

Marco not free from domestic violence epidemic

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 Marco Eagle
 USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Marco Island is not free from the domestic violence that harms one in every three women across U.S., according to the chief executive officer of The Shelter for Abused Women & Children.

"Domestic violence is a national epidemic in our country but is also an epidemic in our community," Linda Oberhaus said at a recent Marco City Council meeting after the council proclaimed October 2019 as Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

In Collier County there were 1,611 domestic violence incidents last year, according to Collier County Sheriff's Office. Out of those incidents, 91 or 5.6 percent were in Marco Island.

"You can only imagine the real number of incidents in our community given the stats that only about half of all victims ever call 911 for help," Oberhaus said. "People didn't want to believe that domestic violence was an issue here on the island in particular."

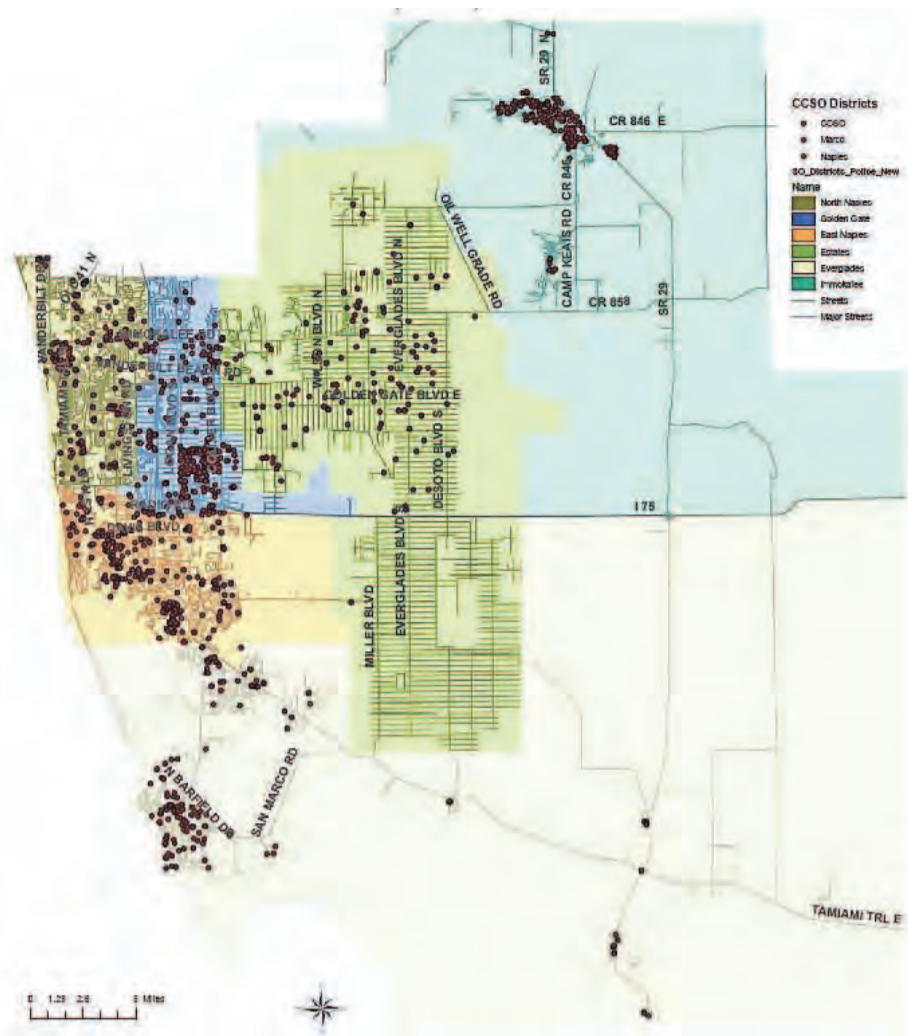
"So the (data) really does demonstrates that domestic violence crosses all boundaries and is literally occurring all over our community."

The Shelter serves an average of 1,700 victims each year, according to Oberhaus. Of those, it served four Marco Island residents in fiscal year 2018 and three so far in the fiscal year 2019 that began on July 1.

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviors used by one partner to maintain power and control over another partner in an intimate relationship, according to the National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH). Anyone of any race, age, sexual orientation, religion or gender can be a victim or perpetrator.

"The reality is no one would ever date someone who hit them on their first date or the second date, that's not how domestic violence works," Oberhaus said. "Perpetrators of domestic violence tend to show one face in the beginning of the relationship and then another later on."

"It's a progression that happens throughout the relationship, a progres-



In Collier County there were 1,611 domestic violence incidents last year, according to the Collier County Sheriff's Office. Each red dot represents one incident. COURTESY OF COLLIER COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

sion of power and control. It's a progression of intimidation and threats but it's something that happens very slowly."

In Florida there were 104,914 reported domestic violence offenses in 2018, according to Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE). The domestic violence crime rate per 100,000 people was 503.4. In 2017, there were 106,979 offenses, a rate of 522.3.

The rate of domestic violence offenses has decreased by 43.4 percent from 1998 to 2018.

Collier County reported 1,598 domestic violence offenses last year, rating it the 43rd Florida county with the worst domestic violence offense rate out of 67 counties. Collier's rate, as well as Lee County's, is below the rate of Florida.

The top domestic violence offense in Collier last year was simple assault with 1,227 offenses, according to FDLE data. The agency defines simple assault as an unlawful physical attack where neither the offender displays a weapon nor the victim suffers obvious severe or aggra-



Linda Oberhaus, chief executive officer of The Shelter for Abused Women & Children, said in a Marco Island City Council meeting on Oct. 7 that the shelter will open a new facility on Immokalee in April, doubling their capacity to serve survivors of domestic violence. In 2018, The Shelter attained a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator for demonstrating strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency.

OMAR RODRIGUEZ ORTIZ/STAFF

vated bodily injury.

Collier registered 265 aggravated assaults, 41 forcible rapes, 32 threats, 29 forcible fondling, three murders and one stalking incident in 2018. The county did not report any manslaughter or aggravated stalking offenses connected to domestic violence.

Domestic violence does not always involve physical or sexual violence, according to Oberhaus. Using economic abuse is another way perpetrators can exploit their partners.

"It could be an affluent couple where the abuser will only give their partner access to a very small amount of money," Oberhaus said. "It actually limits that person's ability to be able to escape that relationship"

Oberhaus also said the majority of domestic violence cases she sees involve isolation as a method of abuse.

"The abuser in the relationship will not want their partner to continue seeing their best friends, their family members, even their own parents," Oberhaus

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Dispensary

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Brechnitz and councilor Howard Reed. The approved resolution reaffirmed medical marijuana dispensing facilities are allowed within the city subject to the same regulations as pharmacies and restrictions provided in the Florida statutes.

Michelle Sullivan, a Marco Island resident, said that having a medical marijuana dispensary close to home is a critical need for people like her. She suffers from multiple sclerosis, fibromyalgia and Chohn's disease, among other painful illnesses.

"I think [...] people don't understand [...] this is to make people like me not to be in so much pain," Sullivan said. Sullivan, at times, had to momentarily stop talking because of her physical pain.

Kerry (Grganto) Wallace, a Marco Island resident, said at the June meeting she needs a medical marijuana treatment center close to home and that her current medical issues may be the result of the side effects of conventional medicines.

"If I (have) had access to medical marijuana before I took that prescrip-

tion, I would not be attached to a machine that feeds me through my stomach right now," Wallace said while connected to a machine that feeds her nutrients in liquid form.

Doctor James J. Faremouthe, a physician and Marco Island resident, said at the meeting opioids kill people and are not suitable for long-term pain management.

"I have come to realize that treating patients with compassionate medical marijuana treatment centers readily available to them would be the most beneficial," Faremouthe said.

The closest open medical marijuana dispensary is in Bonita Springs, 45-minutes away from Marco Island.

How Floridians can legally acquire medical marijuana

- A qualified physician diagnoses a patient with a qualifying medical condition. If the patient is younger than 18 or terminal, a second physician must concur.

- The physician enters the patient's information and order into the Medical Marijuana Use Registry. Caregivers must also be added to the registry.

- The patient and any caregivers must then apply for a Medical Marijuana

Use Registry Identification Card.

- Qualified patients may fill the physician's order at any Medical Marijuana Treatment Center (MMTC).

Source: Office of Medical Marijuana Use (OMMU), Know the Facts.

Qualifying medical conditions

- Cancer
- Epilepsy
- Glaucoma
- HIV/AIDS
- Crohn's disease
- Parkinson's disease
- Multiple sclerosis (MS)
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)
- Others

Source: Office of Medical Marijuana Use (OMMU), Know the Facts.

Medical marijuana by the numbers

- 277,659: the number of qualified patients with active ID Cards in Florida.

- 2,566: the number of qualified physicians in Florida.

- 185: the number of dispensing locations in Florida.

Source: Office of Medical Marijuana Use (OMMU), Oct. 25, 2019 report.



Penalties for breaking the new rules limiting pets at Lee County airports start with a verbal warning, but can quickly escalate to up to 60 days in jail. FILE PHOTO

Airport

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and take it, she can carry it in her arms, or she can keep it on a 5-foot leash and have it under her control at all times," Hagen responded.

Port Authority employees will now have the authority to order any animal exhibiting "aggressive behavior" to be locked in a suitable carrier or removed from the public space. Aggressive behavior is considered by the Port Authority as "biting, growling, lunging, excessive barking or similar behavior."

Existing rules about animals including bans on riding horseback or feeding birds on airport property remain in effect.

The new ordinance was proposed after commissioners met as the Lee County Port Authority board with its special management committee in June.

At that session, some conflict between rules that federal agencies have on service animals at airports and the impact of animals in the terminal on people with allergies were discussed.

Port Authority Executive Director Jeff Mulder told commissioners at that session that in the planned new expansion of the airport, a "pet relief area" would be built inside the secured area of the airport.

Violence

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said. "It will become so confrontational every time that person wants to see a friend or a family member that finally the victims tend to just give up."

"Isolation is a key tactic in being able to have complete power and control over the person you are in the relationship with."

In some cases the abuser will move the victim out of town, city or even the state where they physically no longer have access to family and friends, according to Oberhaus.

The Shelter, located in an undisclosed facility in Naples, provides a 24-hour crisis hotline, emergency shelter with onsite kennel for family pets, legal assistance and a daycare for the chil-

dren of survivors and employees. Other services include community and school education, transitional living and an economic empowerment program that offers financial health training and resume writing.

Oberhaus said leaving an abuser is not easy for survivors and that having an exit strategy is essential for their safety because many domestic violence victims are at much greater risk for domestic violence homicide after admitting they want to leave or want a divorce.

"Friends and family have to recognize that leaving this type of relationship is a process not an an event," Oberhaus said. "We shouldn't encourage victims to leave before calling the crisis hotline to make a safety emergency plan."

Oberhaus said that anyone who witnesses domestic violence in action should call 911 immediately.

"If you see something, say something," Oberhaus said. "Domestic violence is not a family matter, it is a crime."

List of resources for domestic violence survivors

- The Shelter for Abused Women & Children 24/7 hotline: (239) 775-1101, toll free (800) 962-2873, (239) 775-4265 (TTY/TTD), www.naplesshelter.org

- Project Help 24/7 crisis helpline: (239) 262-7227, toll free (800) 329-7227, www.projecthelpnaples.org

- National Domestic Violence Hotline: (800) 799-7233, 1-800-787-3224 (TTY), www.thehotline.org

- National Domestic Violence Hotline online chat: sforce.co/2qaiDrH

- Florida Domestic Violence Hotline: (800) 500-1119, (800) 621-4202 (TDD)

- Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence: www.fcadv.org

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