

Telling Amy's Story

Last night I watched the premier of a beautiful movie about an ugly epidemic. Telling Amy's Story chronicles the years and incidents of domestic violence that led up to the fatal shooting of Amy Homan McGee, a mother of two who had finally found the courage to escape her abusive husband.

This documentary, which was made possible through a collaboration between Penn State Public Broadcasting and the Verizon Foundation is urgently needed to: help open discussions with anyone you believe is being abused, show a path for change to those who are abused, and raise awareness of this pervasive crime in our midst.

One in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime, according to the National Institute of Justice and the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention.

An estimated 1.3 million women are victims of physical assault by an intimate partner each year. Or, in the words of actress and activist Mariska Hargitay, who provides both a poignant introduction and candid post-movie conversation about the film, while you watch the 50-minute video another 700 women will be abused.

Simply noting who was speaking and in attendance at the premier was heartening.

Mariska Hargitay, probably best known for her role as Detective Olivia Benson in Law and Order: Special Victims Unit, is a passionate advocate for domestic violence victims. Her Joyful Heart Foundation's goals are to heal, educate and empower survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence and child abuse. In her opening remarks, she challenged everyone in the audience to turn towards the problem rather than turning away, saying that these abuses can only happen in the dark, and that it is through focusing the spotlight of our attention on these issues that we can make a difference.

Thomsas J. Perrelli, Associate Attorney General of the United States, a man whose dedication to the issue of bringing an end to domestic violence has a long and distinguished history. Sue Else, President of the National Network to End Domestic Violence. Lynn Rosenthal, former President of the National Network to End Domestic Violence, and now the first White House Advisor on Violence against women. And more.

In a tremendous show of dedication to the prevention of domestic violence, and support of this documentary, several members of Verizon's executive team were on hand, including Executive Vice President – Public Affairs, Policy and Communications, Tom Tauke, Senior Vice President, Public Policy Development and Corporate Responsibility, Kathy Brown, and Chief Operating Officer for Verizon Wireless, Dan Mead – who first championed the development of this documentary within Verizon.

It's time to publicly thank Verizon for their leadership and dedication to tackling an 'unpopular' subject. In addition to their support for this documentary, Verizon has offered for more than 15 years their HopeLine project that collects wireless phones, batteries and accessories from any wireless service provider at their stores nationwide, then refurbishes the phones and makes them available to victims of domestic violence through shelter programs. Just last year, Verizon donated over 23,000 phones and 69 million free minutes to almost 600 shelters, and donated nearly \$1.6 million dollars in cash grants to domestic violence prevention and awareness programs.

The viewing of this movie came at a unique moment in time for me. I have just finished drafting a handbook for domestic violence victims titled Internet Safety for Victims of Violence as victims have a e running from abusive situations face very real extended threats online. Far too many women, children, and yes, men, who have successfully escaped domestic violence are 'found' through actions they take online, and this has led to devastating consequences. A recent case motivated me to take the materials I use to teach to law enforcement and counselors, and put them into the hands of those working in domestic violence shelters, in the hands of victims, and in the hands of those who know a victim.

This handbook is currently out for review by domestic violence experts. Once I've integrated their feedback the handbook will go through a final editing, design and layout process, then be launched as a free public resource for you. You'll see a blog here as soon as this handbook is in its final form.

This documentary will be aired on Public Broadcast stations around the country.

To learn when it will air in your area, and to encourage your station to air the film, contact your local station.

It has been 15 years since the Violence Against Women Act, drafted by then Senator Joe Biden, was signed into law. We've made great strides, but as a society we have a long, long way to go.

As you finish reading this post, keep this in mind: If the current rate of abuse continues, one in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime. Count off every fourth woman you pass today to feel the full impact of that statistic.

If you need help for yourself or a loved one, reach out:

The National Domestic Violence Hotline
At 1-800-799-7233

The National Sexual Assault Hotline
At 1-800-656-4673

The National Teen Dating Abuse Hotline
At 1-866-331-9474

Love should never hurt.
Linda

Domestic violence is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior perpetrated by an intimate partner against another. It is an epidemic affecting individuals in every community, regardless of age, economic status, race, religion, nationality or educational background. Violence against women is often accompanied by emotionally abusive and controlling behavior, and thus is part of a systematic pattern of dominance and control. Domestic violence results in physical injury, psychological trauma, and sometimes death.