



# NETWORK News



## Elder Abuse - Looking At A Growing Concern

We've all heard the facts – our population is aging. Nearly 77 million people, more than a quarter of the total U.S. population is over 50. In

King County, 11% are over 65, and that is expected to double by 2030. Yet as the "Baby Boomers" age, we find ourselves with a domestic violence system that serves mostly women under the age of 50. For instance, our numbers indicate only 6% of survivors who seek services at DAWN are aged 50 or older, consistent with demographics throughout the country. While it's long been understood that domestic violence can happen to anyone, regardless of ethnicity, economic class, and gender identity, services have been accessed less frequently by the aging population.

Abuse in later life occurs when an older person is subjected to a pattern of coercive behaviors used to gain and maintain power and control perpetrated by a family member or someone with whom the elder has an on-going relationship. It is the intersection between elder abuse and domestic violence.

Nikki is DAWN's Elder Abuse Advocate (a new program designed to address the needs of older survivors affected by domestic violence). She said there are numerous reasons why older survivors do not access services, maintain contact with abusers, or feel they cannot leave an abusive relationship.

Nikki said an older survivor faces many barriers, such as: personal beliefs that abuse is not talked about, fear of being placed in a nursing home, feel it's the safest choice, dependence on an abuser for caretaking, lack of financial resources, concern that the abuser will not be cared for, lack of understanding from adult children, or physical or mental limitations. Older survivors may not identify with the term "abuse", and may believe a domestic violence agency will pressure them to leave the abusive partner, rather than offer support and understanding. Medical conditions and disabilities may make living on their own difficult or impossible or the abusive individual may be dependent on the victim's care. As with many survivors of any age, older survivors often love or care about the people who harm them. People who are abusive often mislead survivors about their financial and legal options.

*"Our goal at DAWN is to communicate to older survivors that we provide support that is accessible, culturally appropriate and respectful of the survivor's decisions," Nikki said. "We offer a support group open only to older survivors. Participants say they prefer sharing with others who have similar values and issues."*

*Continued on page 4*

## Rosemary's Story

Rosemary has been married for 52 years. For her the abuse started almost immediately after she married at 19. At first the abuse was emotional. It became physical just a year later, during her first pregnancy, leading to a miscarriage.

Over the years, Rosemary told a few family members about the abuse. Back then, she was told if she "was a more dutiful wife, he wouldn't have to hit" her.

Rosemary and her husband had three children together. Throughout their marriage, the physical abuse happened less frequently, but verbal and emotional abuse have always been a part her life.

One thing Rosemary will tell you is that she never lost her fear. Her husband would give her a threatening look many a time over the years. It worked. She never knew when or if he might hit her, so she lived in a state of expectation, of dread.

She kept her secret to herself for many years. Once, she disclosed it to a friend and her friend criticized her for not leaving. She never felt she had that option. Domestic violence agencies didn't exist yet, and she felt she had nowhere to turn.

*Continued on page 2*

## Rosemary's Story continued

Her husband used to physically punish their children. Once, neighbors reported it, and CPS determined it was not child abuse. But the complaint made her husband's rage just grow.

After the kids were grown and gone, Rosemary tried to ask her husband for a divorce. He told her all of the assets were in his name, and she would be penniless if she left. He also told her she would never get a job, because she had no marketable skills.

Rosemary felt trapped, until a woman from her church told her about a support group for survivors of domestic violence. She called DAWN's hotline, and was given the information about domestic violence services for women over 65.

Today Rosemary is not sure she is ready to leave her husband, but she is happy to have someone to listen to her, to offer support without judgment.

Rosemary is now learning more about her legal and financial options, and she has consulted with an attorney through DAWN's free legal clinic. She feels less trapped. She is also learning to value herself, and to take time for herself, her friends and her family. Her husband has become somewhat less controlling since Rosemary learned to stand up for herself. She now sets boundaries and sticks by them, not backing down when her husband makes unreasonable demands and requests.

Rosemary is now experiencing something she has experienced very little in her life.

It is called hope. ■

**24-hour Crisis Line:**  
**(425) 656-7867**

## Ways You Can Help

If you suspect Elder Abuse, contact DAWN's Crisis Line at 425-656-7867. The direct line for DAWN's Elder Abuse Program is 425-656-4305 ext. 256. Assist with creating plans for safety. Keep the information confidential, unless you are a mandated reporter. If the abuse must be reported to Adult Protective Services, talk with the survivor and inform her/him why you must report the abuse. Do so in such a way that least compromises safety. Do not confront the abuser, as this could endanger you and the survivor. You can also contact the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in later Life ([www.nccall.us](http://www.nccall.us)) (608) 255-0539.



Left to right, DAWN Board Chair Deb Overlin-Feist, Nikki from DAWN, Councilmember Kathy Lambert, Claudia Donnelly, citizen advocate, Councilmember Larry Phillips, DAWN's CEO Lee Drechsel, Councilmember Julia Patterson, Sue Lerner, Board member from King County Sexual Assault Resource Center, Councilmember Bob Ferguson, Councilmember Jane Hague, Council Chair Dow Constantine and Councilmember Larry Gossett gather as the King County Council gives DAWN a proclamation on Elder Abuse.

### Need more facts? Consider:

- The population of persons 65+ in 2030 is projected to be twice as large as in 2000. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005)
- In 2003, 565,747 cases of abuse and neglect were reported to adult protective services throughout the United States. This represents a 19.7% increase from the 2000 survey. (NCEA, 2004)
- For every case reported to authorities, five more go unreported. (NCEA, 1998)
- Seattle Police Department reports that in 2003 vulnerable adult abuse referrals nearly quadrupled. Domestic violence accounted for 65% to 75%.
- Only an estimated 30% of sexual assaults against the elderly ever get reported to the authorities. (Burgess, Clements 2006)
- According to the Adult Protective Services Survey done in 2004, 89.3% of elder abuse reports occurred in domestic settings. (NCEA, 2004)
- A 1999 study also found that many victims had difficulty taking care of themselves and that family members were the primary perpetrators of sexual abuse. (Teaster, 2000)
- 8% of all women in single female victim/single male offender homicides reported in 2003 were 65 years of age or older. (Violence Policy Center, 2005)
- Each year more than 500 homicide-suicides or 1,000 deaths occur in persons 55 years and older, which means that nearly 20 older Americans die each week in a homicide-suicide. (Cohen, 2001)
- A Florida study found that persons age 55 and over had homicide-suicide rates almost twice that of persons under age 55, 75% involve a husband who kills his wife before killing himself. (Malphurs, Eisdorfer) ■

# Hour of Remembrance

## GIVE AN HOUR ON OCTOBER 16<sup>TH</sup>

According to the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WSCADV) Fatality Review project, 430 people were killed due to domestic violence in Washington State between January 1, 1997 and June 30, 2008. South King County is not immune to this frightening epidemic. Last year, DAWN held our first Hour of Remembrance ceremony to honor the six SKC victims of domestic violence killed between 2007 and 2008. Our ceremony brought the community together to ensure that these women's lives, and their stories, were remembered.

It's called an "Hour of Remembrance", and we are holding it for our second time this year.

Please join us on October 16th, to commemorate the victims of domestic violence and stand with us to declare that they will not be forgotten. Since survivors often turn to friends and neighbors for assistance, this year we will be focusing on ways to strengthen our response to domestic violence. Specifically, we will highlight the action steps everyone can take to make a difference in the lives of survivors of domestic violence.

Please take one hour out of your busy schedules to stand in solidarity to end domestic violence in our homes and in our communities.

Mobilizing the community in this way is important because 55% of the victims reviewed in the 2008 Fatality Review had told a neighbor about the abuse they were experiencing. This finding is higher than the number of victims who sought Protection Orders or who called police to report the violence. We are pleased to welcome Ankita Patel, a WSCADV staff member and a co-author of the 2008 Fatality Review, to present on the recommendations related to community prevention and intervention.

The Hour of Remembrance will take place on October 16<sup>th</sup>, from 12 - 1 at the Tukwila Community Center (12424 - 42nd Ave S.). We strongly encourage you to stay from 1 - 1:30 to hear more from Ankita about the 2008 Fatality Review report. Many of the findings provide additional, in-depth recommendations for responding effectively to the added barriers faced by women of color, which is especially needed in addressing the specific needs of survivors in SKC.

Make your hour matter on October 16<sup>th</sup>. Join us for the Hour of Remembrance. ■



## New Board President Sees Great 30<sup>th</sup> Year Ahead

Deb Overlin Feist isn't new to DAWN. The incoming Board of Directors President (term to begin in January)

has worked with the agency for more than six years as an active board member. She is also the person who gets the good fortune of directing DAWN's board in its very exciting 30th Anniversary year, which kicks off in the new year.

Feist was a long-time Boeing executive before she retired, with a background in human resources and information protection, retiring as the chief privacy officer. Today she runs a small consulting business, and also volunteers frequently with DAWN as well as other causes. In fact, she was on the Washington Women's Employment and Education board for nine years, and served as their Board President.

*"My passion is helping women and children break the negative cycles that hold them," she said. "Abuse, lack of education, under employment, and the other barriers keeping them from a fulfilling and successful life. DAWN is near and dear to my heart."*

Feist said she is thrilled that DAWN is known as a premiere nonprofit organization these days, and she has a wonderful time working with DAWN Executive Director Lee Drechsel and the rest of the DAWN team.

*"We are working on changing perceptions in the community about domestic violence," she said. "What is it? How do women react to it? There are so many misconceptions. My goal in the coming year is to continue to help people become more informed about this critical issue."*

Feist especially likes the community outreach pieces at DAWN, like the new Bystander Training course DAWN will soon be offering to those who have

witnessed abuse, the new teen outreach and education curriculum which is delivered by DAWN in middle and high schools and, the new Elder Abuse program, detailed in this newsletter.

*"I am hoping we can keep reaching out like we have in the last year," she said. "We want to create a society where domestic violence is not tolerated, and there are so many ways we can do that in the coming year."*

In addition to her work with DAWN, in her spare time Feist also supports O Wines (a charity winery that directs profits from wine sales into scholarships for underprivileged girls), and she helps out with a couple of chef friends in their kitchens.

She said she is looking forward to the 30th Anniversary year, and urges people to get ready for even more news from DAWN.

*"30 years may seem like a long time," she said, "but I promise. We are just getting started." ■*

## NETWORK News:

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DAWN's mailing list is never provided nor sold to anyone.

**MISSION STATEMENT:** DAWN's core purpose is to end domestic violence by empowering survivors and fostering communities where abuse is not tolerated.

DAWN is a  
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partner



**DAWN**  
PO Box 88007  
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### *Elder Abuse – Looking At A Growing Concern continued*

Consider this:

- One factor in domestic abuse is culture and background. In fact, in some cultures, many older victims do not seek services and do not see the behaviors as abusive. This is especially relevant in older women, who were often raised in a culture that did not encourage reporting.
- Over the next 20 years, the number of older Americans will continue to increase. As older people will continue to suffer from abuse, we will also continue to be faced with a service delivery system that is not geared for their needs, nor prepared for their numbers.
- Domestic violence and sexual assault programs must do a better job of designing services tailored for older persons. Adult protective services and the aging network must learn to recognize the dynamics of abuse in later life and offer services that focus on safety, support and breaking the isolation of the victims. (For more information on Elder Abuse and relevant statistics, see Page 2.)

Nikki said there are many things you can do if you suspect that someone you know is the victim of elder abuse.

"First of all, believe the person, listen, and offer support," she said. "Ask how you can help and allow her/him to make the decisions about the next steps. Tell the survivor that the abuse is not her/his fault," she said. "Keeping survivors safe must include emotional support and linkages to appropriate services, which might include safe housing, in-home care, home meal delivery, health care, and support to navigate the system easily," Nikki said. ■



## Come and Join Us

### The 13th Annual *An Evening of Promise*

Saturday, October 3, 2009

Westin Hotel, Grand Ballroom  
1900 5th Avenue, Seattle 98101

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6:00pm Champagne Reception

6:00-7:30pm Silent Auction

7:30-9:30pm Live Auction & Dinner

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For reservations and information contact:  
Krystal Starwich at [KrystalS@dawnonline.org](mailto:KrystalS@dawnonline.org) or  
425.656.4305 ext 261.

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*Please Join Us!*

To preview auction items visit  
<http://dawnonline.maestroweb.com>

Tickets are just \$150/person or \$1500 for a table.

