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SWFL APPROACHES THE ISSUE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

By Samantha Roesler | Oct 24, 2019 | News | 0 🗨️ |



By Samantha Roesler

Opinion Editor

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month and sheriff’s offices along with organizations throughout the SWFL area are doing more than ever to reach out to the local community in efforts to stop domestic violence.

“What we know about this behavior and form of violence is that it’s committed in many different ways,” Abuse Counseling & Treatment Center employee Megan Dalabes

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said. "Because services started to exist, and the community started to be involved, people started talking."

The City of Cape Coral is implementing new technology in the area that gives victims of domestic violence the chance to feel a greater sense of security. The Cape Coral Police Department has announced a program which will involve implementing a home security device to people affected by domestic violence, called the Domestic Violence Camera Program.

"It came about because we had a homicide in Cape Coral where the individual had an injunction for protection, and unfortunately signals did not get to her letting her know that (the offender) was violating the parameters of no contact," said Christine Seymour, Cape Coral Victim Assistance Coordinator. "So, we thought if the actual victim them self had the ability to monitor through cameras, they would know and not rely on an outside company."

For now, the cameras are planned to be utilized as temporary protection. "We want to make sure we don't end up with a wait-list-type of scenario, but to get it up and off the ground we are drumming up the clientele," Seymour said. "If we meet our max and maybe we expand it to more people, it is a safety net, it's not something that we are looking to have as a long-term resource because obviously things change with time." So far, eight cameras have been installed and Cape Coral has the ability to install up to 100 in the area.

The cameras are planned to be utilized for one year per household. However, the cameras will stay at a house as long as they are deemed necessary. "If there have been violations then we are not going to rip them away," Seymour said. "We are just getting people service and then worry about what to do when the first person gets their year marker."

The biggest challenge that has come with this new program is the installation process. "We want (the camera) to be permanently adhered to the structure and because in




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Florida we are concrete-based, we have to drill into that,” Seymour said. “Sometimes, that is a challenge for women being able to use the tools or have the strength or just comfort level. Sometimes they have to resort and ask someone for assistance.” The City has approached this issue through giving women the support they need for installation. “We don’t just leave them hanging,” Seymour said. “The purpose is to get it there and get it running.”

The families that have had this camera installed have expressed a positive reaction to the program. “The first thing is a sense of security,” Seymour said. “Knowing that if someone comes near their house, they’re going to know instead of wondering what’s lurking outside their home.”

Cape Coral is not the only city in SWFL to approach the issue of domestic violence. For the 10th year in a row, a proclamation was made at the Naples City Council that declared October as Domestic Violence Awareness month. The proclamation was presented by Mayor Barnett to Linda Oberhaus, the Chief Executive Officer of The Shelter for Abused Women and Children. The Shelter does major community outreach in October for Domestic Violence Awareness Month.


The Shelter has held multiple events so far for Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and these events vary each year. “Every year (attendance) is a little different because we have new events,” said Kaydee Tuff, Communications Manager at The Shelter. “This year we had really good attendance at all our events.”

One of the more popular events The Shelter holds is Purple Paws for Peace, an event aimed to raise awareness for pet safety and how pets are affected through domestic violence. Pet violence is something that sheriff’s offices in SWFL have expressed no tolerance for.

“The sheriff (Carmine Marceno) also maintains a zero-tolerance policy for any form of abuse... including animal abuse,” said Gary Levine, Public Information Officer for the Lee County Sheriff’s Office. “Over 70% of domestic

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violence victims surveyed have indicated that the perpetrator of the violence has also harmed/killed family pets. We have thoroughly investigated a number of severe animal abuse cases and have made arrests.”

The Shelter teams up with the Humane Society of Naples for Purple Paws for Peace and attendees are encouraged to bring their pets for various activities. “Domestic violence doesn’t only affect family, it affects pets,” Tuff said. “Pets are also abused and oftentimes pets are the first to be abused.”

Besides working on community outreach, The Shelter for Abused Women and Children also works to raise funds for themselves throughout the month of October. For the 9th year in a row, The Shelter held its Purple Party Event, which was held through their NextGen Committee. NextGen is designed for people in the community that are 20-40 years old and it is about trying to get them involved in raising awareness in the community. “Younger people are our future,” Tuff said. “The whole point of NextGen is to reach out.” Tickets to The Purple Party sold out, proving the event to be successful.

The Shelter so far this month has also held a 5K run, a viewing for the public of an original movie filmed on-site at The Shelter, a children’s peace fair in Immokalee, and there will be a dance party on October 24.

“October was always thought as pink, but domestic violence is purple,” Tuff said. “We are really working hard to make people think about purple also in October.”