

# School staff gets 'eye-opening' tour at Shelter



**MAKING A DIFFERENCE**  
JOE LANDON

Right before the start of the school year, about 50 teachers from Avalon Elementary were given the opportunity to tour and learn more about The Shelter for Abused Women & Children.

"(It) was one of the most eye-opening experiences of my teaching career," said Christine Brady, a fifth grade teacher. "It was very emotional, but seeing first-hand where some of our students live, and hearing about the situations they endure, helped shape me into an even more compassionate teacher."

We are telling you about it today because October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, a time for us to focus on the problems of domestic abuse and human trafficking and to learn about what's being done to deal with them.

"Each year we organize an event for our staff to help them find out more about our community," said Avalon's principal, Jessica Campbell. "Unfortunately, we have students who are affected by domestic violence in some way, and by touring the Shelter, our teachers and other staff were better able to understand what kinds of resources are available while also becoming more familiar with what people might experience at the Shelter."

The Shelter's communications manager, Kaydee Tuff, said that "a teacher is often the first individual who will identify a problem, and if we can offer assistance at the earliest stage possible, that helps the family, the school and the entire community. By learning to recognize the signs of domestic violence in their students, teachers can provide early intervention and help direct families to resources they need to be safe. So communication between teachers and the Shelter is vital to the success of the child."

The Shelter's Children's Services Supervisor, Vail Fisher, said that "the idea behind the tour was to instill additional tools within each teacher's tool belt. The teachers learned how to assess situations and determine how they should be properly handled."

They even took part in an exercise where they worked in groups and were given a stack of cards with a different example of domestic violence printed on



More than 50 staff members from Avalon Elementary toured the Shelter prior to the start of the school year to learn more about the facility and how they can recognize signs of domestic violence in their students' lives. SUBMITTED



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each card. They then prioritized the examples listed on the cards ranking them from worst case to least offensive case. What they quickly learned was that each case is just as serious as the next and that trauma and violence should never be underestimated and must always be taken seriously.

During the school visit, Shelter CEO Linda Oberhaus greeted the group and discussed the Shelter's role in the community.

She explained that "the Shelter's mission is to prevent, protect and prevail over domestic violence and human trafficking through advocacy, empowerment and social change."

Putting the problem in perspective, nationwide, one in four women will fall victim to domestic violence in their lifetime. Locally, there were 1,607 reports of domestic violence in Collier County including the cities of Naples and Marco Island this past year alone. The Shelter answered 1,516 calls to its 24-hour Crisis

Hotline (at 239-775-1101) and provided actual emergency shelter to 220 adults and 165 children.

Kindergarten teacher Donna Desimone shares a statement that made an indelible impact on her. "The average victim attempts to leave an abusive relationship seven times before they actually leave for good. But I'm comforted in knowing that families in a bad situation have a safe place to go," she said.

If you'd like to learn more about how The Shelter for Abused Women & Children is making a difference, or if you would like to volunteer, visit [naplesshelter.org](http://naplesshelter.org). You'll find a list of Domestic Violence Awareness Month activities there as well.

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