

**“MAKE A HAVEN FROM THE GRIM REALITY
OF DOMESTIC ABUSE -- VOLUNTEER”**

**NORTH CHANNEL COALITION & BETTY’S HAVEN
2007 INSPIRATIONAL BANQUET**

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Thank you, David.

THE GRIM REALITY OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

It's a privilege to be here with you to honor four inspirational benefactors of Betty's Haven, to celebrate and recognize the importance of volunteering, and to remind ourselves why our support is so important.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. We can't hide from domestic violence. We can't turn away from its victims. But while the unfortunate reality is grim, we are also inspired by the life-saving comfort and hope that Betty's Haven brings.

As most of you know, for more than a decade, the North Channel Coalition has given the women and children of the North Channel and East End areas someone to turn to, a haven, when they are threatened or harmed by domestic violence. Tonight we recognize their mission and thank you for your support.

Let me tell you three short tales.

"Abby's" boyfriend has a temper. When they argue, he punches the wall or throws things. Sometimes he pushes her. Grabs her wrist or her throat. Kicks her, slaps her, hits her.

Do you believe "Abby" is a victim of domestic violence?

"Brenda's" husband is jealous. He follows her when she goes out with friends. He combs her phone bill with suspicion. He accuses her of cheating on him. He makes frequent sexual comments about her, about her friends, about strangers. He makes her have sex with him when she doesn't want to.

Is "Brenda" a victim of domestic abuse?

"Cal's" partner controls all their finances and refuses to share money with him. She criticizes him daily, insults him, calls him cruel names. She's nice when he does as she says but withholds affection as punishment when he doesn't.

Is "Cal" a victim of domestic abuse?

According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline, all of these scenarios can be signs of physical, sexual or emotional abuse.¹

NUMBERS TELL A SOMBER TALE

These three cases happen to be hypothetical, but they are typical of what is happening to millions of American women – and men too – every day. More people are affected by domestic violence than we can put our arms around. Each year, 4 million American women are assaulted by a partner.² If each of them spent just one night at Betty’s Haven, it would be full for almost 800 years.

More than 200 assaults were in fact reported in the North Channel area in 2006.³ And sadly, we know many cases go unreported – how many, we don’t know.

On a “good” day, only three women in the U.S. are murdered by their husband or boyfriend.⁴ Around the world, one out of three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused.⁵ Ladies, glance to your left and your right, and be grateful if it isn’t you.

The Family Violence Prevention Fund reports that 74 percent of employed battered women were harassed by their partner while at work.⁶ And it’s not just her problem, it’s her company’s problem. Violence against women costs companies about 73 million dollars annually in lost productivity, according to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.⁷

And it’s not just our problem, it’s our children’s problem. Dating violence among teens is common. Research indicates that physical or sexual abuse is a part of one in three high school relationships.⁸ These early experiences shape the views and habits that teens take into adulthood. Victim and victimizer may come to believe dysfunctional relationships are “normal.”

VIOLENCE DOESN’T DISCRIMINATE

Domestic violence strikes without discrimination. Women of all races are equally vulnerable.⁹ And while in 95 percent of abusive relationships, men abuse women, males can be victims too.¹⁰ Men abuse women. Women can abuse men. Men abuse men. Women abuse women. Boys and girls abuse each other.

Victims can be young or old, rich or poor, high school drop-outs or PhDs. Many victims are too frightened or too dependent to ever seek help. They may hide their scars beneath long sleeves and their sadness behind a smile.

Many families share the sinister secret of domestic violence. I myself have stood between people I loved and watched a family torn apart by domestic abuse. I suspect some of you have too.

Domestic violence destroys families and relationships. It can perpetuate itself from generation to generation when victims become victimizers who learned only unhealthy ways to love.

That's the grim reality we can't gloss over. Now here's the good news: it doesn't have to be this way. Betty's Haven is doing something about it, and so can you.

THE GOOD NEWS – BETTY'S HAVEN AND YOU CAN HELP

For over a decade, the North Channel Coalition has been counseling local women victimized by domestic violence. Two years ago, they opened Betty's Haven to serve the tens of thousands of women of the North Channel area and the east end of Greater Houston. Many of you in this room tonight have contributed to this safe haven, which depends on your financial contribution to offer hope to women and children who find no sanctuary in their own home, to help them escape with their self-esteem and their lives.

The volunteers of Betty's Haven teach women about domestic violence and provide them with food, clothing, around-the-clock counseling, advocacy, case management, health care, child care, transportation and job search assistance to restore their hope and help them build a life of independence and dignity.

Women and children fleeing domestic abuse need to know someone cares. The volunteers of Betty's Haven care **about** them and care **for** them. We are all here tonight because we care. But we can do more than sympathize.

RAISE AWARENESS

First, raise awareness. Talk to your family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers about domestic violence. Teach them to recognize the signs of abuse. Tell them about “Abby,” “Brenda,” and “Cal.” Ask them the questions I asked you. Inspire them to act as I ask you to act now.

Spread the word about Betty’s Haven at your church or civic group, community organization or workplace. Get involved.

DONATE FUNDS OR GOODS

And while you tell, you can give. Americans are famously generous to those in need. And I don’t have to teach you about Texas hospitality. Whether it’s a tsunami across the world, hurricane refugees from a neighboring state, or a little girl trapped in a well in West Texas, we give them our tears, our prayers, and our paychecks.

We should do no less for the women and children suffering from domestic violence in our own city, our own neighborhoods, streets and homes.

Thank you for supporting Betty’s Haven. When you talk to folks about domestic violence, tell them they can support Betty’s Haven with a yearly or monthly pledge. Without your financial support, they are unable to offer these women and children shelter.

But you don’t have to part with cold, hard cash to give something of value. Individuals and businesses can make in-kind donations of goods or services such as food, beverages and cooking utensils; plumbing, lighting or security; bed sheets for a good night’s rest or job prep classes for a hard day’s work.

VOLUNTEER

We all know that “time is money,” and time spent volunteering can be our most valuable gift. The Independent Sector has measured the monetary value of one hour of volunteer work at eighteen dollars and five cents.¹¹

That’s a hefty payroll that nonprofits like the North Channel Coalition can save themselves by drawing on an abundance of volunteer resources – from individuals, to groups, to companies.

Corporations and businesses can provide nonprofits with financial support, educational initiatives and skilled and motivated volunteers. Companies that can't support every worthwhile opportunity can often do more by unleashing the power of their employees. My fellow employees at CenterPoint Energy gave 128,244 volunteer hours in 2006, valued at 2.3 million dollars, to make a difference in the lives of their friends and neighbors.

Organizations like Betty's Haven have an opportunity today to capitalize on a current demographic change: the looming retirement of the baby boom generation. Millions of "boomers" are ready to leave the workforce but not leave their communities behind. A MetLife Foundation survey revealed that a majority of older Americans want to put their job skills and life experience to use to improve the quality of life by helping the poor, elderly and others in need.¹²

Nonprofits like the North Channel Coalition – with a sound organizational structure and a compelling history, mission and vision – can harness the passion and leadership of these mature workers and retirees to make their vision a reality.

INTERVENE

Finally, we can intervene.

If you know someone who is being abused, help them get help.

If you know someone who is abusive, say something. If you don't, they'll assume you approve. Show them how they should behave. You may be their first good role model. Get them help – chances are they were a victim before they became a victimizer.

Every day we help shape the beliefs and behavior of our children and our friends, our neighbors and co-workers, even strangers not only by our words and our deeds, but also by what we choose to laugh at or to frown upon, what makes us shrug our shoulders or turn our heads.

Don't turn away from the victims of domestic violence. Raise awareness; give money or goods or time; intervene to help the victims of abuse.

The playwright Oscar Wilde said, “a cynic knows the cost of everything and the value of nothing.” You are not cynics; you are optimists. You understand the value of giving and acting on behalf of your community. When choosing how to spend your time and money, consider this:

- The cost of a trip to the Bahamas – 500 dollars
- The value of 200 volunteer hours to a nonprofit – 3,610 dollars
- Saving a life with those volunteer hours – priceless.

Thank you, volunteers and contributors, and thank the North Channel Coalition and Betty’s Haven for giving hope and saving lives.

Sources

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- ³North Channel Coalition Web site, www.northchannelcoalition.org
- ⁴Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief, *Intimate Partner Violence, 1993-2001*, February 2003.
- ⁵Silverman, Jay G., Raj, Anita, and Clements, Karen. "Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality." *Pediatrics*, August 2004.
- ⁶Family Violence Prevention Fund. 1998. *The Workplace Guide for Employer, Unions, and Advocates*, San Francisco, CA.
- ⁷Costs of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in the United States. 2003. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Atlanta, GA.
- ⁸ National Domestic Violence Hotline Web site, www.ndvh.org
- ⁹US. Department of Justice, *Violence-Related Injuries Treated in Hospital Emergency Departments*, August 1997.
- ¹⁰ National Domestic Violence Hotline Web site, www.ndvh.org
- ¹¹CenterPoint Energy Web site, www.CenterPointEnergy.com/community.
- ¹²*New Face of Work Survey*, MetLife Foundation – Civic Ventures, 2005.