A Look at the Silent Victims: Children Who Witness Violence

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. During this month, many events are held to honor and pay tribute to both those who have survived and those who have lost their lives to domestic violence.

It is also a time to focus on the silent victims and witnesses of domestic violence: children. The statistics are staggering. More than 60% of children in the United States have been exposed to crime, abuse, and violence, and many of these incidents have occurred within their own homes. Researchers suggest that repeated exposure to violence and trauma can disrupt brain development, thereby increasing the risks of developing serious illnesses, psychological issues, and dangerous behavior in adulthood.

According to statistics reported by Futures Without Violence, more than five million children are exposed to domestic violence annually. Almost one million were subjected to serious physical violence, including kicking.

Attend Our Vigil October 21

In honor of Domestic Violence Awareness month, we will be honoring both victims and survivors of domestic violence at our annual peace vigil. The vigil will be held at the Plymouth Council on Aging on October 21 at 3:30 PM. Area politicians, victim rights advocates, and local band Angry Ginger will lead the vigil. Please join us for light refreshments before the vigil. For more information, contact Sandra at 508-746-2664.

Collaborations Key to Assisting DV Victims

Building stronger collaborations play integral roles in working towards providing safe and comprehensive services to victims. Family and Community Resources, Health Imperatives, and South Shore Women’s Resource Center have been collaborating to re-establish a domestic violence and sexual assault taskforce. The taskforce will focus on identifying gaps in services, expand knowledge of available resources, and increase community collaborations.

Meetings will be held monthly, each with a guest speaker and an educational component, as well as discussions to address the needs of victims and survivors. The first meeting will be held on October 22nd in Brockton in the morning and then Plymouth in the afternoon.

If you would like more details about the taskforce, please contact Sandra at 508-746-2664.
This past month, our “Road to Healing” program launched its new PSA. You may view it on SSWRC’s Facebook page. We would like to thank Lauren Fender, who bravely told her story for the PSA. Lauren is an amazing volunteer and strong advocate for “Road to Healing” and provides inspiration to us all.

Use Your E-mail & Save Us $  

SSWRC is a non-profit program; thus, staff works very hard to make sure money isn’t needlessly spent. That said, we feel it is important to connect with our friends and supporters through the quarterly newsletter. But you can help us save on mailing costs by sharing an e-mail address you’d like the newsletter sent to instead of receiving it snail-mail.

Please e-mail Marion to make the change: moliveira@hptc.org

Check Out PSA on Facebook!

This past month, our “Road to Healing” program launched its new PSA. You may view it on SSWRC’s Facebook page. We would like to thank Jordan Gustafson Films for creating, directing, and producing the PSA. A special thank-you to actors Samantha Mustari and Alex Monto. We would like to thank Lauren Fender, who bravely told her story for the PSA. Lauren is an amazing volunteer and strong advocate for “Road to Healing” and provides inspiration to us all.

into my job and proves helpful.

I heard Pope Francis address Congress. It was a beautiful speech. What struck me most was who he quoted, even more than the quotes themselves, like Dorothy Day, from the Catholic Worker Movement, for instance.

A marvelous human being, if ever there was one, although I’m sure some of those seated in the Capitol listening to Pope Francis would disagree. Imagine, senators and representatives not being of the same mind.…. The Pope also quoted Thomas Merton, a personal favorite. Merton was a Benedictine monk, writer, and mystic whose faith was informed by Buddhism. I carry a quote of Merton’s with me and refer to it, from time to time. I got it out after hearing the Pope’s speech and thought of how Merton speaks, not only to world leaders and fellow believers, but to survivors, as well.

He speaks of a power that “liberates something in us, a power we did not know we had, a hope, a capacity for life, a resilience, an ability to bounce back when we thought we were completely defeated, a capacity to grow and change, a power of creative transformation.”

Shortly after the Pope’s speech, I sat with a family devastated by the homicide of someone they loved as dearly as anyone can be loved. There was weeping, and there was a quiet rage for which I had no good answers. There were many questions.

I listened, and I promised to provide information that would help clarify the legal process, which can be traumatic itself. There was also “a hope, a capacity for life,” and perhaps “a resilience,” which we’ll pursue in the days ahead and on into the future.

They have felt “completely defeated,” and no doubt they’ll feel that way repeatedly, but together we’ll work at tapping into their “capacity to grow and change,” at least enough to discover some degree of healing and even more of life’s joy.

It’s encouraging to know that we don’t travel or do the work of advocacy alone. We have each other, which represents no little strength in the daunting tasks we face every day. We might also take heart in the glad knowledge that the likes of Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, and Pope Francis accompany us.
strangulation, and severe beating. Over 4 million children have witnessed verbal and emotional domestic abuse, and approximately 8.3 million children will be exposed to both physical and emotional intimate partner violence annually.

Research suggests that 19.4 million children under age 13 will live with domestic violence, (DV), and 30.6 million teens will witness interpersonal violence. The numbers are jolting, and the reality is many children live in homes with violence. For children living with violence, the world feels unsafe, and as more children witness community, national, and international violence, the world can appear dangerous.

Home is where many of us seek safe refuge, to retreat from the hardships of the outside world; however, for children who witness violence, this may not be a possibility. Further, 31% (1 out of 3) of children who witness DV are also victims of physical abuse compared to 4.8% for children who do not. The statistics makes it abundantly clear that these silent witnesses need to be heard, and the impact of exposure to DV must be understood.

Children who witness violence react and respond in different ways. The effects of witnessing violence can be immediate; the child may have ongoing effects in both childhood and adolescence, and for some, the effects can be long-term. Children may experience direct effects, that is, immediate trauma from witnessing or being a part of the violence.

The more indirect impact and effects can include parenting that is compromised because of the abuse. A victim may not be able to protect the child, and the offending parent places the child in fear. Children will become keenly aware of the power differential between the abuser and victim, and may live their life accordingly. Children may adjust their interactions with the offending parent to accommodate and avoid further abuse. At least half of all children who witness DV will intervene in some manner to stop the abuse.

Nearly half yell for the offender to stop, 44% try to get away, with 23.6% calling 911 for help. Some of the ongoing effects of exposure to DV include an increase in health complaints, particularly eating, sleeping, and chronic pain. Children who witness violence also have more self-harming behaviors and report more depression and anxiety.

Trauma effects are varied by the protective factors that a child may have. The age, severity, and frequency of abuse witnessed by the child can impact the level of trauma experienced. The more available protective factors, especially supportive relationships with non-violent adults, the greater the opportunity to alter and improve the negative impact of witnessing DV. Children who have other adverse experiences and minimal support or additional protective factors are at increased risk for more severe traumatic responses.

Overall, research suggests PTSD is a significant concern for children who witness domestic violence. Further, longitudinal studies of children who have witnessed violence found that children who witnessed DV during their pre-school years were more likely to have behavioral problems in their middle teens (age 16).

For boys, witnessing violence during middle school years increases the risk of negative risk-taking behaviors. According to a national survey of youth, more than 50% of victims of dating violence and statutory rape had witnessed intimate partner violence.

Please see “Children” pg. 5
Plymouth Thrift Boutique Needs Your “D & D”

“D&D”- what does that mean? Donations and dollars. As in, we need you to donate and buy.

To say that the construction on Samoset Street has been brutal to both donations and sales is a colossal understatement. But we are forging ahead, mindful of the cause we are supporting.

This month’s sale items include 25% off all sleepwear, 20% off all Halloween (we even have kids’ costumes), and 20% off kitchenware.

Please come in, see the fantastic fall items in stock, go through your closets, and tell your friends and families about us and the cause we are supporting.

Fall hours are Monday-Saturdays from 10 AM to 4:30 PM, starting November 3.

There is plenty of parking behind the store. Plymouth Thrift Boutique is located at 16 Samoset Street in Plymouth. Please call with questions/directions at 508-746-4557.
Research is clear: many children who grow up with violence in their homes are more at risk for longer term behavioral problems. They are also at increased risk of being further victimized throughout teen and adult years, including experiencing DV in adulthood.

Based on this, the question becomes what can we do? Teachers, neighbors, coaches, instructors, and other positive adult role models can influence how a child perceives his/her world. Not all children who witness violence will be negatively impacted. The child’s resiliency and the number of protective factors and supports can reduce the risk factors involved in witnessing violence.

Some intervention and prevention strategies include safety planning with the victim and children, holding the offender accountable and working specifically with the child to provide support and understanding. Building resiliency in children through environmental support through connections with caring adults, family, and community has shown to increase a child’s view of self and builds confidence.

While a child may be exposed to violence, positive role modeling, community connection, positive parenting, and quality of education can build upon a child’s self-regulating skills, thereby improving motivation and self-confidence. It is important to cultivate positive responses to children who witness violence and provide the support within the context of their emotional development.

Our schools, community programs, coaches, and other athletic or after-school programs can provide consistent resources to develop positive interactions with adults and peers, thereby increasing the child’s or adolescents support network. Children too often are silent victims. It is important for the community to understand the impact of DV on children and become the voice for those who have remained silent. Research strongly suggests adults have the capacity and ability to make a difference in a child’s life.

**Replacing Your Cell Phone? WE Want It!**

We’re “Calling All Old Cell Phones” when you upgrade. Deliver phones to Plymouth Thrift Boutique, 16 Samoset Street in Plymouth. Please do not include attachments as they will only get thrown away. We ship phones to a company on behalf of SSWRC, which then receives a check. The phones are reconditioned and given to DV victims to call 911 if they need to.

Plymouth Thrift Boutique is open Monday-Friday, 11 AM to 5 PM; Saturday, 10 AM to 5 PM.
WANT TO TALK?

If you would like to talk to someone about domestic violence, regardless of day or night, call 888-746-2664. Sometimes having an impartial person to bounce things off of can be very comforting.

Perhaps you are calling for a friend, perhaps yourself. It doesn’t matter. Our trained staff is ready to listen.

So, don’t pull your hair out. A sympathetic ear is waiting to listen. Most importantly, know you are not alone. There is nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about. You are not responsible for someone else’s behavior. Pick up the phone… you’ll feel better having taken a first step.

I have not read any warnings on the label of the pants stating that placing the pants on one’s body— a young woman’s— will be placing herself at risk for “inappropriate behavior.”

Wearing yoga pants or other form-fitting clothing is not an invitation for young men/men to act poorly. The idea that a piece of clothing is the cause of a behavior seems preposterous. Does this mean if I wear a nice dress or skirt, I will alter the behavior of others? That a pair of pants, a shirt, a sweater has the ability to improve behavior or conversely cause one to act in a manner that is “inappropriate”?

The hypocrisy of the reasoning behind the dress code is that society promotes increased sexuality and objectification of women, but when a woman buys into the current style— she is also opening herself up to ridicule and blame.

Very rarely do I hear anyone say a man who is showing off his muscles causes a woman to act poorly. So, it would seem it is only women’s clothes that have the ability to alter and shape behavior, which if we apply logic, know this is untrue.

The bigger issue that lies within this ideology is victim blaming. Stat- ing young men cannot control their impulses when they see female students in yoga pants is giving young men an excuse. The male student is not held accountable for his behavior; rather, the female student who chose to wear yoga pants is at fault.

Somehow the pants caused a shift in the young man’s behavior that would not have occurred if she had worn something not as form-fitting. This belief supports the notion that placing yoga pants on her body gives her the power to alter a boy’s mind and actions. It supports the belief that how a woman dresses can control the outcome and responses of her male counterparts. This attitude is also degrading to young men/men. Many males do not get distracted and do not act in a manner deemed inappropriate.

Further, a young woman should be able to wear what she wants. A dress code for the purposes of decreasing bullying is one issue, but to be blatant and state that yoga pants are too distracting is victim-blaming and sexist. The next leap is to sexual assault and abuse. Too often we hear people blame victims of sexual assault. “She was drunk,” “Did you see what she was wearing?” “Why did she go to the bar/ party?” “Why did she walk alone?” “She’s a slut,” and through it all, the victim is blamed, and the offender is released from accountability.

Please see “Yoga” page 7
The message sent is that somehow women are in control of how men act or treat them. A woman has the power to protect herself from harm, only if she changes her attire, alters her actions, and does not do anything that could remotely be construed as causing the behavior.

The reality is that how one dresses is not an invitation to being sexually harassed, assaulted, or raped. A woman should be able to wear what she wants, and if the clothing is provocative, it is not inviting a man to rape her. Women do not get dressed thinking, “I think I will get harassed or raped today.”

They do not shop for clothes with the thought in mind that today “I will pick out yoga pants, a skirt, or shirt that will truly put me a position to be approached in an ‘inappropriate manner.’” Women have the right to express themselves and wear clothing that they like without repercussions.

The dress code is sexist. It absolves young men/men of accountability and teaches them they do not have to be responsible for their behaviors. The message sent is far-reaching. Young men/men will go out into the world, and carry out the lessons learned. We undermine the good intentions of the majority of males who do not act inappropriately.

We also continue victim-blaming ideology. If we teach sexism and absolve young men of responsibility for their actions and behaviors, then gender-based crimes will continue to occur.

Women will continue to carry the burden and blame for crimes that are committed against them because of their gender. If we strive for a society that places men and women on an equal playing field, then we must start to create change early on.

We must challenge the old belief system and ascribe to a new one. If we objectify women, we de-personalize them. If we promote increased sexuality amongst young women, but then tell them they are to blame for what happens to them, then we disempower half of the population and diminish their worth. Some might argue the dress code is just that—but it is the reason behind the code that is the problem.

The dress code implies women are responsible for men’s bad behavior, that they should alter their appearance or dress to accommodate their male counterparts.

The message continues to support the sexist attitudes and behaviors that ultimately support the existence of sexism and inequality within our society.

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VIGIL:**
Where: Plymouth Council on Aging
When: October 21 Time: 3:30 PM
JOIN US!