

# 'It's an everybody issue'

Nonprofit aims to raise awareness of domestic violence

By Melanie M. Sidwell  
Longmont Times-Call

LONGMONT — Talking about domestic violence is part of the job for Janice Baker, the new development manager at the Safe Shelter of the St. Vrain Valley.

But she sees how people's faces change when she shares that she also is a survivor of an abusive relationship.

"I'm not perceived to be the face of a domestic violence victim," said Baker, 43, adding that her story is not unique.

"I wear a suit, I'm happy. I'm (re)married. I'm fortunate. In the domestic violence world, I am a lucky person because I did not end up in the hospital or dead. And that's a sad thing to say that I'm considered lucky."

One in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

In Colorado, more than 1,000 people each day sought services last year, according to the 32 of the 46 domestic violence programs in the state.

And Longmont accounts for 46 percent of all domestic abuse cases in Boulder County, according to the Safe Shelter.

The Longmont nonprofit is highlighting October, which is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, with a series of events, including fundraisers and a candlelight vigil.

"It's not a women's and children's issue; it's an everybody issue," Baker said.

Thirty-seven percent of all victims are men, the Safe Shelter reports. And while the nonprofit offers shelter to women and children only, Safe Shelter does provide counseling to all victims of domestic abuse.

"It's the subtlety of the things that happen that you don't realize it's happening,"



Lewis Geyer/Times-Call

Safe Shelter of St. Vrain Valley development manager Janice Baker is a domestic violence survivor herself. The Longmont nonprofit is highlighting October, which is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, with a series of events, including fundraisers and a candlelight vigil.

Baker said.

She met her first husband in 1996 while living in Texas, where he was on a job assignment. He was charismatic and charming, writing her "incredible" love letters, she said.

They soon married and moved to northern Colorado, where he was from. Within a year, their first child was born, and she became a stay-at-home mother.

But, she says now, "by the end of my pregnancy, I realized that the person I knew in Texas was not the person in front of me."

Her husband began to cause rifts between the couple and her East Coast family and so her parents and five siblings lessened contact with her, she said. His friends were her only social outlet. He sold her car, leaving her homebound and reliant on his vehicle.

"I had no friends here, no family here. I was already an isolated person," she said.

Then one day, while moving a desk, she discovered hidden bottles of liquor and realized the glasses of water he drank throughout the day

were actually clear alcohol, such as gin or vodka.

Her husband began to demand receipts for all her purchases. She said he began to shove and threaten her at home, once pushing her down the stairs.

A friend, one of the few who knew of the escalating violence, asked Baker: "Is this the kind of example you want to set for your child?"

Baker said the couple got into an argument at a public summer concert when her husband, who had been drinking, grabbed her arms and shoved the mother and child to the ground.

He then blamed her for falling with their child, she said.

"I think when things had moved into public, it was really dangerous; a line had been crossed because he no longer cared if people saw his actions," Baker said. "We were at great risk."

Baker said an abused woman will attempt to leave an average of seven times because the barriers are numerous — from finding a place to stay to affording day care for children to loving the remorseful abuser "be-

cause you want to believe it."

Baker said she sought help after her husband shoved her and threw her into the door of his office in the presence of their toddler. He had become angry after calculating she "owed him \$33,000 a year in lost income" so she could stay home and raise their child, she said. He chased her with their child out of the building and onto the street.

She found a hotel. She found help from a local domestic abuse center. She found a therapist for their child. She found an attorney. She went home and found her art studio trashed, an ice pick used to stab her wooden desk and glasswork, she said.

"I was terrified. I had no current skills for work. I had no job; I had nowhere to go. I had no money. It was a tough situation to walk away from," she said. "When it ended, I had had it so well, people were stunned. People called me liar to my face."

After their five-year marriage ended, the intimidation continued — she said he attacked her after a court hearing in front of their lawyers and police personnel, and he would block her car and

## EVENTS

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**Saturday:** Mary Tables, One Cause inaugural fundraiser (ticketed event)

**Wednesday:** Eat to Defeat fundraiser at Deli Zone, 1240 Ken Pratt Blvd.

**Oct. 17:** Steps of Hope Candlelight Vigil at Izaak Walton Park 7 to 9 p.m.

**Oct. 17:** Zigg's Coffee at 400 Main St. will donate \$1 for every drink purchased

**Nov. 7:** Sunflower Spa to donate proceeds

**24-Hour Crisis Line:** 303-772-4422

threaten her when she dropped off their child for supervised visits.

Still, Baker earned a degree in women's studies and attended a master's degree program for conflict resolution. She worked for legal services helping women. And in 2003, after she had a double mastectomy because of breast cancer, she married a "gentle soul" with two grown children.

Her child, now in those "tween years," has supervised visits with her ex-husband, Baker said, though she has spent \$50,000 in court fees to maintain their relationship in a safe, supervised setting.

"As a parent, you look at what you've left, but the child is still living that life," she said.

Baker said she fears what the statistics say about children of domestic violence — that those who witness it are likely to carry that pattern of abuse into their relationships with a partner and their own children.

But she said she wishes her ex and their child can one day have a healthy relationship and that her child breaks the cycle of abuse through counseling, education and awareness.

"That is my hope," Baker said.

Melanie M. Sidwell can be reached at 303-684-5274 or msidwell@times-call.com.

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