

# Domestic Violence: The Cost

Robin Flahaut, 47, thought she would be dead by now. Instead, she's very much alive and vocally claims the title of survivor. "Everyday is a great day when you haven't been hit."

Robin is a survivor of domestic violence. Defined as a pattern of abusive behaviors used to control or exert power over another, domestic violence often begins as emotional abuse and escalates to physical abuse and sometimes sexual abuse. Domestic violence also can manifest itself as:

- Environmental abuse – a victim is economically dependent, imprisoned by geographic isolation or denied any freedom. Their possessions can be destroyed, their children are abused or their friends and family are driven away.
- Social abuse – rigid social roles that limit the expression of feelings such as anger or depression, teach that individuals are not as capable or as important as their abuser, or convey that individuals need to be protected and controlled.
- Child abuse – the physical, sexual or emotional maltreatment or neglect of individuals under the age of 18.
- Elder abuse – the physical, mental, sexual, neglectful, abandonment, or financial exploitation of older individuals.

Robin has experienced all but elder abuse.

At 20 months old, Robin already had sustained two broken arms. As a child, "I was abused mentally, physically and verbally on a daily basis. I was being called names, and I didn't even know what those words were. These were

supposed to be people that loved me."

All of her husbands were abusive. To avoid making the same mistake, she didn't marry one husband for five years. But once married, the abuse started. "My life has been a horrible, horrible road. I'm not at all strong, but I am a survivor."

Robin reached a breaking point 13 years ago

when her husband at the time threatened to kill her 16-year-old son, "and I believed him." Robin turned to the phone book and found the Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley. Robin bravely reached out and called the 24-Hour Crisis Hotline. Robin has been a Women's Resource Center client off and on since.

Although she never had to use the Emergency Shelter, Robin used many of the WRC's other services, which include:

- Crisis Intervention;
- Emergency Advocacy – meeting victims of domestic violence at hospitals or law

## by the numbers

Family violence costs the nation up to **\$10,000,000,000** annually.

Violence against women costs companies **\$72,800,000** annually in lost productivity.

**1** out of **3** women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during her lifetime.

enforcement agencies to assist them through their crisis situation;

- Legal Advocacy – helping victims navigate the courts to proceed with protective orders, custody suits, divorce and untangling financial commitments with their partner; Counseling;
- Support Groups;
- Transitional Housing;
- Children's Services – services/programming to assist children who have experienced or witnessed domestic violence.

Family violence costs the nation from \$5 to \$10 billion annually in medical expenses, police and court costs, shelters and foster care, sick leave, absenteeism, and non-productivity.<sup>2</sup> Annually, domestic violence results in almost 100,000 days of hospitalizations, almost 30,000 emergency

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department visits, and almost 40,000 visits to a physician.<sup>3</sup> Then there's the hidden cost. Abused girls are significantly more likely to get involved in other risky behaviors. They are 4 to 6 times more likely to get pregnant and 8 to 9 times more likely to have tried to commit suicide.<sup>4</sup>



*"If you don't like me, just let me go. You don't have to hit me or talk to me that way. Shame on people who use violence to control their partner."*

- ROBIN FLAHAUT

There's also the generational cost. All of Robin's abusers were abused themselves. Nationally, one-third of abused and neglected children will later abuse their own children.<sup>5</sup> Children who experience child abuse and neglect are 59 percent more likely to be arrested as a juvenile, 28 percent more likely to be arrested as an adult, and 30 percent more likely to commit violent crime. And then there's the effect on a child's future relationships. Survivors of family violence often experience difficulty in future relationships, which affects not only the stability of home and family, but also professional relationships in the course of employment.<sup>6</sup>

"Domestic violence is like a cancer – if someone doesn't do something about it, it will spread," Robin said. "When people are talking down to you and telling you that you're stupid and you'll never amount to anything, your self esteem is broken down. These people that are abusing you are people who are supposed to love you and want you. You learn that this abuse must be how people really love. It sets you up for poor decision-making in your adult life."

Society can exacerbate the problem too. An abuser can have one face for the public and another used in private, when the doors are closed – a face that only the victim sees. "You've got a man who can be really good and kind, which is the face that the world sees, but

behind closed doors, they're totally different."

When a victim separates from their abuser, friends and family can persecute the victim for leaving. "There's power in the secret. People don't tell on their abusers or turn them into police because it's embarrassing. People worry too much about what other people think. If you break the secret, you start to break the power."

People can heal from domestic violence, said Debbie McClintock, the WRC's Domestic Violence Program Coordinator. "First and foremost: Domestic violence is never a victim's fault, but victims of domestic violence

have such immense strength. They've worked so hard and put their energy into staying alive and well and not triggering their abuser. When they begin to talk about what's happened to them and have associated all those events with the feelings of those moments, that's when the healing process begins."

Robin regularly speaks about her experiences. She wants to help those who have suffered from domestic violence, and she wants other victims to know that domestic violence does not have to be tolerated. "Nobody deserves to be treated like this. If you don't like me, just let me go. You don't have to hit me or talk to me that way. Shame on the people who use violence to control their partner."

Robin beseeches victims of domestic violence to get help. "If you're in a domestic violence situation, seek help. Call the Women's Resource Center if you can. There is confidential, free help there and to any degree you want it."

1. [The Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley's website](#)
2. A 1992 report by the American Medical Association
3. American Medical Association. 5 issues American Health. Chicago 1991
4. Silverman, Jay G., Raj, Anita, and Clements, Karen. "Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality." Pediatrics, August 2004.
5. [ChildHelp](#)
6. [The Ripple Effect](#)



## A moment...

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. We would like to take a moment to honor the lives of everyone affected by domestic violence. Trying to control anyone through intimidation or power is wrong. There is another way. If you or someone you know needs to talk to someone trained to the unique needs of domestic violence, please call our 24-Hour Crisis Hotline at (540) 639-1123. We're only a phone call away.



*These are certainly uncertain economic times for all of us. Monetary donations that help fund our programs are down. Our food and paper supplies for our shelters are lower than they have ever been. Any help you can give the WRC at this time will be tremendously appreciated.*

24-Hour Crisis Hotline: 540.639.1123  
or 1.800.788.1123 (regional access)

Office: 540.639.9592  
E-mail: [director@wrcnr.org](mailto:director@wrcnr.org)  
[www.wrcnr.org](http://www.wrcnr.org)

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

## Pat Brown



Domestic Violence Awareness Month has been in existence for quite a few years. The point, of course, is that if more people are aware of domestic violence, more can be done to alleviate it from our lives, our communities and our society.

At the beginning of the Women's Movement for Equal Rights in the 1970's, women were speaking out for equal status and treatment, equal pay for equal work, equal access for jobs and education.

Women also spoke out for the first time about domestic violence. They made us

aware of the violent acts happening to them and their children at the hands of their boyfriends, husbands or ex-husbands. It was shocking and horrible. Shelters opened and women helped other women find safety and new lives.

As more people became aware of domestic violence, outrage led to advocacy groups that worked hard to spread the awareness to anyone who would listen. We sought to create awareness in our communities, churches, civic organizations, local governments and in our criminal justice systems. We spread awareness to state legislatures and to Congress. State legislatures began changing laws to help battered

women use the criminal justice system for protection and holding abusers accountable. Congress adopted landmark legislation in the early 1990's known as the Violence Against Women Act. It created federal laws and funding to help serve victims of domestic and sexual violence.

Many individuals have worked hard to alleviate domestic violence from their lives. Communities have made great strides to provide better services and justice for their citizens who have experienced domestic violence. Our society is paying attention. But there is so much more to do. Millions of people continue to suffer emotional, physical and sexual abuse at the hands of their intimate partners. Their problems are often magnified by poverty and a myriad of other issues. As long as there are people experiencing domestic violence, we need to remain vigilant at providing them assistance with their struggle.

Our goal is that every neighbor, police officer, judge, minister, churchgoer, politician, activist and citizen be aware of the destruction and devastation caused by domestic violence.

If we are aware, then together we will be able to create a community free of domestic and sexual violence.

In Peace,

*Pat Brown*  
*Executive Director*

## Sisters working together

The Women's Resource Center provides many types of programs and services to people who have experienced domestic and sexual violence. Last year, we served more than 3,800 people. Serving that many people is an effort we undertake with the community. We are very fortunate to have as part of our community a sister organization in the [Virginia Tech Women's Center](#), located on Virginia Tech's campus.

The effect of their presence is most keenly felt at the WRC Transitional Shelter – Cornerstone. It has eight apartments and community space for survivors of domestic and/or sexual violence. Penny Cook, Volunteer/Operations Coordinator for the Virginia Tech Women's Center has coordinated the Cornerstone Project since a student came to her and wanted to do a Habitat for Humanity house. "That was beyond our means," she said. Having heard the desire to assist those with fewer economic resources, an idea was floated back to the student. What about Cornerstone? That student was extremely interested. A meeting date was set and the information went out.

"We were overwhelmed with support," Cook said. "This is our fifth year of being involved now, and it brings me pride that the students are so dedicated to the success of the program."

Virginia Tech Women's Center Co-Director Christine Dennis Smith said the Cornerstone Project goes beyond volunteering and donating. "There's a huge educational component for our students as well. Our students get involved in the projects at the WRC, and they start to learn about violence against women and what affect that can have on people's lives."

Cook also said once students sign up for the Cornerstone Project, the Virginia Tech Women's Center brings in speakers to



*Photos provided by Penny Cook*

**The Virginia Tech Women's Center coordinated decorating this Cornerstone apartment, one of 13 apartments decorated since 2003 totaling more than \$20,000 in donations. Owned by the Women's Resource Center, Cornerstone shelters women escaping domestic and/or sexual violence for up to 18 months.**

educate students about domestic violence and its affects on society.

Cook and her volunteer students mobilize the Virginia Tech community for the Cornerstone Project, and by the time she and her students are finished, students, faculty and staff across the entire campus "adopt" 2 to 3 empty transitional housing apartments each year, supplying them with small appliances, bedding, dishes, towels, and more for families who move in. This coordination has

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## THE GIVING CORNER:

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# How you can help

totaled \$20,000 since 2003.

"If it were not for the Virginia Tech Women's Center, we would not have an Adopt-An-Apartment Program," said Kelly McCoy, the WRC's Transitional Services Program Coordinator. "Our women come to us with no personal possessions, and the Virginia Tech Women's Center provides a home for them."

With the Cornerstone Project, not only do the Virginia Tech Women's Center students and staff organize campus groups into collecting household items, but they also coordinate decorating days with campus groups each taking a room. When they come to decorate, they get the feel of the Cornerstone community, most of which house families. They see children and parents coming and going and understand that the people they see are survivors of domestic and/or sexual violence.

Ashley Tomisek, now a Virginia Tech master's sociology student, last year's coordinator of the Cornerstone Adopt-An-Apartment Program, first volunteered at Cornerstone by pulling weeds and mulching around the property. "I saw all these kids playing on the mulch pile and having a great time. But I saw up close and personal the children affected by domestic violence."

That interaction led Tomisek to lead the Cornerstone Team.

The Women's Resource Center staff is so grateful for the Virginia Tech Women's Center's involvement. "They come over in teams and each team takes a room," McCoy said. "They wash dishes, hang curtains and make beds. They work their magic, and in a weekend, an empty apartment becomes a home."

These groups take special care to consider each family member's preferences and personalities and match them to themes throughout the apartment. One young boy who loved Spider Man was overwhelmed with joy when he moved into his newly decorated Spider Man room. Recently, a teenager's room was decorated in various shades of blue and she couldn't believe that she finally had the bedroom of her dreams. And the final touch? The crew always leaves one thing behind in each apartment displaying Virginia Tech logo "to let them know that we at Virginia Tech care," Cook said.

When women and children move into their newly decorated home, "they are absolutely overwhelmed," McCoy said. "Some families are coming from such different circumstances, that when they see their cozy home, it's very overwhelming and



*Photo by Penny Cook*

**As apartments turnover, Virginia Tech students make Cornerstone apartments cozy and welcoming for incoming families.**

emotional for them."

So, from the Women's Resource Center to the Virginia Tech Women's Center: Thank you for the tremendous work in our community's rejection of domestic and sexual violence. Indeed you are changing the world!

*If you or your organization are interested in adopting a Cornerstone apartment, please call Kelly McCoy at (540) 639-5700.*