

Program offers hope in domestic abuse cases

By Laura Crimaldi

Monday, September 3, 2007 - The Boston Herald

A uniquely successful Newburyport program offers rare lessons in combating domestic violence, according to advocates.

The Greater Newburyport Domestic Violence High Risk Case Response Team has an exceptional track record: From April 2005 to April 2007, the program reviewed hundreds of domestic violence cases and identified 42 as in need of immediate intervention. Out of those high-risk cases, 31 batterers ended up facing criminal charges in court, including 15 who were sentenced to jail time, according to a program report.

The program will be honored in October by the National Network to End Domestic Violence with a Spirit of

Advocacy Award.

“We’re extremely honored by this and hope that it will help other communities be able to address the issue and replicate this in their communities as a best practice,” said attorney Mardi Chadwick, director of client services for the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center.

The Newburyport Response Team has succeeded by identifying concrete risk factors and preventative measures. In reviewing all domestic violence cases in the six towns it serves, the team looks for the following warning signs that a case could turn deadly:

- history of strangulation
- escalating violence in the last year
- threats of weapons
- recent estrangement
- court involvement

If the case is accepted, police, probation officers, local hospitals, schools and the state Department of Social Services get involved as necessary.

Among the actions taken are:

- repeated police drive-bys at the victim’s house
- requests for a surrender hearing if the batterer is on probation
- petitions to the court to place the batterer under Global Positioning System monitoring

The program, which was launched two years ago, was inspired by the tragic 2002 death of Dorothy Giunta-Cotter, 35, who was fatally shot in Amesbury by her abusive husband the night before she was due to seek a permanent restraining order from the court. Her husband, William, 39, committed suicide.



Photo by Matt Stone

Seeing success: Mardi Chadwick, right, director of client services for the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center, confers recently with the center’s executive director, Suzanne Dubus.