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PS Form 3526, July 2014

NEWSMAKER

Domestic Violence Victims Have Key Allies In DVAC, CFS

By Allyson Pang

One of the recent and most sobering stats to come from the Hawai'i State Department of Health is this: About 1 in 5 adults in Hawai'i has experienced physical violence or intimidation by an intimate partner in the past five years.

In light of these startling numbers and in recognition of Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October, the community is being asked to view domestic violence as a complex issue that involves complex needs.

These needs are often best met through service providers like Domestic Violence Action Center and Child & Family Service.

Laurie Tochiki, interim CEO of DVAC, emphasizes more awareness of domestic violence and its detrimental impact on families and relationships.

"Do we need death to think that maybe we have to talk more strenuously about how we, as a state, and we, as a community, have to step up?" Tochiki asks. "If we don't … do more with prevention, do more with helping to heal trauma … I worry about it (domestic violence) getting worse."

As one of the oldest and most comprehensive, holistic domestic violence service providers in Hawai'i, DVAC functions as a first responder to crises.

This year, its helpline (808-531-3771) alone fielded about 3,000 calls.

After-crisis services include housing, survivor support groups, financial literacy and workforce development services, and even attorney services.

DVAC also leads prevention education efforts for youth through its Teen Alert Program (TAP 808), which defines healthy relationships.

But, what happens when children are already in crises?

"(Youth) need a strong, consistent, supportive adult who gives unconditional, positive regard," says Amanda Pump, president and CEO of CFS.

Power and control are at the core of domestic violence, often starting as a non-physical act like isolation, according to Angelina Mercado, executive director of Hawai'i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence. **PHOTO COURTESY PROSTOCK-STUDIO / STOCK.ADOBE.COM**

Laurie Tochiki

Amanda Pump

Angelina Mercado

To create strong foundations, CFS works with the entire family, addressing each member's unique needs. For example, for those who cause harm, CFS also runs evidence-based offender programs and anger management classes. It also offers private shelters and transitional housing.

With DVAC's services in town, CFS covers rural communities on the leeward and windward coasts to broaden accessibility to DV services.

Both DVAC and CFS are part of the Hawai'i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, which supports service providers with research-informed trainings and problem-solving situational strategies.

The coalition works with anyone who may interact with a survivor, from prosecutors to health care providers.

"Thinking that … the only time that we should prepare to be in touch with (survivors) is through our programs, is naive," says Angelina Mercado, executive director of HSCADV. "The reality is not everybody is going to call the police, and not everybody is going to seek advocacy, not everybody is going to seek a domestic violence shelter — so where else are they seeking services and help?"

Mercado says HSACDV aims to meet survivors wherever they are.

"We have so many survivors in the state who have reached out, and there's so many more who have not, and until we're able to provide safety for all of them, there's always something for us to do," she says.

Pump agrees, adding, "If we do it right and we all have a concerted effort into doing it right, we will see families thrive and everybody will benefit."

Healing is communal, Tochiki adds.

"I have real hope that in Hawai'i, with aloha, with the aloha spirit, with our sense of 'ohana, with our sense of connection to land and to each other — that we have the ingredients to do this so much better and in ways that are so much more healthy."

Visit each organization's respective website: domesticviolenceactioncenter.org/contact, childandfamilyservice.org and hscadv.org.