

October Is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), one in four women and one in seven men face severe physical violence by an intimate partner at some point during their lifetime.

Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative is committed to supporting employees who are victims of intimate-partner or family-member violence by providing referrals to community resources and/or time off. In recognition of October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month, below are messages from area personnel who work year round on the issue.

Manuela S. Vazquez, community outreach and volunteer coordinator, First Step (Rockingham County)

Domestic violence includes various types of abuse, such as: verbal, emotional/psychological, economic/financial, sexual assault and stalking. Although physical abuse is more commonly known and is the most noticeable, it's important to note the prevalence of other types of abuse and keep in mind that these are not mutually exclusive.

We hear daunting stories of someone being killed at the hands of their abuser and we think, "How could this have happened?" Something most of us find surprising is that abusive relationships often begin in verbal abuse, which can gradually turn into physical abuse as the perpetrator continues to manipulate the other person.

First Step can be reached by calling (540) 434-0295 or visiting firststepva.com.

Kara Marushi Pyles, director of programs and development, New Directions Center (Augusta County, Staunton, Waynesboro)

There is not one person or community that is immune from becoming the victim of intimate-partner violence. It affects all socio-economic classes, ages, ethnicities and communities; however, the warning signs or red flags of domestic violence are still rarely talked about or widely known, making prevention extremely difficult.

Without education on the dynamics of domestic violence, people are more susceptible to becoming entrapped in a violent and lethal situation. According to the CDC, half of all female homicide victims are killed by intimate partners. It's

so important to take this form of violence incredibly seriously because it doesn't just leave a scar. It destroys lives.

New Directions can be reached by calling its 24-hour crisis line at (540) 886-6800 or visiting newdirectionscenter.org.

Beth Ogle, court and community collaboration coordinator, Response Inc. (Shenandoah County)

It's important to know that the most dangerous time for a survivor is when they leave the abusive relationship. We urge anyone who is thinking of leaving to reach out for services first. A domestic violence advocate can help you develop a safety plan to make sure you get out safely and with the least amount of difficulty.

People who are exposed to intimate-partner violence face trauma that can affect their physical and mental health. It can influence every aspect of their life, from productivity at work and school, to their ability to interact with their peers. When a community understands the dynamics of intimate-partner violence, they can better respond to the needs of the survivor and help them recover from this trauma more effectively.

Response can be reached by calling its hotline at (540) 459-5161 or visiting responseva.org.

Debbie Dart, director, Choices/Council on Domestic Violence (Page County)

Common misconceptions regarding domestic violence are that a person in a violent relationship can leave anytime he or she wants. This is not true. Fear is a very powerful tool. Victims of domestic violence believe that their partners are omnipotent. They believe the threats of suicide and homicide. They believe it when abusers tell them that "no one will believe anything that you say." Abusers are often more likely to seriously injure or kill their partner when they leave.

In a rural area, advocates and victims have to get creative to maintain safety. Safety planning is crucial prior to leaving a violent relationship. For example, having signals worked out with neighbors, i.e., blinds up or down, porch or barn light left on, and hiding important documents in



the trunk of a car, at a friend's home, or a local domestic violence program's office.

Choices of Page County can be reached by calling (540) 743-4414 or visiting choicesofpagecounty.org.

Faith Power, executive director, The Laurel Center (Winchester and Frederick/Clarke/Warren counties)

This month presents us with an opportunity to recognize the individuals and organizations that work tirelessly to prevent domestic violence throughout our region. Many organizations that help survivors of domestic violence will be holding events to raise awareness.

Participation in these events is an important way to raise awareness and to help break the cycle of violence in our communities. Some other ways you can make a difference are to volunteer, donate goods, distribute purple ribbons to visible community members, and make small donations to shelters and agencies that run on shoestring budgets.

Together we can make change and bring domestic violence out of the shadows and help ensure that victims receive vital services.

The Laurel Center can be reached at its 24-hour hotline at (540) 667-6466 or by visiting thelaurelcenter.org.