

Spotlight on the Domestic Violence Services Network

By Pat Flanagan, ABUW Volunteer

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Fact: One in four women will experience domestic abuse sometime in her life.

Fact: One in five high school students report being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner.

Fact: An estimated 5 million elders are victims of financial exploitation and abuse by caretakers.

Fact: Domestic violence is on the rise on the home front...right here in Acton and Boxborough.

“Unfortunately, the number of reported incidents is up,” Jacquelin Apsler, Executive Director of the Domestic Violence Services Network, Inc. (DVSN), stated recently about the dramatic increase of domestic abuse. She reported that violence is escalating at a rapid pace with increased abuse of elders by caretakers and family members, dating abuse among teens and young adults, and more sibling violence and abuse of parents by teens.

DVSN, a community-based organization, works to end domestic violence of every type in collaboration with 10 police departments including Acton and Boxborough. In 2010 DVSN serviced 629 clients within its ten member towns, up from 342 in 2008. “It is the only provider of outreach and support services to Acton and Boxborough residents who are victims of domestic violence,” noted Ms. Apsler.

Twice yearly, DVSN offers a 52-hour advocate training program to civilian volunteers who provide outreach, support and validation in collaboration with police departments. DVSN Advocates learn how to help victims tell their story, assess their risk, plan for safety and connect with community resources. They may also accompany victims to Court to obtain abuse prevention orders and to help them navigate through the court system. Advocates are trained to listen and offer non-judgmental support and encouragement.

In addition to Advocate training, DVSN trains approximately 300 police officers and dispatchers annually about best practices and how changes in domestic violence laws impact their roles as first responders in domestic violence cases.

To get the word out about the services they offer, DVSN sponsors support groups for victims and presents an annual clergy symposium each spring. This year’s event will be held on May 11 at Temple Or Atid in Wayland. DVSN also holds a candlelight vigil each October, provides materials to libraries, schools, municipal buildings and churches, and presents “DV 101” at nearly 40 venues each year.

As the recipient of a grant from ABUW in 2010 and the 2005 Concord-Carlisle Human Rights Council’s “Climate for Freedom” Award, DVSN is recognized as a key provider of outreach and direct support to domestic violence victims in our communities. For more information, call (978) 318-3421 or visit www.DVSN.org