

Argument looms over batterers treatment cost

Butte Weekly, 6/22/05

The belief that courts and other authoritative bodies should hold batterers solely responsible for their actions in terms of paying for even court-ordered treatment is a national -- as well as a local -- movement.

The concept has been endorsed by Tonya Geraghty, director of Safe Space in Butte, and the matter will come before the Butte-Silver Bow council of commissioners during budget discussions for the coming fiscal year.

But, so far, a majority of commissioners have voted that, because of the necessity for batterers to be treated, the local government should contract with a private firm to provide treatment.

Community, Counseling and Correctional Services (CCCS) has provided the services to Butte-Silver Bow for several costs of training stad costs, CCCS no longer can afford to absorb the costs on its own, according to Mike Thatcher, CEO of CCCS.

The fact remains, however, there is a need for such counseling services in Butte.

Barb Mueske, formerly with the Family Planning Clinic at the Butte Silver Bow Health Department, pointed out that while children are one part of the victim of domestic violence equation, "The victims at the clinic are children themselves, our biggest age group is 16-25."

Services, therefore, are geared to teens who may not want their parents to know they are using the clinic, Mueske said.

In addition, County Attorney Bob McCarthy says that more than 90 percent of batterers return to the home and that batterers who are ordered to counseling by the courts are, generally, unwilling to go to treatment because they do not want to change their behavior.

Women, particularly married women, are, in general, the targets of the abusing spouse. The opposite also is true with, at times, the female in the relationship being the batterer.

But, as the victim is abused, children in the relationship also suffer.

While the list of manipulations and threats employed by the batterer is extensive, there are common types of the manifestations of abuse.

For example: Using coercion and threats to hurt the victim, to leave the victim, to commit suicide and forcing the victim to commit illegal acts.

Treating the victim as a servant, making all the big decisions, being the one to define the roles of the man and the woman.

Preventing the victim from getting or keeping a job and other forms of isolating the victim.

Intimidation through looks, actions, gesture, breaking things, abusing pets.

Calling names, destroying self-esteem, intimidating the victim is mentally ill, humiliation.

Making light of the abuse, not taking actions to allay victim fears, denying abuse, shifting responsibility for behavior.

One of the greatest risks of having a batterer in residence is the potential abuse of the children of the relationship.

Geraghty provided a study conducted by one Lundy Bancroft who found the following -- mostly from literature about the subject.

That study found that the physical abuse of children indicated that about 50 percent of batterers repeatedly assault children in the home -- a rate that is 700 percent higher than non-batterers.

The study also found that batterers are four or more times more likely than other men to sexually abuse their children or step-children and exposure to domestic violence is one of the top risk factors for incest victimization.

Also, even if the batterer and the victim separate (divorce or some other reason) the risk of child abuse by the batterer not only continues, but may intensify because of the rage of the batterer.

Because of the long-term effects of a batterer's actions on children, recovery by the children depends on carefully planned visitation situations and the nature of the child's relationship with the non-battering parent and siblings.

One of the conclusions reached was, "Children who are exposed to domestic violence have multiple potential sources of emotional and physical injury from the batterer's behavior, well beyond the witnessing of assaults alone, and their potential for recovery from past domestic violence can be compromised by ongoing unsupervised contact with the batterer. Additionally, children are at risk to develop destructive attitudes and values that can contribute to behavioral and developmental problems."