

Wisconsin domestic violence homicides reach new high

By Karen Pilarski
Freeman Staff

WAUKESHA — The preliminary count of Wisconsin domestic violence-related deaths for the first half of 2016 is 39.

According to a press release from End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin, it is almost 70 percent higher than average, and it represents a one-third increase over the previous high, which occurred from January to June of 2009.

The release said End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin has been tracking domestic violence homicides and homicide-suicides since 2000. Executive Director Patti Seger said from 2000-2014 the number of domestic violence deaths in Waukesha County was 23. The statistics for 2015 are not available at this time. Seger urges the community to use the resources available to them to help prevent more deaths.

Waukesha County and domestic abuse violence

The Women's Center Executive Director Angela Mancuso said TWC is a resource in Waukesha County which provides safety, shelter and support services for free and a 24-hour hotline. She said Waukesha County is not immune to domestic violence.

"There are one to two domestic abuse related homicides per year in the county," Mancuso said.

This year 58 percent of those reported deaths included firearms. Mancuso said having weapons present in a domestic abuse home increases the risk of fatality by 500 percent.

Other reasons for abuse-related deaths are economic unease, substance abuse and mental illness; although advocates are careful not to blame those reasons for the statewide spike in deaths.

"Domestic abuse violence can happen during a good



Submitted photo

The Women's Center of Waukesha offers services to victims, both adults and children, of domestic abuse. In October on the grounds of The Women's Center are full-sized purple silhouettes to represent lives lost to domestic violence.

economy or a bad economy," Mancuso said.

Watching for signs

Both Seger and Mancuso believe domestic abuse violence is preventable. Mancuso said some of the key predictable factors include firearms present, animal abuse, strangulation and rape or sexual assault.

"If we are paying attention as a community to those areas, we may be able to decrease the fatality risk," Mancuso said.

Tanya Brown, sister of the late Nicole Brown Simpson, spoke during TWC's anniversary luncheon. Tanya Brown indicated her sister did tell some close friends about being abused and no one did anything.

"This is a powerful example of if you know something is going on, do something about it," she said.

Mancuso said it could be as simple as just being a shoulder to lean on or being a good friend.

Many people think of domestic abuse as a "private issue" but Mancuso said it is a societal issue.

Don't judge victims

Often abuse victims feel isolated and Mancuso added it is due to shaming and blaming in our culture. Victims are being bullied on

social media or in person with questions such as "why don't you leave him/her" or "how can you go back, you must like the abuse." Seger points out relationships are complex both in abusive and nonabusive situations.

"Many victims don't want the relationship to be over; they just want the abuse to stop," Seger said.

Victims may rely on their abusers for child support, child care and financial stability. What is important is for victims to know there are community resources to help them.

In Mancuso's opinion, there is a need for communities that connect victims to advocacy services, pay attention to risk factors and shift the blame off the victim. Mancuso said people have become culturally desensitized to violence. As a community, people need to teach youth about healthy and unhealthy relationships and conflict resolution.

"Choosing to use force or violence in response to conflict is a choice — it is a learned behavior," she said.

For more information on TWC visit <http://twcwaukesha.org>. For information on End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin visit www.endabusewi.org.

Email: kpilarski@conley.net