

Guest Column by Dennis R. Naylor
Domestic Violence

October is the time of year when most people think about the beginning of autumn, football games, baseball playoffs, hunting season, and Halloween-related events. What most people don't know is that October is also Domestic Violence Awareness month. Domestic violence, defined as a pattern of behavior used to establish power and control over another person through fear and intimidation, often including the threat or use of violence, negatively impacts millions of individuals and families every year. Oftentimes, the abuse remains a dark secret maintained by those affected.

When people hear the term "domestic violence," they often associate it with those in the low income, uneducated, or substance abuse demographic. As a veteran law enforcement officer, I can tell you that this is far from the truth. Incidents of domestic violence span across all levels of education, income, and social class. It also transcends age, race, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. In my experience in working with victims of domestic violence, I can share that some of the victims are people one would never consider to be victims due to the outside image they present. I can also share that some of the perpetrators involved in domestic violence are people that no one would ever consider to be "that type of person" for the same reason. With 1 in 4 women and 1 in 5 men experiencing victimization from their partners in their lifetime, there's a good chance that everyone reading this article knows a victim of domestic violence.

Domestic violence often remains a tightly kept family secret due to feelings of shame, fear, and intimidation, and as a result many victims endure the abuse for years. Some victims are dependent upon the abuser for financial support, some are convinced that nobody will believe their report of abuse, others develop low self-esteem and learn to accept the abuse, others don't want to risk ruining the family's image, some feel that the abuse will worsen if reported, and others simply don't know where to go for help. As a police officer I responded to dozens and dozens of domestic violence incidents and the common theme was that the victims were aware that their relationship was unhealthy, but leaving it was extremely difficult for them.

As a community, we can help by acknowledging that domestic violence is a societal problem which has many warning signs. Do you know anyone who shows fear around their partner? Do you see unexplained injuries on anyone you know? Do these individuals create excuses for the cause of the injury which does not make sense? Do you know anyone who has a partner who exhibits extreme jealousy or anger? Do you know anyone who is required to have constant contact with their partner throughout the day? Do you know anyone whose finances and appearance are strictly controlled by their partner? Do you know anyone who is kept isolated from family and friends? If the answer to any of the above questions is "yes," then domestic violence may be a part of that person's life.

Statistics show that a victim of domestic violence makes at least seven attempts to leave an abusive relationship before they finally succeed. The first step, either leaving the relationship and/or seeking help is the most difficult because of fear. Once that first step is overcome, the rest of the process becomes much easier. If you're reading this and are a victim of domestic violence, know that you are not alone. A tremendous resource which exists in Otsego County is the Violence Intervention Program (VIP) of Opportunities for Otsego. VIP is a non-profit, community action program which provides advocates who help victims of abuse and violence transition to a safe and healthy lifestyle, free from abuse and oppression. The advocates are trained professionals who provide confidential counseling, develop suitable options for each unique situation, and provide safe housing. Additionally, VIP advocates assist victims in gaining orders of protection from their abusers through family court while coordinating with law enforcement to address criminal acts.

Readers, please take some time this month to pay closer attention to those around you and look for the warning signs. Offer assistance if warranted and provide the support that some desperately need. If you're a victim of domestic violence, please call us anytime at the Oneonta Police Department at 607.432.1111 so that we can assist you in regaining the safe and healthy life you deserve. To learn more about domestic violence, **please visit ofoinc.org** or for immediate assistance, call their 24 hour hotline at 607.432.4855 and ask to speak to an advocate.

"It is the mission of the Oneonta Police Department to provide professional services with integrity and dedication, to preserve life, to enforce the law, and to work in partnership with the community to enhance the quality of life in the City of Oneonta."

