

## OUR VIEW

# DOMESTIC ABUSE: DEADLY SCOURGE

**A** year ago June, Alice Morrin was shot to death by her husband, who then killed himself in their Vernon home. On the police blotter, it was a murder-suicide. Here, at the offices of The Courant and Fox Ct, it was the loss of a co-worker and to many a dear friend. For those who work daily with victims of domestic violence, it added to a grim toll — 20 to 25 people are killed annually in Connecticut by those they know best.

We were not strangers to reporting violent crimes and domestic abuse, but Alice's death prompted us

### BATTERED LIVES

► Shining light on trapped victims

to dig deeper into the murky shadows of intimate violence, which fall across people from all walks of life. Since then, we have written and televised dozens of stories — under the heading of "Battered Lives" — about the thousands of state residents who are abused by their spouses or partners and the devastating effect it has on them, their children and others close to them. Other stories delved into abusive dating relationships and the fierce controlling behavior that twisted lovers inflict on the people they claim to love.

### Fear, Lies

The opinion pages printed painful, first-person accounts, mostly by women, about the emotional toll and physical injury inflicted by boyfriends and husbands. They wrote of the lies, promises, threats and fear of telling anyone or seeking help. These were women from poor to wealthy homes who shared the same story. Men wrote, too. Connecticut writer Wally Lamb, who teaches writing to female prisoners, wrote the compelling stories of women so desperate to escape abusive partners that they resorted to violence and went to jail.

People who seem to have the world on a string often carry a heavy burden in their hearts. Former news anchor Janet Peckinpugh wrote of marrying her college sweetheart and finally running away to escape his beatings.

All this was by way of opening our eyes and those of our readers and viewers. Dr. Richard F. Jones III, former chief of staff at Hartford Hospital, wrote of his awakening. One day, after many years of practice, he asked a longtime patient about some bruises on her body, which had been evident on previous visits. She told him she had been waiting for the question — her husband regularly beat her with a plastic baseball bat.

Dr. Jones realized then that among those with bruises, burns and broken bones regularly treated at the hospital were many more people in need of help. They were getting treatment for the symptoms of a scourge that was going unrecognized.

### Fight Continues

Our "Battered Lives" campaign, whose logo we are retiring this week, was designed to drag domestic abuse out from behind the shades, to make more people sensitive to its signs, to help its victims see themselves in a different light and to seek help.

We harbored no illusion that in 12 months we could turn back a problem that can be traced back to ancient times. Figures from the Coalition Against Domestic Violence, whose executive director Erika Tindill writes on the cover of this section, show that its 18 agencies in Connecticut handled 9,000 more cases (56,636) from July 2008 to June 2009 than it did the year before.

The latest figures are not compiled but are likely to show similar or greater volume.

Ideally, greater public awareness of the domestic violence problem will strengthen the resolve of victims and prompt them to seek help. It will also encourage efforts such as the General Assembly's allocating more money in this year's budget to allow the state's domestic violence shelters to stay open 24 hours a day, and passing another law to begin electronic monitoring of domestic violence offenders.

This kind of legislation and continued support by public officials for the people and agencies who aid abuse victims is critical.

A culture that is indifferent to abuse becomes complicit. Most important is erasing the tolerance long given to domestic abuse. Although our formal "Battered Lives" campaign is ending, our commitment remains. That means we will continue to publish and broadcast stories about domestic abuse.