

Men: Take ownership of domestic violence problem

By Mike Butler

Today is Father's Day, a day that brings about genuine feelings of love for our fathers and deep admiration and honor for men who have long track records of placing their wives and children above their own personal needs. Unfortunately, in far too many homes in our community, some husbands and fathers struggle against the stresses of their lives and perpetuate an atmosphere that is filled with fear and violence. In approximately 20 percent of those homes, the husbands and fathers will encounter a police officer who will arrest them for domestic violence — an event that has long-lasting impact on their marriages and children.

Domestic violence is the No. 1 public safety issue in Longmont. Domestic violence impacts several thousand people annually in our community: More people are injured as a result of domestic violence than any other crime in our city. When people ask me if it is safe to live in Longmont, I typically reply that it depends upon whom you live with.

While there have been some remarkable efforts and continued projects that have impacted the seriousness of domestic violence, we are still fledglings in our capacity to sustain a reduction in the frequency of occurrences of domestic violence. We now believe we have discovered a major missing piece of the puzzle, a piece that has the potential to significantly diminish domestic violence in our community.

In terms of solutions and responses to domestic violence, the women of our society and in Longmont have taken the lead. For years, it has been only women who dared speak up and stand up for those being victimized. It has also been only women who would give voice to the impact of domestic violence on our children, within the workplace and in our communities at large. For certain, women were and are, far and away, the most victimized by domestic violence.

I, and many others, am convinced the issue of domestic violence will not be significantly minimized until the men in our community believe it is our issue, too. I would challenge the institutions, the media, our community and our accepted wisdom to re-think and alter our current practices regarding the role men can and should play in resolving our community's No. 1 public safety issue. This is a crime that has far-reaching impact on both young men and women.

Until men begin to see domestic violence as our problem, too, I believe we will continue to spin in circles in our attempts to mitigate domestic violence in our community. Institutions such as our police department and our safe shelter are doing what they can to respond to domestic violence, but their approaches are reactionary and symptom-based. Until we bring men into the focus as being part of a proactive solution, our families and ultimately our community will continue to see the unending cycle of boys mirroring the abusive behavior of their fathers. This is a very tall order given the culture we live in, given the traditional roles men and women have in our society, and given the current state of how we address domestic violence.

There recently have been some high-profile men speak personally about their role as a person involved in domestic violence. They have very powerful stories to tell, but we will need to enlist men as fathers, as husbands and as people who love their families into a much larger effort that speaks to prevention, that speaks to modeling behavior for their sons, and that speak out against the violent culture we live in.

As the popular phrase goes, it is time to "man-up" for an issue that for far too long has been conveniently relegated to women. I would invite anyone who is interested to contact me and join an effort that has been titled the "White Ribbon Campaign." This project, developed by the Longmont Ending Violence Initiative (LEVI), invites men to become a major part of the solution.

We can offer several opportunities on how you can utilize your time, creativity and energy toward minimizing domestic violence in our community. We also invite you to join us at 7 p.m. Monday at LifeBridge Christian Church for a presentation, "Voices of Men," to hear Ben Atherton-Zeman.

Please call me at 303-651-8533 or LEVI at 303-774-4534 if you want more information or are interested in participating in our White Ribbon Campaign.