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OP-ED - Judsons

Help abusers make the right call

BY LANE AND PATTY JUDSON
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THE man who is hurting his partner needs to know that it doesn't have to be this way.

It's not too late to keep the promise he made to himself, that he wouldn't cause his own child to have the fear he remembers having when his father shouted at and hit his mom.

Not too late to stop the harm to loved ones, to avoid the experience of going to jail, and to lighten the sorrows of a violent home.

We're the mother and father of Crystal Judson Brame, who was murdered by her estranged husband, Tacoma Police Chief David Brame.

He shot her in the head, and committed suicide in a Gig Harbor parking lot, as their children sat in a car just a few feet away. Our 8-year-old granddaughter held Crystal in her arms as she screamed for help.

Knowing that her husband's abuse was getting worse, Crystal did everything in her power to protect herself and her children. She asked for help, spoke out and went to court. Nothing that she tried was enough to protect herself and her children from a man who was in charge of protecting people.

Since Crystal's death in 2003, we've learned that the statistics paint a grim picture. In our region, a recent Group Health survey found that 44 percent of women had experienced domestic abuse as adults. For many, the abuse was both physical and emotional, and for many it had lasted for more than five years.

Nearly one in three American women reports being physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend at some point in their lives. In Washington state, police respond to an average of 51,000 domestic violence calls each year.

Since Crystal's death, we've been working hard to support victims' rights. The opening of the Crystal Judson Family Justice Center this past December, funded and operated jointly by Pierce County and the city of Tacoma, is a step in the right direction. Their services are free and include emergency assistance, safety planning, victim advocacy, housing, chaplaincy services, electronic filing for temporary protection orders, and criminal and civil legal services.

We were also successful in getting federal legislation passed by Congress with a provision included in the Violence Against Women Act called the Crystal Judson Brame Domestic Violence Protocol Program. It consists of a grant program to assist law-enforcement agencies to develop procedures for dealing with domestic crimes committed by their own employees as well as train special advocates to assist victims like Crystal.

We also want to see efforts to reach the abuser earlier without waiting for

a call to 911, a rush to the emergency room, or a death.

A new service being offered and evaluated at the University of Washington gives us much encouragement. It targets the adult male who is abusing his partner or spouse and who has concerns about his behavior.

The program is called the Men's Domestic Abuse Checkup (1-800-MEN-1089), and it's designed for men who may be struggling with two competing thoughts. On one hand, they feel justified in how they are treating loved ones, and on the other hand they feel remorse.

This new program is entirely by phone and it even lets people stay anonymous. The goal is to reach the concerned man, help him to take stock, and support him in thinking through his options.

We don't know if our son-in-law would have made the call if this program had existed back then, but we believe if he had, the tragedy that has struck our two families would have been prevented.

If you have a son, a brother, a father, a friend, or a co-worker who you know is hurting their partner, help that person to make the call — 1-800-MEN-1089.



Lane and Patty Judson, the parents of Crystal Judson Brame, live in Gig Harbor.