

Help for abuse victims has been available 30 years

Services for victims of domestic violence have been available in Sherman County for about 30 years, beginning with a child abuse hotline.

The volunteers handling the 24-hour hotline made the connection between child abuse and domestic violence, said Charlotte Linsner, program director for the Northwest Kansas Family Shelter, and started providing help for families rather than just children.

The shelter began in the late 1970s, Linsner said, and was incorporated in 1983. People with Fort Hays State University and Ellis County wrote a grant for the shelter, she said, and the grant covered 18 counties.

The shelter then took the group running the hotline in Sherman

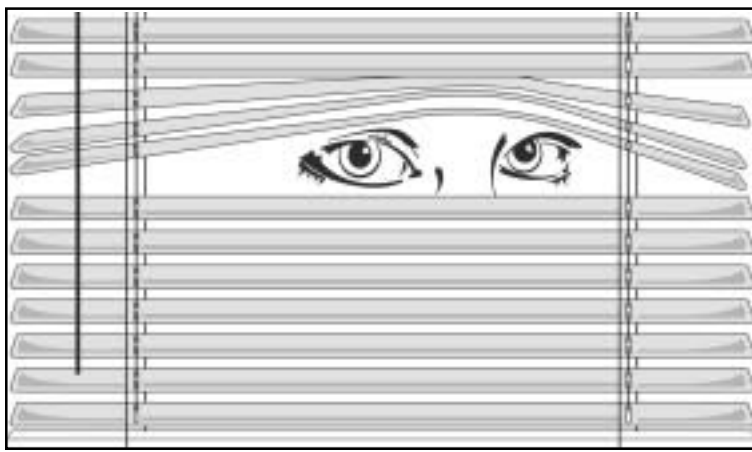
County under its wing.

Linsner's history with the shelter has been about as long. She said she saw an ad looking for volunteers in 1979 and went to training in Colby. She went from being a volunteer to the position of outreach coordinator and later to program director.

Linsner said there are misconceptions about the shelter. A lot of people don't realize the shelter is a home, she said, not a row of beds. Victims have their own rooms, and there are rooms for children. There is a living area, a kitchen, laundry room and a back yard for kids to play in.

There are some rules, Linsner said, but they aren't very strict.

The shelter's services are free, she said; food and linens are provided, and transportation, advocacy



Domestic violence victims often become accustomed to having their every move watched and have trouble feeling safe even after getting the abuser out of their lives. The Northwest Kansas Family Shelter does whatever possible to keep those who choose to leave abusers safe and to help victims whether they stay in the relationship or not.

and referral services are free. The shelter is required by the grants it receives to provide the services at no charge.

The shelter has only five paid staff members, Linsner said, and relies on its 20-30 volunteers to cover the 10,080-square-mile service area. Volunteers man the shelter's 24-hour crisis line, Linsner said, provide personal and legal help, educate the public, listen to victims or transport them to the shelter, to receive medical care or to safe homes where they can go for 72 hours.

Not every county has a safe home, Linsner said, but there are enough of them that the farthest anyone would have to drive is an hour.

There is no paid staff in Sherman County, she said, but there are three

volunteers, and she maintains a home here but works in the Hays office.

The shelter has a 24-hour crisis line with someone always on call and has helped between 20 and 30 women in Sherman County in the last year.

The shelter began asking for donations from cities and counties for the last 10 years, but no tax is levied specifically for the shelter. It gets money from grants and private donations as well.

About seven years ago, she said, the federal government put on push that cities and counties should pay for help for domestic violence victims.

They are tax-paying citizens, Linsner said; they shop in the area and send their kids to school there.

Shelter offers safety, counsel

SHELTER, from Page 1

work through what they are dealing with, Linsner said, and help to keep the family safe. Sometimes the family's not safe, she said, if the perpetrator is violent.

She said she heard a news report that a man in another state drove some distance, crossing state lines, with his 7-year-old daughter, to kill his wife's parents. That creates a lot of victims, Linsner said.

In our area, the case of Kerrie (Aschenbrenner) Bevington of Brewster is an example of the family as victims, Linsner said, and the community as victims. Bevington's husband Lanny was charged with first-degree murder following her shooting death on Dec. 28.

He pleaded guilty to second-degree murder Monday, July 19. The agreement was for a 227-month

sentence, nearly 19 years. Sentencing was set for 9 a.m. Wednesday, Sept. 15, subject to the completion of a pre-sentencing investigation and report.

The county had to pay for court time and appoint a lawyer to defend the man, Linsner said, and an important person was lost to the community.

In this situation, Linsner said, he killed her — she has no rights, and her family has few. But he has all kinds of rights, including the right to a fair trial, the right to a lawyer....

And he got only a 19-year sentence, Linsner said, while she had a sentence of death.

Cris Lovington, a volunteer for the shelter, said the American Medical Association says 65 percent of families deal with domestic violence at least once. That doesn't in-

clude those who don't report anything, she said.

And, Lovington said, domestic violence is the No. 1 cause of death for pregnant women.

Northwest Kansas lost six people to violence from Oct. 1 through Dec. 31, one each in Sherman (Bevington), Cheyenne and Graham counties and three in Ellis County.

"Now we have serious signs," Linsner said. "People are dying from the abuse."

The one in Cheyenne County was planning his wife's murder by paying someone, Linsner said, and died in a scuffle with police.

The one in Graham County was an 18-year-old woman who was killed by a man. Those in Ellis County included a suicide and a Fort Hays State student who was killed in a fight.

Sherman County may add task force

Two northwest Kansas counties have task forces on domestic violence, and the Northwest Kansas Family Shelter program director hopes Sherman County will add one soon.

The shelter has task forces in Decatur and Logan counties, said Director Charlotte Linsner, and they work on whatever they see as the focus in their areas. The Decatur County Stand Against Violence focuses on educating the community, she said, while Logan County Stand Against Violence focuses on children.

The Logan county task force sponsored the state exhibit, "Silent Witnesses," at Oakley High School, Linsner said. The exhibit contains statues of women whose lives have been destroyed by domestic violence.

Having a task force in Sherman County, she said, would help educate people about violence. Linsner said anyone interested in volunteering for the task force should call her at (785) 625-4202.

She said getting volunteers is not easy. Many are former victims. A lot of people don't get involved, she said, until something happens to them or their family.

People's lives are busy, Linsner said, and the fact that the shelter has so many volunteers is testimony to their dedication.

Education is needed to change attitudes about domestic violence, Linsner said, such as the view often is that it is the victim's fault for not leaving.

If a woman kills her abuser,

Linsner said, her sentence (national average) will be three years longer than that of a man who kills his mate. A man who shook a baby in Denver a few years ago got two years for killing the child, Linsner said; the woman got 10 for not removing the baby from the situation.

"Society does not make the abuser accountable for his actions," she said, "and does not make the punishment fit the crime."

Cris Lovington, director of the Regional Prevention Center, has had a strong role in domestic violence education in her six years as a volunteer for the shelter.

Her efforts have reached teenagers and students in her classes learning English as a second language. Lovington said she feels it is important to let people know the family shelter's services are available.

"A lot of volunteers would prefer to stay anonymous," Lovington said, "and I can understand that, but I think people need to know the services are here."

There is no office in Goodland for

domestic violence services, she said, but there are agencies willing to help. The victims just need to ask for help.

"When I call Charlotte," Lovington said, "she comes right out. I don't feel we're out here alone."

"Five hundred thousand women die every year from domestic violence," Linsner said. "It amazes me that with as many physical and mental health services here, this isn't a priority."

There could be an office in Goodland, she said, if the county and the community would support it.

Sherman County, and Goodland in particular, has been good to the shelter, Linsner added, when they are raising money. When Pizza Hut donated a percentage of its sales to the shelter for one day in April, she said, they made \$300. That fund raiser will be done again in October.

But more money than that would need to be raised to pay for an office here, Linsner said.

Family Shelter roundup

The Northwest Kansas Family Shelter handles domestic violence in 18 northwest Kansas counties:

- Sherman County victim, Linda, says the shelter saved her, Story on Page 1
- The family shelter provides safety, help, counsel to those who face violence in their home. Story on Page 1.
- Goodland family shelter office closed for lack of money. Story on Page 8.
- Shelter director hopes Sherman County will

add domestic violence task force. Story on Page 8.

- Family shelter has been in Sherman County for 30 years. Story on Page 8.
- Volunteer has seen the good family shelter can do and has provided translation and education services. Story to come.
- Family shelter covers 18-county area with five paid staff, 20-30 volunteers and shrinking budget. Story to come.

Abuse victim saved by shelter

ABUSE, from Page 1

crown to wear when her husband called her his vulgar pet name for her. Then you have permission to be that, Linda said, when you wear the crown.

She said she took the suggestion, and the first time she put on the crown, her husband laughed so hard he never called her that again.

But, Linda said, the adjustments didn't fix the relationship. An abuser doesn't care what you're doing when he's hitting, Linda said; when he comes home in a rage, there's nothing you can

do.

If you're going to make your marriage work, Linda said, you both need to have counseling together.

Linda said when she sought help, the shelter had an office in Goodland and a support group, but not now.

"We don't have a group here," she said, "or a counselor. We need that."

Women in abusive situations often don't think they have options because they have kids, she said. There are a lot of obstacles to face to get out of a situation.

A lot of times, she said, the victim doesn't tell her family and feels

alone. There's the loneliness, she said, fear of being a single parent and frustration. Victims need support from a counselor and a group.

Those who met in the support group didn't tell anyone on the outside who was in the group, she said, or what went on there. They need privacy.

She said the case of Kerrie Bevington, who was killed by her husband in December, proves the need for an office in Sherman County to help domestic violence victims.

"I was one of the lucky ones," Linda said, "who was able to get out alive."

Lack of money closes outreach office

The Northwest Kansas Family Shelter's outreach office in Goodland closed in 2000, and then an office was open for a year in Logan County, but lack of money shut it down.

Charlotte Linsner, program director for the shelter, said she was the outreach coordinator here for six years, at first working out of her home, then having an office for 4 1/2 years.

She said at first Larry Minner gave her office space at no charge and then she shared space with

Sharon Jensen. Federal money paid for an office where the Red Cross is now on 17th Street, she said.

The federal money was pulled, she said, because the government started pushing communities to take care of their own domestic violence services. There was not enough financial support here for a full-time person, she said.

Linsner took the position of program director in Hays. The shelter advertised for a part-time outreach coordinator, she said, thinking it wouldn't work to keep an office

open with a part-time person.

As it turned out, she said, a part-time person was hired in Logan County, and county commissioners there paid for office space. The office was open there a year, she said, when the coordinator resigned.

When the shelter advertised for a replacement, Linsner said, no one even came in to interview, so money for the office fell through.

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