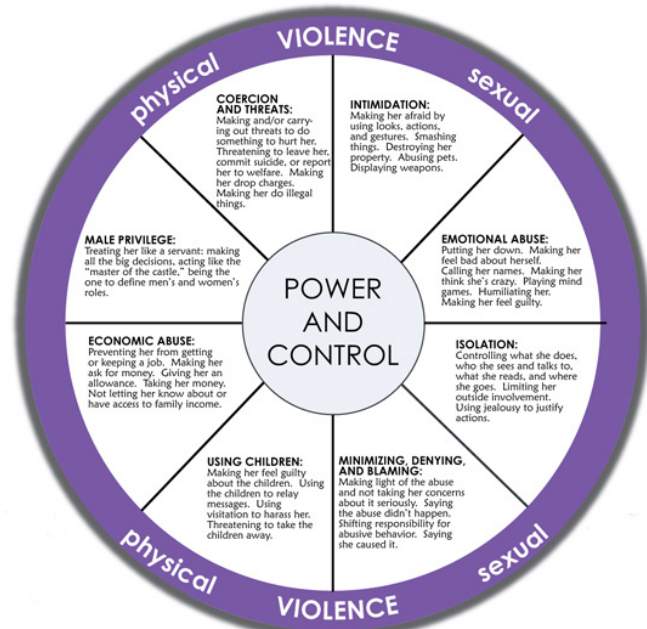


Published September 26th, 2012

It Doesn't Have to Be This Way - Taking a Stand Against Domestic Violence

Laurie Snyder



An unwelcome media spotlight was turned on Lamorinda yet again this summer as news broke regarding back-to-back domestic violence incidents. Arrested for allegedly injuring his wife at their Moraga home June 25, Joseph Sienkiewicz then made a grab, during his booking, for a police officer's gun.

On June 26, Evangeline Cumbe Devera was allegedly murdered by James Collin, the Miramonte High School graduate with whom she had lived on Moraga Way for roughly 10 years. In 2006, Collin pled no contest to charges for battering Devera's head with a telephone. In 2012, his weapon was a machete.

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, nearly "one-third of female homicide victims ... are killed by an intimate partner" annually; a significant percentage of their batterers also physically and mentally harm children. Boys witnessing domestic violence are "twice as likely to abuse their own partners and children when they become adults."

"Even the less extreme violence ... takes its toll," says Gloria Sandoval, CEO for STAND! For Families Free of Violence. "Victims of domestic violence and children growing up in violent homes may turn to drugs or alcohol to help deal with their emotional and physical pain ... violent partners and those who are abused may neglect or behave abusively toward their children. Victims may miss work to hide injuries."

Moraga had 17 cases of domestic violence from January 2011 to June 2012, according to Moraga Police Chief Robert Priebe; partial figures for 2010 and 2009 show five and seven cases, respectively.

"Isolation is a big factor" in the cycle of domestic violence, says Stacy Baird, Director of Intervention Services for STAND! For Families Free of Violence. This cycle repeats over days or decades, and "can happen hundreds of times in a relationship." Developed by Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs. Source: National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence: www.ncdsv.org/.

Lafayette has recorded 63 calls for service this year alone, and had 59 in 2011, 86 in 2010, and 85 in 2009, but it should be noted that these Contra Costa Sheriff's Office numbers combine data for domestic battery, domestic disturbances, and domestic violence.

In Orinda, 16 cases of domestic violence were reported to police in 2010, 14 in 2009, and 17 in 2008. Each call, says Orinda Vice Mayor Amy Worth, represents the impact of violence on our neighbors.

Citing national figures that one in four women and one in 13 men will experience domestic violence in their lifetimes, and young women are the most likely targets, Orinda City Council Member Victoria Smith says, "Too often we are told that because women have, undeniably, made great progress in our society in recent decades, that we don't need to focus on issues that primarily affect women; but these statistics prove that that is just not true."

So Why Don't Victims Just Leave?

The primary reason victims fail to seek help is fear, says Stacy Baird, STAND's Director of Intervention Services. They doubt police will believe them, and feel ashamed. "Calling the police means other people are going to know." Socioeconomic concerns are major factors - even in affluent areas like Lamorinda.

"People often don't realize that the very attributes that make a town like Orinda an attractive place to live may contribute to a person's ability to exercise abusive control," explains Sandoval. "Houses may be quite separated ... reducing the chances that a neighbor will overhear arguments or violence ... public transportation is scarce, requiring access to a car in order to participate in the community. Neighbors respect each other's privacy, so they may overlook warning signs as not being any of their business ... these factors may serve to increase a victim's isolation, especially if a partner controls the finances, the car, and uses threats of physical violence."

For immigrants, there are additional hurdles. Knowing they fear deportation, their abusers often hide or destroy documents and threaten to report them to Immigration and Naturalization Services.

Take Action

Lamorinda takes "domestic violence very seriously," emphasizes Worth. "As a county, we have a zero tolerance policy." Police are well trained and "are tied in to all of the resources."

Baird wants those thinking about taking their children to a secure location to know that STAND! facilities are "very home like" - individual family units with comfy couches, kitchens, and playgrounds where kids will be safe. But

because it can be dangerous to leave batterers, she urges victims to work with STAND! to create safety plans.

And if you're the violent one? "Ask for help," says Baird. The crisis line is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"As members of the community," says Sandoval, "we must play a role if we want to see an end to family violence: Get to know your neighbors. If you haven't seen someone in a few days, check to see if she or he needs anything. If you see something that doesn't seem right, tell someone. If you hear repeated loud arguments, or objects being thrown, call the police."

Says Smith, "By shining a light on this simply unacceptable conduct, we hope to reach out to all those at risk and that help is available."

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month
Get Educated

Lafayette, Moraga, and Orinda are all issuing proclamations supporting October's National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. On October 4, STAND! will host its 20th Annual Rebuilding Lives Luncheon at 11:30 a.m. at the Concord Hilton. Co-chaired by Orinda resident Nadia Costa and emceed by ABC7 news anchor Cheryl Jennings, the event will feature a talk by actor and domestic violence advocate Victor Rivers. For tickets, contact: (925) 676-2845.

On October 14, the Orinda Community Church will present a special service with dance and music at 10 a.m., followed by a Forum on Domestic Violence. The free event will include an 11 a.m. screening in OCC's 200-seat Fellowship Hall of "Telling Amy's Story," plus a discussion with experts from Kaiser, OCC and STAND! All are welcome. For information, visit www.orindachurch.org.

Domestic Violence Crisis Line (local):
(888) 215-5555

Domestic Violence Hotline (national):
(800) 799-SAFE (7233). TTY: (800) 787-3224

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