

Local organizations raise awareness about resources for domestic violence victims

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Domestic Violence Awareness Month has spurred local organizations to spotlight expanding resources for victims, witnesses, and even perpetrators.

At a time when an NFL scandal has propelled the issue into the national spotlight, several agencies and nonprofits are making Richmond a priority for domestic violence intervention. Federal dollars awarded to Contra Costa County last week will help to fund the efforts.

“We’re trying to spread the word that it’s not a private issue, it’s a community issue,” said Jon Myers, spokesman for the California Victim Compensation Program (CalVCP), a state agency that offers financial support to victims of crime.

This month, CalVCP released free online resource packets including graphics, fliers, and ready-to-use tweets about domestic abuse.

An ad campaign running throughout public transit in four high-crime Bay Area cities, including Richmond, reminds the public that recovery from domestic crime is costly and CalVCP can help pay. The graphic ads, which show bruised and battered victims, are designed to make an impression.

“We’re showing the reality of crime,” Myers said. “The images that you see on the bus and the BART are a little darker than what we’ve done in the past.”

CalVCP helps victims pay for medical bills, therapy, funeral costs and lost income. In cases of domestic violence, relief funds often help women and children relocate to safer living situations.

In Contra Costa County, the agency dispensed \$376,630 to 250 victims of domestic violence in the last fiscal year, Myers said. Funds come from restitution payments made by offenders.

Domestic violence-related calls for assistance in Richmond were down to 397 in 2013 after reaching a 10-year high of 557 in 2012, well above the county per capita average, according to data from the state attorney general’s office.

The West Contra Costa Family Justice Center (WCCFJC) is hoping to sustain the downward trend in Richmond.

Normally once-per-month newsletters will be distributed weekly in October. The ramped up communications aims to educate readers on the interconnectedness of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse and human trafficking.

The center is a one-stop shop, temporarily at the Hilltop Mall, where victims can get help from medical professionals, crisis counselors, law enforcement and attorneys. WCCFJC has partnered with the Richmond Police Department, Bay Area Legal Aid, STAND! For Families Free of Violence, and Community Violence Solutions, a rape crisis center.

“National stats say that your typical domestic violence survivor has to navigate through 30 different systems, different intake hours, different locations, and different eligibility requirements,” WCCFJC Executive Director Susun Kim said. “What we have at the center are navigators who sit down with the client and figure out her situation, her safety, and her needs.”

WCCFJC will also work with Concord-based STAND!, and other community and county partners, to implement a domestic violence homicide reduction program over the next two years.

A \$650,000 U.S. Department of Justice grant awarded to the county last week will help train first responders in identifying domestic violence offenders that are most likely to kill their victims.

Once potentially fatal situations are identified, STAND! will provide intervention services for all members of affected families, including children and perpetrators.

STAND! will also host public events this month and expand a program that promotes gender respect in Richmond public schools.

“Being a man doesn’t mean using violence and abusive or belittling behavior,” said Rebekah Truemper, STAND!’s director of Development and Marketing. “It’s about caring and compassion and being nurturing. That’s actually more manly.”

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