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Beth Warren, Director of Outreach & Reneé Carroll-Grate, Executive Director of Hope's Door photo by Andy Johnson

Hope's Door: A Door to a New Beginning

By Natalie Medigovich

THE MOST RECENT STATISTICS from the Texas Department of Public Safety show that 74% of all Texans have either experienced first hand or know of someone who has experienced some form of domestic violence. National figures cite that nearly 25% of American women report being physically assaulted or raped by a current or former spouse or cohabitating partner. It is the leading cause of injury to women in the United States.

Domestic violence, also known as battering, is a coercive behavior that physically harms, arouses fear, prevents a woman from doing what she wishes, or forces her to behave in ways she does not want to. It can include the use of physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidations, emotional

abuse, and economic deprivation.

Fortunately, an organization in Collin County knows these statistics all-to-well, and has taken on the mission of helping the victims of area domestic violence for the last 16 years. Hope's Door is the only Collin County shelter serving individuals and families affected by domestic violence. Since opening the shelter's doors in 1989 the agency has provided safe shelter for more than 3,787 women and their children and answered more than 16,000 crisis line phone calls. And, of course, everything remains strictly confidential to ensure safety.

"A group of concerned citizens, the Plano Junior League and some local attorneys did a needs assessment and decided they wanted to see a shelter in Collin County," said Hope's Door's

community education/public relations director, Tammy Taylor, who has been with the agency for seven years. "There are shelters in Dallas and Denton, but we mainly serve Collin County. About 40% come from Dallas County...of course, Hope's Door would not turn anyone [not living in Collin County] away."

Hope's Door offers several comprehensive educational programs designed to help break the cycle of domestic abuse, such as individual and group counseling. Two examples of such are residential counseling, which is provided during a shelter stay and an aftercare program, offering a one-year safety net of continuing support and counseling for victims of abuse.

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Outreach counseling is provided to women who do not need residential services where they can learn effective communication skills to express their feelings and needs. A men's counseling program offers a 24-week intensive group atmosphere where batterers are held accountable and learn via structured curriculum themes including defining violence and equality, respect, support and trust, in the Battering Intervention and Prevention Program. Other programs, such as community education, are provided

through speaking engagements, panel discussions, and day or evening workshops.

"It's so unfortunate that domestic abuse is still out there," said Tonia Cummings, Victim Advocate with Frisco Police Department since August 2000. Cummings' primary duties are crisis relief and crisis response. "My heart goes out to them. Domestic violence is like drunk driving, it does not discriminate."

Cummings, who says her position has placed her in sensitive situations such as holding the hands of victims while they were being examined by a doctor, pointed out that domestic abuse is all about power and control over that person.

"It's not about anger," she said. "Abusers can control their anger and work with the police. We are just so fortunate that the city of Frisco has a program like this. My original position was offered through a grant back in 1997-98 and the city picked it up when the population of Frisco was only 34,000. The city was very proactive and forward thinking."

Taylor said that 37 women from the Frisco area are enrolled in Hope's Door Outreach Program, or 7% of the program's participants. Another 5%, or 12 Frisco area clients, are involved in the Battering Intervention and Prevention Program. In the last year, the Collin County shelter housed 255 women and children, counseled 528 in the Outreach Counseling program, 223 for the Battering Intervention and Prevention program, and received 1,340 anonymous crisis hotline calls.

Two of the common errors in victims' reasoning is thinking they can do something to change the person who is abusing them, or that they deserve the abusive behavior. The Hope's Door website urges victims to trust their instincts when something just doesn't seem right.

"The abuser has to want and seek

help," Taylor said. "We do have a couple of men enrolled in the victim's program, but it is mostly women. Most of the men who are involved with Hope's Door are in counseling by court order because they have been arrested, referred by the probation department or by Child Protective



HOPE'S DOOR

HOPE BEGINS WHEN DOMESTIC ABUSE ENDS

Services (CPS). We really want to see the number of men in counseling increase."

"We currently train police departments, hospital staff, church clergy and Sunday School teachers for things to look for," said Taylor. "There is a state law that says if a doctor is examining a patient, he is required to document files and required to give a patient help when he suspects domestic abuse."

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The state of Texas requires every police department to have a crime victim liaison, but many do not have a full-time employee dedicated to victim's advocacy like Frisco.

"The system can seem so convoluted and I am in it," Cummings acknowledged. "I help victims navigate through the red tape."

Taylor praised a local business, Curves, for its recent financial contribution of \$11,000 to Hope's

Door. Curves owner Debra Pope conducted a "Fun for Fall, Get Fit Challenge" where teams earned \$10 from sponsors for each pound lost. About \$5,500 was raised between five area Curves locations, and Curves Corporate office matched the funds raised locally to double the amount of the Curves donation.

"This year she wants to raise \$20,000 for Hope's Door," Taylor said.

Hope's Door's majority funding comes from the Texas Department of Human Services, United Way of Collin County,

the Office of the Attorney General and the Department of Justice. Major recurring in-house fundraisers include the Evening of Hope Gala and A Date with Santa (hosted by Hope's Door auxiliary the Pathmakers).

A date with Santa sells out every year, says Taylor, noting that sponsors are always needed for the two events. Crissa's Closet, an upscale resale-clothing store located at 3131 Custer Road in Plano is another source of financial funding created for Hopes' Door's many programs and services.

"Success rates are hard to pinpoint in concrete ways," Taylor said. "One way we measure success is by the numbers served and the number of referral sources. Our shelter is full most of the year, our hotline is always ringing, and our counselors are busy serving clients. There are lots of opportunities for volunteers, though, and we always need help."

Taylor emphasized that a new Frisco support group meets once a week and that all services are free of charge. For more confidential information about the support group and other services offered by Hope's Door, please call the program office at 972.422.2911 or www.hopesdoorinc.org. If you need help, call the 24-hour Crisis Hotline at 972.422.7233.

Natalie Medigovich is a freelance writer living in Frisco.