

BREAKING *the* VIOLENCE CYCLE

Transitions essential, even in 'paradise'

By Tanya Lester

Gulf Islands Driftwood Contributor

People who meet Nancy Boyce at community functions sometimes ask her what she does for a living. When she responds that she oversees Salt Spring Transition House as Island Women Against Violence executive director, she is met with a surprised reaction.

Some cannot believe that women are abused in "paradise."

"We are humans here, so we have problems," said Boyce in a recent interview. "Our actions are not always congruent with our pristine surroundings."

Statistics show that "stays" or "number of overnights" in the four-bedroom, six-bed transition house for women have increased from 247 per year when it opened its doors in 1995 to a high of 1,137 in 2003. On average, 70 to 80 women and children stay at the house each year.

Crisis line calls have consistently increased from 76 in 1998 to 350 in 2004. In 2003, 10 of those calls were from the Outer Islands. After a year of networking in Outer Islands communities, that number went up to 46 the following year.

There is no question that some southern Gulf Islands women are being abused by their male partners. Boyce agreed experts do not know if more women are being abused each year or if more, through public education, are realizing that they do not have to stay in unsafe homes.

Transition House is made visible in the community through the Transitions Thrift Store in Ganges, and by poster and brochure distribution.

Perhaps the first thought that goes through a woman's mind as she determines if she could call is whether she is in fact experiencing violence and abuse, or violence that is serious enough. Boyce points out that abuse can be physical, emotional/mental, sexual or financial. It is about "relationship dynamics where there are power imbalances."

Besides self-referral, the crisis line might be called on behalf of the woman from the hospital emergency department if she is being treated for assault, through the RCMP detachment or by someone else who is concerned for her well-being.

Boyce said the crisis line counsellor who picks up the phone always asks to talk to the woman herself so she can be in control of the decision making. The counsellor's first responsibility is to determine if the woman is in immediate danger. For example, she could be hiding in the bedroom while she talks on a portable phone. Staff will contact the RCMP in cases where someone needs assistance because their immediate safety is at risk.

If a woman is at least temporarily safe, the counsellor will find out if she wants to stay at the transition house. At this stage, a preliminary risk assessment is done to see if the woman will



DERRICK LUNDY/GULF ISLANDS DRIFTWOOD

Transitions Thrift Store volunteers, staff and patrons celebrated its 7th birthday last year with a cake and lots of smiles. Island Women Against Violence executive director Nancy Boyce is seen third from left at top.

be safe at the local house or if she needs to go to another community. Staff work with women to arrange for their safe arrival at the transition house.

Every effort is made to keep the location of the transition house confidential for safety reasons. The house has a number of security measures in place, including alarms and panic buttons that can be used by staff and residents to summon a variety of first responders.

"We have a history of great response from our RCMP detachment," Boyce said.

A woman can be overwhelmed and exhausted when she arrives at the house, notes Boyce. If she has children, they can accompany her.

Mandatory paperwork must be completed. Then, a support staff member shows the woman around the house.

It contains emergency and personal hygiene items, a laundry room and a kitchen stocked with food.

Residents live communally and look after their own cooking and cleaning.

Boyce stresses that staff strive to make the setting as comfortable and welcoming as possible.

Stays range from overnight to 30 days. During this time, staff support "a woman to decide on her next step."

That next step could be applying for income assistance, finding a place to stay, going into a treatment program if alcohol or drug addiction

is an issue, finding a job or resting, doing safety planning and going back to her partner.

A woman may return to the transition house more than once.

"We work from a feminist perspective to empower women to make their own decisions," said Boyce. "Our role is to provide a safe place and information that can assist in that decision-making. We are non-judgmental."

Transition House provides a respite. "How can you think straight?" asked Boyce. "How can you function if you are not safe?"

This year marks a decade since a group of island women "walked out on a limb" by deciding to use the house donated by an island resident as a safe place for women and their children.

Improvements have consistently been made over the years to create a highly functional, safe and welcoming environment, including additions to the building, landscaping and fencing.

The 10th anniversary year will be marked with the launching of two new community counselling programs called "Stopping the Violence" and "Children Who Witness Abuse," as well as Women's Outreach Services.

"We have a real vision of improving services," Boyce said.

For support or information on any services offered by Island Women Against Violence, call the crisis line number at 537-0735 on Salt Spring Island or toll free 1-877-435-7544.

Family violence here?

Sadly, but not surprisingly, yes.

Last year 74 women and children stayed at the Salt Spring Island Transition House and 350 calls were made to the Gulf Islands Crisis Line. Salt Spring RCMP dealt with 18 male and female spousal assaults, and 11 domestic incidents without physical assault. Outer Gulf Islands RCMP logged 30 such incidents, with half involving physical assault.

And only a portion of incidents are even reported.

With this special section the Driftwood marks the 10th anniversary of the Salt Spring Island Transition House, in cooperation with Island Women Against Violence (IWAV), the non-profit society that runs the house and crisis line. It recently changed its name from the Gulf Islands Women's Resource Network to more accurately reflect its mandate.

From interviews with people working in the social services and criminal justice fields, a victim of domestic violence and two women who grew up in abusive homes, the dynamics of violence and the ways it can be addressed are revealed. We outline programs to help families, including new counselling services through IWAV, and gain hope through initiatives like Respectful Relationships, created by Salt Spring Women Opposed to Violence and Abuse for use in local schools.

The Driftwood honours those who aid people scarred by family violence, and everyone who takes steps — whether personal or community-wide — to break the intergenerational cycle of abuse.

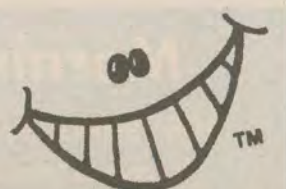
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BREAKING THE VIOLENCE CYCLE

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Changing attitudes help conquer victims' fear

By Sean McIntyre

Gulf Islands Driftwood Staff

With a reputation as a laid back haven for craftspeople and retirees, Salt Spring often feels a world away from the mainland.

But when it comes to violence in the family, the island shares the same social pressures as any other community in Canada.

"There's the impression the Gulf Islands are just a happy holiday place. There are bed and breakfasts and visitors everywhere and people always think of it as a destination, but it is a full community where people live and breathe, have good times and bad times," said Salt Spring Community Services executive director Rob Grant. "I think the profile of the community is just like any other community and that means we have many of the same issues."

At times, he added, it even seems the very things that make Salt Spring such an idyllic spot may also contribute to the difficulties of offering help.

"The concept that the Gulf Islands are a kind of paradise often means government funding is harder to get, and the area's isolation, especially on Outer Islands, means it," said Grant.

The islands' reality of violence is echoed by Salt Spring RCMP Const. Lindsay Ellis, who said any notion the Gulf Islands are a tranquil paradise immune from violence is a myth.

"You may wonder how this could happen on Salt Spring," she said. "We don't have the armed robberies, or assaults in the parks all the time, but I think family violence is a different thing."

Regardless what form it takes, abuse in the family is often rooted in the same cycle of violence found in every community.

"No matter where you are, it happens just because of the demands on the family," she said. "You can move anywhere, but that's still going to be your family. In some relationships, violence is the norm."

In his office at the Community Services building, Grant said public attitudes have undergone "a total 360" in his 25 years of social work in Winnipeg, on Vancouver Island and Salt Spring.

But Grant said many women still remain worried coming forward will just aggravate an already stressful situation and lead to a split in their families.

Grant says organizations like Community Services, the transition house and the RCMP are all



SEAN MCINTYRE/GULF ISLANDS DRIFTWOOD

Last year Salt Spring RCMP dealt with 18 spousal assault cases, while the Outer Islands detachment had 15.

well trained in ensuring confidentiality.

Fear is an issue Ellis deals with on a regular basis and she says ensuring everyone's safety is the department's highest priority.

"I've had women say they'll be in big trouble because the police are getting involved," she said. "We are fully aware of the risk and we make sure to take into account the other safeguards in place."

Although issues of family violence have come out in recent years, Ellis said many misconceptions still exist.

Domestic violence is a lot more complicated than the traditional image of the "big burly man" going after his defenceless wife, she said.

Substance abuse, homelessness, poverty, isolation and mental illness each contribute in some form to troubles at home.

"It is important to recognize family violence rears its head in many different forms," she said.

"Dire financial circumstances can lead to stress and poor relationships, but even white-collar professionals have job-related stresses and poor relationships and respect issues," she said. "Having money doesn't necessarily mean you also treat people with trust and respect."

Though statistics show most cases involve men as the abusers, Ellis said experience has shown her women can be every bit as violent.

Women, she explained, often feel they can get away with using force or think it is the only way to get their point across, just because that's what they learned while growing up.

A desire to make people feel more comfortable has forced the RCMP to examine itself to see how it dealt with the issue in the past.

Ellis said discussing family violence at the detachment several decades ago would have been unimaginable.

"We wouldn't be having this conversation and [as a female officer] I wouldn't even be here," she said.

While attitudes from an older generation still exist in some larger detachments around the country, younger officers are required to undergo extensive training that addresses violence in relationships.

Ellis pulls out a four-inch binder filled with case studies, interviewing techniques, counselling resources and legal procedures.

A more progressive police training program, increased hiring of women and minorities, and a slew of new recruits have all helped change the face of policing and, hopefully, made it more accessible for people in need of assistance.

Unfortunately, Ellis added, change is often something arrived at in response to tragedy rather than from foresight.

"Time and time again we've learned from tragedy," she said. "We learn from people dying."

Whereas Ellis said officers in the past may or may not have shown up at a house to take a look around, today's typical call involves separating the individuals, getting individual accounts of what happened and then acting from there.

Grant believes the RCMP's new attitude is a precursor to further change needed on a community level to better social problems in general.

"Only when sufficient time and energy is spent focussing on issues of housing, employment, health and family violence can we begin to make our communities better places to live," he said.

In the meantime, Grant has seen positive results when the individuals involved learn some new relationship skills.

"It's just being really aware and ensuring perpetrators of violence and victims of violence get lots of education," he said. "They need to learn violence is not the norm and that there are different kinds of ways to have a relationship other than what they may be used to."

But putting things back together again is not easy, and often requires a wider look at the problem.

"Family violence is pretty holistic," he said. "You can't just deal with someone who has been abused. You have to deal with the whole system."



Rob Grant

Community Services executive director

• **Salt Spring Spousal Assaults (RCMP stats)**

- 1998 - 18
- 1999 - 22
- 2000 - 7
- 2001 - 7
- 2002 - 10
- 2003 - 9
- 2004 - 18

• **Spousal Assault by Gender**

- 2001 - 6 male, 1 female
- 2002 - 10 male, 0 female
- 2003 - 5 male, 4 female
- 2004 - 15 male, 3 female

• **Domestic incidents with no physical assault involved (includes threats, intimidation, bullying)**

- 2001 - 7
- 2002 - 14
- 2003 - 14
- 2004 - 11

“They need to learn violence is not the norm...”
Rob Grant

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- makes you feel crazy or afraid
- says it's your fault if they get angry
- keeps you from seeing your friends or family
- is very jealous and possessive
- forces you to drink or take drugs
- drives fast or recklessly to frighten you when you're in the car
- controls all your finances
- threatens your children
- destroys your personal belongings or talks about it
- hurts your pet, or talks about it
- threatens, slaps, shoves, hits or restrains you against your will
- forces you to have sex or unprotected sex
- threatens you with weapons
- promises to change, but the abuse keeps happening

“

I was held captive through poverty and abuse by the father of my children and the love of my life.

”

Violence scars Salt Spring Island family

By Mitchell Sherrin
Gulf Islands Driftwood Staff

Numbly detached during an interview while describing her own beatings, it was remembering the look on her daughter's face that finally drove her to tears.

“He was punching me and totally going at me and my daughter was just screaming,” she said.

This island woman (name withheld) tried to describe her daughter's expression from memory — an image of a pre-school-aged child standing in a doorway witnessing her father batter her mother — but words just slipped away into oblivion.

“My kids have witnessed extreme violence,” she said.

As a young mother, not much older than a child herself, this woman lived with savage beatings, verbal abuse, desperate squalor and no escape for so many years that those things just became normal to her.

“Prisoners of war didn't have it as bad as me — because you can just look at the person doing these horrible things and think, ‘They're the enemy.’ But I was held captive through poverty and abuse by the father of my children and the love of my life.”

She described her situation calmly with the resigned frankness of any survivor of atrocities. Her scars are mostly invisible.

“I could have been a good wife to somebody.”

This pretty young woman with two young children lived in a trailer, often without basic necessities, and watched her life slip into a depressing trap. Along with the physical and mental abuse, her husband used drugs, left pornographic magazines all over their home and watched pornography on TV constantly.

“The homes we had were not habitable for children,” she said. “Our house had lots of holes in the walls and doors punched into oblivion.”

Problems began whenever her husband ran out of marijuana, cocaine or tobacco, she said.

Asked how the violence first began to appear in her relationship, she recalled that the beatings didn't start until she was three months pregnant.

“The first time — he threw me on the ground and kicked me,” she said. “It was just me insisting that the spaghetti was too salty.”

Though he'd previously yelled at her, the attack came as a shock to both of them, she said.

“At that point, he realized what he was.”

Her husband had been the victim of physical and sexual abuse himself and was repeating a cycle of violence, she noted.

As for herself, she talked about a “Mother Teresa Syndrome,” whereby people harm others by martyring themselves.

“I really didn't do him any favours by allowing him to do this to me.”

Beatings escalated over a five-year period

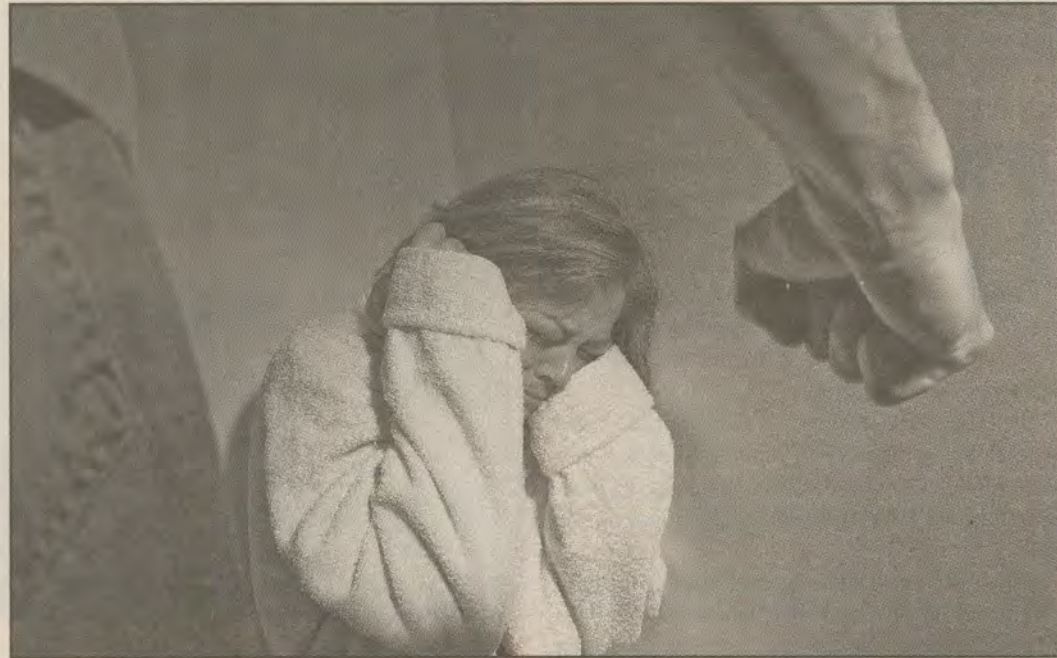


PHOTO GRAPHIC CONTRIBUTED

Spousal assault leaves a trail of damage that is difficult to repair.

where she experienced punches, kicks and being lifted by her hair, among other abuses. Meanwhile, the man insulted her continuously, which eroded her self-esteem.

“I thought he wouldn't punch me with my son in my arms,” she said. “I know it's bad.”

Ashamed she'd attempted to use her baby as a kind of protective amulet, she also believes she was partially responsible for the violence she suffered.

“People ask, ‘Why didn't you just go to 7-Eleven and get away?’ . . . I felt like it was my fault and it was my responsibility to fix it — that's why you stay.”

And she couldn't be shaken from her convictions about personal blame.

“It's a safety thing. It's the only way I can be sure it won't happen to me again.”

After a year away from her husband, she now believes he needs to take responsibility for his own actions.

“That's what Hell is. God doesn't put you in Hell, you create it yourself.”

Before she escaped from the abusive relationship, she'd already fought with her mother, who'd tried to convince her to leave him.

“What would you do if you told your daughter to leave this guy and she said, ‘But I love him?’”

She'd also called police with mixed success. Her husband was taken away on one occasion, but when he returned, she called police again and said she didn't know what to do.

“[The police officer] told me, ‘Do whatever you want. It's your decision.’”

She also found little help from her experiences with official agencies, she said.

“Nobody knows this stuff. They don't see it.”

As her life began to crumble, she even found herself admitted for treatment as a psychiatric

patient diagnosed with a borderline personality disorder.

She believes some people in the helping professions took her husband's side when she tried to get help from social services. But she didn't represent herself as well as she could, she said.

“I don't know anyone who can be graceful under those circumstances.”

It wasn't until her husband indicated that he wanted a mistress last year, that she finally ended the relationship. At that time, she had a conversation with her father that offered an epiphany.

“My dad cheated on my mom and hit my mom and since then he's realized he messed it all up . . . He was really wonderful in giving me some valuable insights.”

After talking to her father, she realized her husband had significant problems that she just couldn't fix.

“He didn't love me. He just cared about me as a possession. He didn't want me to create problems in his life.”

Her husband left the island due to conflicts with other people and the final step to separate proved easier than she expected.

“My poor little sleep-deprived mind churned out a solution.”

Unfortunately, she lost custody of her children in the ensuing breakup.

She talked about small successes, like recently finding a good job, but now she's engaged in a convoluted legal battle with the man who already wreaked so much damage in her life. And she's found little support along the way.

Gaining access to her children fills her mind more than the violence of the past.

But her emotional and psychological gashes still remain as open wounds, even though the welts, cuts and bruises from assaults have faded.

“I trusted someone I shouldn't have trusted.”

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Courts aim to rehabilitate offenders

By Mitchell Sherrin
Gulf Islands Driftwood Staff

Crown counsel Barb Penty urges victims of domestic violence to seek early intervention through the court system.

"Step forward early while you still can," she said. "Because otherwise I've seen some women who've put up with [abuse] for 30 years — a whole marriage."

Unfortunately, women — who comprise the overwhelming majority of victims she sees — are often afraid, they don't want to break up the family or they think they can change the offender, she said.

"There's a breakdown in self-esteem through a long period of abuse that makes it harder for that person to come forward because they take on more and more of the responsibility for it happening on their shoulders. They're told that it's their fault they got hit."

After working almost 20 years as Crown counsel in provincial courts, Penty has learned that an assault conviction can break the cycle of abuse and can actually provide opportunities for victims and offenders.

"It often takes an outside person to look the offender in the eye and say, 'Look buddy, you've got a problem.'"

By the time police are usually brought into a matter involving families, there is already a history of abuse, she said.

"It tends to be an escalating cycle when offenders know they are getting away with it. It tends to increase over time and get more violent because there are no repercussions."

Assault within relationships always involves an imbalance of power, she said.

"The offender is maintaining control by threats and violence and verbal abuse and has intimidated the other party, making it harder to come forward. The longer it goes on, the tougher it is to step forward."

Psychological abuse often accompanies violence, which erodes the self-esteem of victims, she said.

"I've had many women in my office who say, 'I know I brought it on myself. He told me I deserved to be hit for burning the potatoes. He didn't want to but I was making him hit me.'"

On the offender's side of the equation, men often become more violent as they lose more and more control of themselves within the relationship, she said.

"They lose the respect of their partner and they feel that. So they become more desperate to hold on and they become more assaultive. It becomes this weird cycle and that's why it escalates," she said.

Compounding the complexity of domestic violence, Penty estimates that 90 per cent of cases involve substance abuse.

"It's easier to behave in a way that you wouldn't



DERRICK LUNDY/GULF ISLANDS DRIFTWOOD

The courtroom may be an intimidating place, but the justice system is there to help.

normally behave when you are drunk or stoned, that's what I see."

And yet abusers don't want to behave the way they do, she said.

"Which is the other reason why women don't come forward. As soon as he sobers up, he's incredibly apologetic, there's lots of flowers — and then it comes again."

An assault conviction becomes important because it guides an offender to take responsibility for their actions.

"When that happens, we can move less toward a deterrent-kind-of punishment and more toward a rehabilitative punishment."

Offenders commonly don't recognize the severity of their abuses, she said.

"Most men who are doing it don't realize they are trying to maintain control of the relationship. They are afraid of losing the person or they're insecure about their attractiveness or ability to provide, or whatever. In a man, the way to solve it is through dominance and control."

The Crown acts on as many cases as they can prove.

"We've been really focussed over the last 10 years on taking these things much more seriously. We're not leaving people behind closed doors with a 'What you do in the privacy of your own home is your business' [attitude]. We're getting in there."

Police and courts are trying to raise public awareness to break the cycle, she said.

"We want to try and change generational behaviour. These are things they saw their dad do and women saw their mother suffer through. It's cyclical."

Families don't have to continue those patterns, she said.

"People can change. Women can be more assertive and not put up with it and men can learn that [abusive] behaviour destroys exactly what it

is they are trying to preserve."

Technically, someone commits assault when force is applied intentionally to another person without consent. A threat to harm someone can also be defined as assault if it is accompanied with implied physical force, she said.

"You can spit at someone and not connect and that's assault."

Judges must consider and balance several different factors during sentencing, she noted.

According to the Criminal Code of Canada, sentencing aims to denounce unlawful conduct, deter further offences, provide rehabilitation and reparations, promote responsibility and separate offenders from society where necessary, she said.

Peace bonds are rarely used in instances of family violence, she said.

"It comes up with younger couples who are dating as opposed to married and who don't have a long history but they're still immature and don't deal with their issues well. Then we'll put them on a peace bond with a counseling condition."

Offenders can benefit from programs in jail and on probation that include counselling.

"I'm the first step — because if the person isn't convicted, the other stuff isn't available to them. All of the remedial and rehabilitative programs are only ordered following conviction."

She's heard from many families where counselling did improve the situation at home.

"It's only because dad didn't realize it was making everything worse every time instead of making it better. . . It's learning a new way of looking at things and a new way of communicating."

Penty advises women to act affirmatively, before they got caught in a destructive cycle.

"If they see that the behaviour is escalating and it appears to be associated with either a drug or alcohol issue . . . and if the person won't voluntarily go to seek help, they should come forward."

Family Violence

Statistics Canada, 2000

- Spousal violence accounts for 18 per cent of all violent offences reported to police.
- Women are victims in 85 per cent of spousal violence incidents.
- Between 1974 and 2000, nearly 2,600 spousal homicides were recorded in Canada, but the rate dropped from 16.5 to 6.3 women per million couples during that period; and from 4.4 to 2 men per million.
- People 65 or older reported being the victim of violent crime 2.5 times less than those in the 55-64 age group. (162 per 100,000 people versus 403 per 100,000).
- Among family violence cases towards seniors, adult children and spouses were the perpetrators in 71 per cent of cases.
- 31 children and youth were killed by family members in Canada in 2000, from 55 child/youth homicides.

“It tends to be an escalating cycle when offenders know they're getting away with it.”

Barb Penty



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Local History

- 1992 - SWOVA (Salt Spring Women Opposed to Violence and Abuse) registers as a non-profit society and identifies need for transition house and crisis line services.
- 1994 - Gulf Islands Crisis Line set up.
- 1995 - Anonymous donor gives house to be used as a transition house for women and their children. House begins to operate with volunteers.
- 1997 - SWOVA divides in two. One half retains the SWOVA name and adopts a mandate of research, education and prevention work. The other half becomes the Gulf Islands Women's Resource Network (GIWRN) and runs the transition house and crisis line.
- 1997 - Transitions Thrift Store is opened.
- 1998 - Transition House receives core operational funding from the B.C. Ministry of Women's Equality.
- 2004 - Supported by the Canadian Women's Foundation, the GIWRN identifies gaps in services and barriers to accessing existing services in the Southern Gulf Islands.
- 2005 - GIWRN takes a new name — Island Women Against Violence — and with new provincial funding expands counselling and outreach services on Salt Spring and the Outer Islands.

Youth take lead in preventing family violence

Submitted by the SWOVA Respectful Relationships program team

Primarily violence prevention needs to begin early, when youth are forming their values and attitudes towards relationships.

By assisting young people in developing the skills and awareness to form healthy relationships, we can prevent a lot of painful damage further down the line.

SWOVA's Respectful Relationships program, for students in grades 7, 8, 9, and 11, has proven to be very effective in helping young people to develop the necessary tools to prevent family violence. For the past five years, this program was offered in our school district, with each participating student receiving 12 workshops per year on developing healthy and respectful relationships.

This is what the students said about the program

- "This program is great and it helps a lot of kids! Thank!" — Grade 7 girl.
- "It was all important, fun, interesting and useful. I'm serious about this." — Grade 8 boy.
- "The SWOVA program was very good at teaching you how to realize when you are in an unhealthy relationship. This could save your life someday." — Grade 9 girl.

• "I'd like to say thank you for enlightening me about relationships. I'm sure these skills will be helpful in my life." — Grade 11 boy.

• "I think SWOVA's program should be offered to parents!" — Grade 9 girl.

• "So much of school is a waste of time. This wasn't. Thanks for taking time to talk about the really important things." — Grade 11 boy.

• "I find this course to be very much worthwhile and I think it should be longer than a two-week course. Thanks again SWOVA, it's sad to see you go." — Grade 11 boy.

• "SWOVA is awesome! It has really helped us all, I think. I hope they continue it here and in other places." — Grade 9 girl.

Grade 10 students talk about the program

One teacher asked her Grade 10 class the following question: "Do we have reason to believe that young people today are better equipped to deal with relationship violence and abuse? If so, how and why?"

The students' responses were as follows:

• Yes. We learn about it in SWOVA. We know what's going on and practise ways to deal with bad relationships.

• Information makes us better equipped.

• Teens today get a better understanding of right and wrong in relationships with these new programs in place.

• SWOVA should be taught Canada-wide to teach all teens about respectful relationships. I think teens who have taken the course are less likely to be abusive and more likely to help peo-



PHOTO PROVIDED BY SWOVA

Becky Acheson and Edwin Kwong, SWOVA Youth Team members from 2004-2005, review Respectful Relationships material.

ple who are and who might be in danger.

• SWOVA has definitely helped me in being more confident to stand up to someone and not take anything I'm not comfortable with. Youth today can make better relationship choices.

• We have more information now. It's not a secret. We can communicate about it.

• I think SWOVA helps make you understand and know about violence prevention, but you yourself have to put the ideas into everyday life and try to make a difference.

• We know now that it's OK to stand up for ourselves. We know what a healthy relationship should be like so we can get out of dangerous ones.

• SWOVA makes us more aware of reality rather than the stereotypical view of relationships.

• There is more support now. It's not frowned on to say that one was a victim of violence and abuse.

SWOVA has helped tremendously. Youth are much better equipped with knowledge, respect and mutual understanding.

Professionals' response

School and community comments on the program include:

• "One of the real achievements of the program was giving my students the sense that they could take action in a bad situation. They don't have to be helpless or powerless." — Grade 11 teacher.

• "I see the program as strongly positive, especially because of the blending of community and school that it represents. We are building a

"knitted" community on this topic, violence prevention and healthy relationships." — Grade 7 teacher.

• "This program has resulted in a significant and positive change in the way young people in the schools in this district interact on a daily basis. Its success is visible in the dramatic decline in confrontational behaviour and the growing sensitivity, awareness and acceptance of others shown by our students." — Superintendent of School District #64.

• "It is felt by all of the police officers of the Salt Spring RCMP that much of the result of our low incidence of youth crime is due to the work of SWOVA . . . No youth charged with an offence in the last several years has been involved with the SWOVA initiatives. Our officers are reporting more and more favourable interactions with island youth." — Detachment Commander, RCMP.

Investing in prevention

Estimates are that family violence costs millions of dollars every year in British Columbia, in ambulance, police, court, transition house, counselling and healthcare costs. In addition, there are costs in lost wages as well as the incalculable cost of human suffering to children and adults.

Investing in prevention with our youth takes a much smaller amount of money and it is a positive investment in the future of a safe community. As the saying goes, "Violence costs, prevention pays."

Help break the cycle of abuse.
Speak out against Family Violence.

Henri Procter
537-5515

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THE TREADSHED 2000

We endorse this supplement
"Family Violence"
and encourage everyone to read this informative feature.

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BREAKING THE VIOLENCE CYCLE

6 • WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 28, 2005 • SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO THE GULF ISLANDS DRIFTWOOD

Family violence includes emotional abuse

By Tanya Lester

Gulf Islands Driftwood Contributor

Among the real-life horror stories society classifies as family violence is the emotional abuse some children experience while growing up.

For the victim, it is often the most difficult to validate because it does not leave physical bruises or scars. No bleeding occurs and doctors have no way to verify that it actually happened.

"Sometimes it felt like trying to hang onto the air," said Sophia Gibran (not her real name) of Salt Spring.

"I had nothing tangible that I could show to prove how deeply it was affecting me. Whenever I talked about it or anything concerning my feelings, my mother would just tell me I was being oversensitive."

Gibran stopped talking about it and became painfully shy. Being unable to speak or be heard became part of the abuse.

"It was always difficult to distinguish between what the abuse was and what my reaction to it was. I realize now I had difficulty knowing what part of the enmeshment was me and which was my mother. Where did she leave off and where did I start as a person?"

Cassandra Keller (a pseudonym) also stopped talking as an attempt at self-preservation.

Keller's father constantly taunted her. He was diagnosed with a mental illness and insisted Keller, too, would be inflicted with mental imbalance.

"He repeated this and so many other things like Chinese water torture," said Keller. "You're constantly walking on eggshells. You can't do anything right."

Despite her attempts to do everything right, her father's explosions were an inevitable part of the abusive cycle. Then, when he was happy and "making nice," he would shower gifts on Keller.

Gibran felt the only way she could protect herself from the abuse was to psychologically hide within herself. As a result, she had very poor posture.

"My father chided me one day about my humped-over shoulders," said Gibran. "He asked: 'What's the matter? Are you scared that your chest is developing?' I was totally mortified. He was rarely home, so it was like a total stranger talking to me in a very intimate way."

Most of the time, she felt abandoned by her father, who frequently worked away from the home. Her mother raged at Gibran and her siblings constantly and was physically violent as well. Gibran remembers that when she herself was not the brunt of her mother's bad temper then she was witnessing someone else "getting it."

"My mother would chide my sister for being



PHOTO GRAPHIC CONTRIBUTED

Families are destroyed by both physical and emotional abuse.

overweight," said Gibran. "One day, I remember my sister was in dress-up clothes and looked very much like a young lady.

"This triggered something in my mother and she threw my sister over the outdoor steps into a snow bank. I started to learn that there was no point trying to make sense of family violence. It just never makes sense."

Gibran remembers warning her sister when her mother was sneaking up on her with the strap. As a result, she "got it," too.

As a teenager, her father attempted to choke her when she tried to rebel against her parents' control. She remembers twice he took his rifle and threatened to kill himself.

Once, Gibran's mother insisted on "ripping" her daughter's bra off of her because, apparently, it needed "to be washed."

Her mother did this in full view of her father who was lying on the bed. Then, her mother turned and ridiculed her father for watching.

"I always felt my mother was somehow jealous of any attention our father might give us," Gibran said. "It was like she was competing with us for his love. Later, as an adult, when she told me she had been sexually abused by her brother-in-law, I started to understand why she had such a warped misunderstanding as to what love is."

For Gibran, the most damaging abuse was the constant arguing between her parents when her father was home. She knew at any moment it

could be redirected to her.

Neither Gibran or Keller have married.

"I swore when I was 13 that I would never get into a relationship or have children until I understood what had happened as a child," Keller said. "Also, I had to divorce myself from my parents. At Christmas and other holidays, I feel like a bad person because I don't have anywhere to go. I am an orphan and I have always been an orphan."

Both Keller and Gibran agree that if their parents had been divorced and they had lived with the "better" parent, it would have been a tremendous relief and greatly improved their lives.

Keller believes she has overcome the effects of the abuse by going to counselling, seeking guidance from intuitives/psychics and healers; meditating and following her dreams.

"I have not perpetuated abuse on other people," Keller said. "I speak out and act if I see anyone being put down. I can stand up calmly and strive for my ultimate healing in authenticity."

Gibran works in communications. "I think because I spent so much of my childhood being unable to speak — and when I did I was never heard or taken seriously — that I began to realize the importance of storytelling as a way to heal myself and to help others heal," she said.

"The other thing is being a spiritual junky. This path has resulted in long periods of happiness and bliss."

Where to Get Help by Phone

- 24-hour Crisis Line: 537-0735 on Salt Spring & toll free: 1-877-435-7544.
- NEED Crisis Line: 1-866-386-6323
- Kids Helpline: 1-800-668-6868
- Help Line for Children (to report child protection concerns): 310-1234
- 24-hour suicide prevention & intervention: 1-800-784-2433
- Free counselling from SS Community Services: 537-9971
- Galiano crisis counselling: 539-5823
- Mayne Island help line: 539-5925
- Pender crisis counselling: 629-3859
- RCMP-based Victim Assistance Program - Salt Spring: 537-5555; Outer Islands: 629-6171

“I started to learn that there was no point trying to make sense of family violence. It just never makes sense.
”

Victim of childhood abuse

”



FAMILY VIOLENCE IS A SERIOUS SYMPTOM OF A ROOT PROBLEM

Fortunately professional intervention can help solve this problem!

You can make a difference by acting today!



ARLENE MODDERMAN



New counselling services available

By Tanya Lester
Gulf Islands Driftwood Contributor



Dorothy MacLellan
Stopping The Violence counsellor

SSI Transition House Intakes and Crisis Calls

- **1998**
Women - 23
Children - 11
Total Bed Stays - 627
Crisis Calls - 76
- **2001**
Women - 32
Children - 20
Total Bed Stays - 858
Crisis Calls - 197
- **2004**
Women - 52
Children - 22
Total Bed Stays - 911
Crisis Calls - 350

“Women have been told how to live their lives, but experience has shown that women know best what is right for them.”

Dorothy MacLellan”

Island Women Against Violence (formerly known as the Gulf Islands Women's Resource Network) will soon be starting up three new programs to complement existing transition house and crisis line services for women and children affected by violence and abuse. Set to start in late fall, the three new programs: Stopping the Violence, Children Who Witness Abuse and Women's Outreach Services will provide counselling and outreach support to former transition house residents, as well as any women and children in our community who need this specialized support.

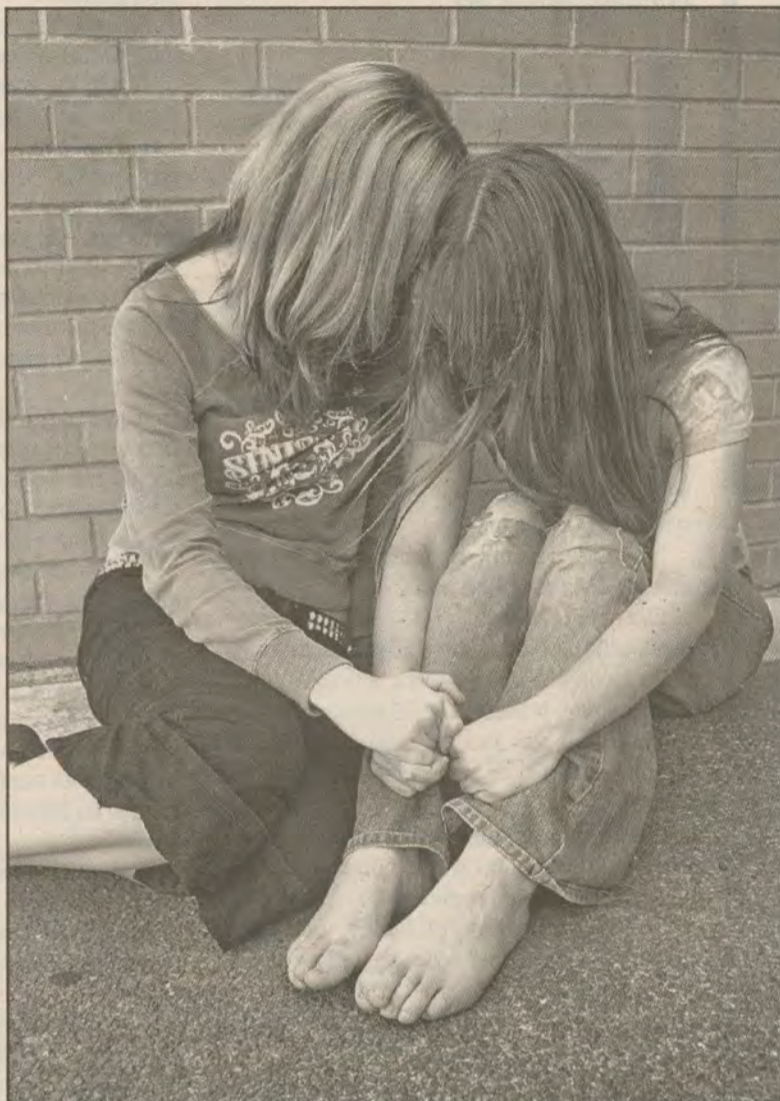
All of these services will be safe, free and confidential.

The outreach worker will offer a variety of support services to women in the southern Gulf Islands, ranging from public education to supportive counselling, information and advocacy. Providing follow-up support to women who have left the Salt Spring Transition House will also be a key component of this service.

The Children Who Witness Abuse (CWWA) counsellor will work with children aged three to 18 years who have witnessed abuse, violence or threats in the home.

CWWA is a specialized counselling program that operates in many B.C. communities. Its roots are found in the work of transition houses, created by workers in response to the needs they saw in children staying in shelters.

Stopping the Violence program counselling is



DERRICK LUNDY/GULF ISLAND DRIFTWOOD

Counselling can make a world of difference in attempts to break the cycle of violence.

for adult women who have experienced sexual abuse, violence in relationships or childhood abuse.

According to Dorothy MacLellan, the Stopping the Violence counsellor, once women have met their basic needs, they can focus their energies on making other positive changes in their lives.

MacLellan's experience in the field includes counselling in the areas of sexual abuse, assault, violence in relationships, emotional abuse and adults who were abused as children. MacLellan stated that counselling helps women explore their strengths and plan for the future.

Of primary importance for women is to be in control of their own emotional healing.

“Women have been told how to live their lives, but experience has shown that women know best what is right for them,” stated MacLellan.

Women must be in control of their own coping mechanisms. They may not consciously realize that being safe will make a difference and that happiness and peace are emotions they may experience. Once a woman has experienced just a glimmer of one of these positive feelings, said MacLellan, she wants to have those feelings again.

Goals are set based on what the woman wants in her life.

MacLellan believes “every woman who comes in the door will have or develop different goals, because each woman is an individual.”

For more information regarding these programs, contact Island Women Against Violence through the crisis line at 537-0735 or toll free at 1-877-435-7544.

Transitions Thrift Store the ultimate recycling project

By Tanya Lester
Gulf Islands Driftwood Contributor

Next time you buy something at Transitions Thrift Store, face the cashier area and the outside door. Then, take a look up to your left.

The mounted photographs of the charmingly furnished rooms at the Salt Spring Island Transition House will show you where some of the profits from your purchase are going.

According to Nancy Boyce, who works as executive director of Island Women Against Violence, which runs the transition house, thousands of dollars in profits each year have kept the house furnished since an industrious board member decided to open the thrift store in 1997.

Store profits have also created much-needed contingency reserves and annually supplemented operational funding for the house. This year, the organization will rely on store profits to assist in the launching of two new counselling programs: Stopping the Violence and Children Who Witness Abuse.

Located next to Salt Spring Coffee Co. in Ganges and opening out onto the parking lot, Transitions is a “beehive” of activity during its business hours — people dropping off clothing donations in plastic garbage bags, others checking out what's new on the clothing racks. Two part-time co-managers and volunteers sort through clothes, hang them up, create window displays or ring up good buys.

Boyce explained if supporters do not see their clothing donations in the store, that may be because they have been taken right over to the transition house. Once there, they are hung in the closets for emergency use by women and children using the services of the house.

Those who stay at the transition house also receive clothing credits to be used at the thrift store over a six-month period.

If there is an overabundance of clothes, Transitions does its best to redistribute goods to other worthy causes on-island. After that, things are passed on to other non-profits on Vancouver Island.

Transitions Thrift Store is the ultimate in recycling projects: the community giving and receiving goes on and on.

I encourage everyone to read this informative supplement and help break the cycle of abuse.

Peter

PETER BARDON

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BREAKING THE VIOLENCE CYCLE

8 • WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 28, 2005 • SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO THE GULF ISLANDS DRIFTWOOD

Victims Assistance programs provide support

By Mitchell Sherrin and Sean McIntyre
Gulf Islands Driftwood Staff

If people call out for help, Salt Spring provides many services for victims of family violence.

"For change to happen, you're going to have to take that first step," said Salt Spring Victim Assistance Program (SSVAP) coordinator Kimberly Lineger.

And those services are there to empower islanders to make their own choices.

"It's about getting control of your life, not handing your life over to an agency to take care of you."

Administered by the Salt Spring RCMP, SSVAP is the link between police and the court system, said Lineger.

"If you're a victim of family violence I enter into the equation," she said.

Out of approximately 100-150 cases Lineger deals with each year, some 50 per cent of those cases involve family violence, she said.

"It's down. It used to be 75 per cent." Cases she sees include assault, harassment uttering threats, or a combination of those charges.

"[Victims] shouldn't assume that friends and neighbours know what's going on. They're going to have to tell somebody."

She directs victims of family violence in one of two directions: either they proceed with court or, if victims are not ready for that avenue, she links people with other services in the community, she said.

"When people come in at the questioning stage, they are looking for validation that

something's wrong and they are looking for information."

Lineger can connect victims of violence with school-based counsellors, if children are involved, the transition house and counsellors from the Salt Spring Community Services Society (SSCSS) — "Wherever people feel most comfortable," she said.

"You have to be prepared to ask a lot of questions and keep asking questions until you get the answers you want."

The community worker at SSCSS is the conduit for social services on the island, she said.

"They do case management on a level that I don't do."

Sometimes it takes two or three different attempts to connect with support workers before people can work out their plans, she said. And they shouldn't feel like they have failed if it takes a couple of times.

"Each time they enter into the criminal justice system, they get new tools."

If victims appear in court, Lineger prepares them for the court process and links them with the Crown, she said.

For people who want to learn more information about Victim Assistance or the court system, without contacting Lineger or the police, there is an information kiosk at the Salt Spring library.

"Sometimes people come in and don't know where to start."

Lineger is also working on a web page, which she hopes to have established in the new year.

The Outer Islands is also served by a Victim Assistance Program through the RCMP detachment. Pender-based program coordinator Elaine Donahue said trust is one of the most

crucial parts of doing her job.

"If there are only 800 people on the island, victims usually want to keep these things hush-hush," she said. "The first thing we tell them is about the confidentiality."

People are still hesitant to call the police, she said, but increased awareness is empowering family violence victims to step up and recognize this is not the way it has to be.

Donahue said fear, isolation, self-confidence and trust all play a role when victims are faced with letting others know about their circumstances. Herein lies an irony of domestic violence in the Outer Gulf Islands. Whereas the islands' intimacy stood as a barrier for so long, it is now that same intimacy that has proven so important in the absence of formal provincial programs.

In her 18 years on Pender Island and eight with Victim Assistance, Donahue has come to know the people and their needs.

"While many of the services we refer people to are on Salt Spring or Vancouver Island, we can do quite a bit on the islands considering our size and resources," she said. "We make do with what we have and I always want to ensure people there is help available."

Even though people are there to listen, Donahue said the onus remains on the victim.

"It's always up to the individual," she said. "People need to feel empowered and that has to come from inside them."

She said friends, family and counsellors can encourage this by constant reassurance and reinforcement.

"The difference is that on a small island, there will generally be someone nearby to speak with and give some source of support," she said.



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Island Women Against Violence

Who are we?

Island Women Against Violence (formerly Gulf Islands Women's Resource Network) is a registered non-profit society that was established on Salt Spring in 1992.

Our mission is to provide services throughout the Southern Gulf Islands to women and their children affected by violence and abuse.

What do we do?

We operate the Salt Spring Island Transition House & 24 Hour Gulf Islands Crisis Line.

New services we will soon be offering:

- Stopping the Violence Counselling
- Children Who Witness Abuse Counselling
- Women's Outreach Services

All IWAV services are safe, free and confidential.
For information or support, please call

537-0735 or toll-free 1-877-435-7544

We envision people living free from violence and abuse.

Funded by the B.C. Ministry of Community Services.

Transitions Thrift Store

A fundraising venture owned & operated by Island Women Against Violence

How your support of Transitions helps...

- Provides residents of Salt Spring Island Transition House with thousands of dollars worth of needed goods annually.
- Stocks the Transition House with emergency clothing, supplies and household items.
- Furnishes the Transition House through store profits.
- Helps fund crisis support, counselling and outreach services for women and children affected by violence and abuse.