

Catholic Charities helps domestic violence survivors find freedom

By Lindsay Jump

Domestic violence is a more acceptable issue to talk about publicly, but substantial progress remains, says Frances Holeyton, director of Domestic Violence Services (DVS) at Catholic Charities.

On average, 20 people per minute in the United States are victims of physical violence by an intimate partner, according to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That equates to more than 10 million women and men per year.

Holeyton says she doesn't believe domestic abuse has increased but more people are becoming comfortable reporting abuse.

“More people are thinking about their goals, their dreams and how to address them,” Holeyton says. “Ultimately, I think this benefits the entire culture — this benefits all of us.”

Serving between 130 to 150 adults and 160 to 225 children annually in a confidential metro location, Catholic Charities provides an environment for domestic abuse survivors that promotes respect and empowers survivors to advocate for themselves and their families.

Catholic Charities helps abuse survivors rediscover life beyond fear via a 24-hour crisis hotline, an emergency shelter, temporary housing, after-shelter support, as well as specialized services for Latinos and children.

“I think initially it was thought that if we just get them a safe place or get an order protection that things would settle quickly,” Holeyton says. “What we've learned over time is that it's more complicated than that.”

Survivors of domestic violence are commonly hesitant when seeking help. More often than not, a high risk of danger is prevalent when leaving an abusive relationship. Concern on how the survivor will support and provide for their children is natural.

Fear and change can be so paralyzing that many people will call the shelter multiple times, but may never take the next step of coming to the shelter, Holeyton says.

Holeyton stresses even a phone relationship can provide key support to people in need.



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"I think there are some misconceptions about reporting. People are afraid they will have to give up their personal power," Holeyton says. "I think they're uncertain about not only what options they may have but what they're even strong enough to do."

Driving home the importance of over-the-phone support, Catholic Charities staffs its crisis hotline 24 hours per day with domestic violence advocates who answer questions, discuss options and provide support including crisis intervention and safety planning.

"If we support them with viable options, Holeyton says. "They can tend to the things that they choose to give attention to, while helping them be mindful of safety."

Catholic Charities mainly serves women and children, but male domestic abuse survivors are prevalent. Holeyton admits the stigma around men reporting abuse can cause many men to stay silent. She says even though male abuse situations are statistically lower, it needs to be addressed.

"We need to really be patient and give them that time and space to think it through, to really take the authority in their own lives," Holeyton says.

Domestic Violence Services is one aspect of Catholic Charities' multitude of efforts to serve its community. Holeyton notes its connection with MACCH, as well as other local, statewide and regional nonprofit organizations, is key to providing the best overarching care for their clients.

"Community alliance is important. None of us can do this alone," Holeyton says. "We all need each other. That's how we can best serve clients and best meet the mission that's in our hearts."



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