

# Facing violence with education, outreach

## Zontans host domestic violence panel

By Wyatt Aloisio  
Staff Writer

LUDLOW — During October, officially Domestic Violence Awareness Month, agencies put their heads and resources together to try to rid their communities of domestic violence. And thanks to the Zonta Club of Quaboag Valley, the conversation is increasing in intensity and purpose.

Groups everywhere, including the Zonta Club, are educating the community, teaming with public safety partners and health organizations to shine a light on the causes of domestic violence and see perpetrators brought to justice.

A recent gathering at the Ludlow Country Club on Monday, Oct. 15 focused on the challenges facing the region including human rights, with a panel of guests speaking on the severity of domestic violence cases seen by law enforcement and area health organizations and ways to reverse current trends.

Moderated by Zontans Shanique Spalding and Danielle Petrangelo, the panel of guest speakers included Belchertown Police Chief Chris Pronovost; Elizabeth G. Dineen, executive director of the Young Women's Christian Association of Western Massachusetts, Palmer Police Chief John Janulewicz, and Monica Moran, manager of domestic violence prevention programs with the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission. Each shared past experiences working to combat domestic violence and provided input on the three questions of how many incidents they typically see weekly in their lines of work and their effects, the number one barrier

that they perceived as being for victims, and what they thought the best resource would be that could benefit survivors.

The evening served as an official launch of the club's "He for She" campaign, a solidarity campaign to promote equality by encouraging those both male and female to speak out for victims of domestic violence and gender stereotypes and actively including men and boys.

A survey submitted by Zonta to the police departments in eight area communities as well as to the YWCA showed many of the towns dealt with high rates of domestic violence with limited advocate resources available to victims, largely dependent upon grants.

The survey further showed that little to no presence of resources for male victims was made available. The most predominant factors contributing to an inability to exit a dangerous relationship included lack of transportation and child and pet-care concerns, lack of income, lack of shelter or housing, fear of retaliation from the defender, and the stigma associated with physical or emotional abuse.

"I've seen a lot of changes today compared to where we were many years ago in say the 1980's. But there is still a lot more that I think can be done still," said Pronovost, longtime member of a detective bureau investigating rape and assault.

Janulewicz compared the present day to a time when officers would arrive to a scene, witness a victim, and be unable to do much to provide help.

"You'd come to a residence and see the injuries, bloody nose, bloody lips, and not be able to do anything about it," he said. "The only opportunity you could afford them, if you could call it that, was to leave the household. So when the laws did change it was drastic."



Turley Publications staff photo by Wyatt Aloisio

(From left) Belchertown Police Chief Chris Pronovost; Elizabeth G. Dineen, ED, of the YWCA of Western Massachusetts, Palmer Police Chief John Janulewicz, and Monica Moran, manager of domestic violence prevention programs with the PVPC, speak before Zontans on Monday, Oct. 15.

Janulewicz said changes he is most grateful for included having an active domestic violence task force in town, as well as a court advocate who provides victims with resources.

Pronovost said on average, his department receives three domestic violence calls per week with nearly 12 per month while Janulewicz said in Palmer they receive roughly 10 to 15 calls per week.

The two agreed that properly coding and classifying domestic violence can be problematic and more than anything, defender accountability and holding a zero tolerance policy for offenders was paramount.

"These are the calls that we put quite a bit of our resources into because they are some of the most important calls that we go to," said Pronovost.

"Most of us have absolutely no idea how pervasive domestic violence is," said Moran, who said local tax dollars are spent on the problem.

"Police are spending 20 to 40 percent of their time, at a conservative estimate, responding to domestics," she said.

According to statistics gar-

nered from a 2017 Massachusetts State Health Assessment a total of 2,100 incidents of sexual assault were reported to rape crisis centers in Massachusetts in 2017 with one in three women and one in five men in the Commonwealth have reported rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner.

An examination of data showed that in one day, domestic violence programs throughout the state served 1,834 victims and were unable to meet 389 requests, of which 85 percent were requests for housing.

National statistics from sources including the Center for Disease Control, the Department of Justice, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation show one in four women and one in nine men in the U.S. were victims of intimate partner violence with domestic violence cases estimated to cost \$8.3 billion in resources annually. A total of 14 percent of all homicides in the U.S. have been committed by a current or former inmate who was a partner to the victim with over 70 percent of victims being female.

Dineen said much of her

time is spent with the District Attorney's office working on domestic assault and violence cases and often, those who commit the acts of violence against their partners will come straight from being released from prison and even armed with weapons.

"Many of these defendants can be just unrelenting in their pursuit of the survivors," said Dineen. "People have come to the YWCA pretending to be a priest, saying they are here to give spiritual counseling. People have come dressed as professional saying they are a lawyer and here to settle a mistake.

We've had people come with baseball bats and guns. We have to look at domestic violence as an epidemic and look at it the same way we did with smoking and drinking. It is everywhere, in every social class."

Dineen said the emergency hotline at the YWCA last year alone received more than 12,000 calls with holidays being a major time for incidents to occur.

Moran thanked Zonta, who many years ago had assisted in providing the initial start-up funds to create a support group in the area for victims. She said the greatest barriers for victims

continue to be economics and infrastructure with few shelters and affordable housing available in the region and victims being dependent financially on their abusers.

"There's the short term, I just got a restraining order against my partner and can't afford my rent this month," Moran said. "Then there's the long term where there's no affordable housing in the region. The first one is the important thing to keep in mind because there's something that we can do about it."

A question and answer session followed, with panelists

giving their insight on how to promote advocates in communities, such as online and social media, current legislative efforts and resources that could be supported, and the best means to promote discussion on sexual assault and violence in schools. Panelists agreed working with kids to end the cycle of violence needed to be addressed.

"The sooner we can get that ingrained into kids, male and female, that it is not only not okay to do but also illegal, the more likely we are to cut that cycle," said Janulewicz.