

An illustration featuring three stylized human figures in profile, looking upwards towards a large, glowing globe. The globe is set against a background of a starry night sky with various colored stars and planets. The figures are rendered in a soft, painterly style with muted colors. The overall mood is contemplative and hopeful.

mourn
celebrate
connect

October is
Domestic Violence
Awareness Month

Domestic Violence Awareness Month:
REMEMBERING THE VICTIMS



For nearly a quarter century, law enforcement, victim service organizations, citizens and survivors have set aside the month of October to remember and encourage the abused, educate the public and look for new innovative strategies to end the epidemic of domestic violence. October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month and the vision is as clear as it was nearly 25 years ago.

This year's theme, "Mourn. Celebrate. Connect." serves as a reminder that communities must speak in a unified voice to combat domestic violence, and to challenge citizens to support the many programs that seek to create communities free from violence and coercive control.

The U.S. Department of Justice reports nearly 1.5 million people (including 1.3 million women) are victimized by domestic violence every year. Intimate partner violence remains one of the most prevalent, yet under-reported, crimes in our nation today. Approximately 20% of those experiencing intimate partner violence annually obtain civil protection orders. However, more than two-thirds of those restraining orders are violated.

The problem is further magnified by the witnesses to this abuse. Experts say that witnessing violence between one's parents or caretakers is the strongest risk factor for transmitting this violent behavior from one generation to the next. Boys who witness domestic violence are twice as likely to abuse their own partners and children when they become adults.

Until the early 80's, talk of abuse in the home was kept to a minimum. For adults who grew up before that time, domestic violence wasn't something people talked about publicly. When you talk to adults who were abused as children, many will say that even criminal justice agencies would sometimes ignore the issue.

Denise Brazzell knows that all too well. Denise is a survivor of severe childhood abuse and neglect, from both parents. She and her three siblings grew up in a "very dysfunctional" family. All four endured physical and sexual abuse at the hands of their parents and often witnessed their mother beaten and bloodied following confrontations with their father.

"My father tried to kill my mother many times," she said. "Once Mom showed up at the hospital with her face crushed, most of her front teeth missing and an eye hanging out of its socket. The doctors were told she crashed the

car into a utility pole."

In addition to the physical and sexual abuse, Denise suffered another trauma when her house caught fire when she was seven years old. Denise went into the burning home looking for her mother, not knowing that she had escaped the flames.

Denise suffered third degree burns over half of her body. Despite numerous surgeries, her father would tell her and her siblings that no man could ever be attracted to someone so disfigured. She not only dealt with the physical pain, but with mental abuse as well.

Having long buried her past, Denise Brazzell is one of the few success stories. Happily married with two children, Denise is director of student services on a college campus. When available, she speaks about the pitfalls of domestic violence and encourages victim service workers and law enforcement to be aggressive

in their stance against violence in the home.

Denise is thrilled to see the new innovations available to help today's abused families. VINE (Victim Information and Notification Everyday) has been of particular interest to her. VINE is the nation's first automated service for victim notification and currently serves victims and their families in more than 2,400 communities in 47 states, including most of the nation's largest metropolitan areas and many of California's largest cities.

VINE grew out of a 1993 Kentucky murder. Mary Byron was shot to death by a former boyfriend who had raped her weeks before. He was in jail awaiting trial and was released without her knowledge. He bought a gun, stalked her for several days, and then shot her to death as she left work on her 21st birthday.

Within a year of her death, VINE was launched in Mary's hometown, giving vic- >>

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tims and their families the ability to call a toll-free number to check on the custody status of their offender. They can also register to be notified upon an offender's status change.

Over the years the service has continued to expand, giving victims, families and other interested individuals the option to track an offender's custody or court status by telephone or email. Denise credits VINE with giving many domestic violence victims their lives back, as well as providing a sense of empowerment.

"VINE is a branch that literally goes into every aspect of the domestic violence situation, the crime victim's situation and allows people to have a root to hold on to and be protected," she adds. "If you've ever stood out in the world alone, knowing there was nothing beneath you if you jumped, it's comforting to know VINE provides the safety net. VINE allows you to function without having to constantly look over your shoulder."

How do domestic violence victims like Denise learn about VINE? From the people who are sworn to protect them. Sheriffs' associations across the country were among the first to actively seek out the program and make it avail-

able in their communities. The National Sheriffs' Association is an avid VINE supporter.

"Very early in VINE's development, California sheriffs began looking at this service as another means of reaching out to victims," said Carmen Green, Acting Executive Director of the California State Sheriffs' Association. "We realized that the more information we provide victims and their families about the custody status of their offender, the better off they'll be."

"We are proud of the work sheriffs' associations have been doing to keep their members informed about VINE," said Michael Davis, CEO of Appriss, provider of the VINE service. "California was one of the first states in the nation to recognize VINE as a valuable part of victims' safety, especially domestic violence victims."

Crime victims and concerned citizens can track the custody and/or court status of offenders and register to be notified any time of day or night, seven days a week through a toll-free number or online at www.vinelink.com.

For more information about VINE services in California, visit the California State Sheriffs' Association website at www.calsheriffs.org. ☆



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