

The Charlotte JEWISH news

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An Affiliate of the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte

We're All in This Together

October is Domestic Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month

In the women's restrooms at Shalom Park, you've seen the tear-off pads in the stall. They say, "Are you being hurt by someone you love? It's not your fault: Get help."

For Jews, October begins with Sukkot, a time to celebrate our homes as shelters of peace or Shalom Bayit, which is also the name of a volunteer agency dedicated to fighting domestic abuse in our Jewish community. At Sukkot, we contemplate life's importance and fragility, remembering the temporary shelters our forefathers used during the Exodus. Fittingly, this holiday falls within Domestic Violence Awareness Month. For victims of abuse, homes are metaphorical sukkot: fragile, isolated, vulnerable to terrifying outbursts and places where people feel lost and hopeless as our forefather did in the desert, waiting for acknowledgment and the help that will allow them to be truly free.

According to studies conducted by Hebrew Union College, Jewish Women International, and local surveys in places like Cleveland, Baltimore, and Columbus, someone is being hurt in approximately 10-25% of Jewish households.

In conjunction with Shalom Bayit and Jewish Family Services, all of Shalom Park and several

other Jewish agencies are uniting once again during the month of October to declare that domestic abuse will not be tolerated and to encourage those suffering at hands of an abuser to come forward and seek help. Many agency staff and volunteers will wear purple ribbons, symbolizing domestic abuse prevention; Rabbis will give sermons; messages will appear in newsletters and brochures; free-standing blue silhouettes revealing local stories of Jewish survivors will be displayed; presentations will be made at Board and staff meetings; and youth groups will collect old cell phones for shelters. (See sidebar for schedule of sermons/displays.)

While our homes and temples and Jewish community are our shelters, "many feel isolated, walled away in silence and in fear," says Stephanie Starr, Executive Director of Jewish Family Services. "Domestic abuse is not always easy to spot. It is a pattern of behavior. Some days, he or she is nice and loving; other moments terrifying. Usually the abuser is charming to the outside world and only abuses the spouse. This makes it more difficult for others to believe the victim."

Compared to non-Jewish women, Jewish women often take five times longer to leave an abu-

sive spouse, according to studies by Hadassah and Jewish Family Services of Toronto. Perhaps the fear that she will not be believed is one reason. Additional reasons a victim may feel compelled to stay includes spousal financial control; self-blame for the abuse; and shame. It is rare for communities to talk about domestic abuse. Even when there is physical abuse, women often do not get help until her children get abused as well, as described below by "Judy":

Every day he told me how stupid I was. Professionally I was moving upward, but at home I couldn't even cut up a vegetable the right way. Anything short of perfection brought on the rage. If I didn't keep my mouth shut, he turned on the kids. The day he picked up my eldest by the hair and threw him across the room, I knew I had to leave. The aftermath was just as difficult as I was afraid it would be. No one believed me and no one believed the children. He was that good at being charming and manipulative with the outside world. People didn't think it could happen in a Jewish family.

"We see children from these homes and the devastation wreaked when all one parent cares about is controlling and dominating and 'winning,'" says Elka Bernstein, Director of The Charlotte Jewish Preschool (CJP). CJP collected and donated \$250 to the work of Shalom Bayit this past school year. "Both as teachers and as friends, the most important thing we can do is learn about abuse and to learn what to say and what not to say, because I do believe every one of us knows someone who is being abused."

"Silence is an abuser's best friend," notes Sue Worrel, Executive Director of the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte. "We can't be neutral, as individuals or as a community. Friends, family, and victims themselves should go to Jewish Family Services, call the confidential line of our volunteer advocates at Shalom Bayit, or talk with their Rabbis or Cantors or someone you trust," says Ms. Worrel.

Join this effort by wearing purple this October. Look for purple pins and brochures at every Jewish Agency and visit our local Jewish community web site, www.shalombayit-nc.org for resources and to learn more. To

save one life, is to save the world. ☆

Marsha Stickler, Nancy Rones,

and Amy Krakovitz contributed to this article.



Displaying the purple pins they are making for the Jewish community to wear in October are BBYO members (left to right) Noah Kipnis, Sarah Fellman, Karla Jagodinsky, and Jacob Meyer.

Domestic Abuse Awareness and Prevention Events in October

Wednesday Evening, October 3
Temple Beth El Sisterhood
Sukkot Dinner
Marsha Stickler, Chair of Shalom Bayit, Speaker

October 5
Temple Beth El
Rabbi Judy Schindler, Sermon

October 6
Temple Israel
Rabbi Ezring, Sermon

October 13
Charlotte Torah Center
Rabbi Chanoch Oppenheim, Sermon

November 5
Jewish Learning Institute at Chabad House
Rabbi Yoseph Groner, Speaker

The silhouettes will be on display weekdays during the month of October on Main Street at Shalom Park

Please remember to pick up a purple pin at most reception areas of our Jewish agencies during the month of October.

Don't miss the free concert with
A Capella group Six13
Saturday, November 3, 7 PM, Temple Israel



Listen now at www.six13.com

This is a Michael Meiselman Legacy Event.

See page 12 for more details.

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