

Opinion: Time to live every day without violence

By Diana Meza Cabrera

On March 29, President Obama nationally proclaimed April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month and Child Abuse Prevention Month in an effort to bring these global issues to the national spotlight for all Americans.

Our leaders have demonstrated that there are steps to be taken toward achieving a safer nation. This year's first step was the reauthorization of VAWA (Violence Against Women Act). VAWA was established in 1994 to provide funding for the investigation and prosecution of violent crimes against all victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking.



This year the legislation was improved to include the protection of Native Americans living on reservations, victims who are undocumented, and the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning) community as well.

The passing of VAWA allows agencies such as Live Violence Free to provide continued services and education to members in the community, spreading awareness of the effects of such violent acts.

April 24, was Denim Day, an international campaign that is held every year to promote the deconstruction of the destructive attitudes toward sexual assault. In 1997, a teenage girl in Italy was picked up by her 45-year-old driving instructor for her first lesson. He drove her to an isolated location, pulled her out of the car, and forcefully raped her. The girl was courageous and despite his threats she reported

the incident and he was arrested.

After his conviction the perpetrator appealed the sentence and the case went to the Supreme Court. In the final ruling, the Italian Supreme Court overturned the rape conviction claiming the sex act to have been consensual. The statement by the chief judge read: "Because the victim wore very, very tight jeans, she had to help him remove them, and by removing the jeans it was no longer rape but consensual sex."

The women in the Italian Parliament were outraged by the verdict and protested the court by wearing jeans to work. This action began the annual international demonstration known as Denim Day.

The culture that has developed around violence and rape has desensitized our communities, thus creating the need for awareness events such as Denim Day to remind us just how real and heinous these crimes are.

Every two minutes a person in the United States is sexually assaulted. This means that there is an average of 207,754 victims over the age of 12 that report being sexually assaulted per year. It is important to note that this number does not take into account anyone under the age of 12 or anyone who does not report being assaulted.

Sexual assault is one of the most unreported crimes as 54 percent of sexual assault crimes go unreported each year. Victims are often silenced because of their feelings of shame and fear that occur with these forms of attacks. Most often a victim's abuser is someone that they know and trust. Nationally, two thirds of victims reported knowing their attacker and 34 percent of rapists are a friend or acquaintance of the victim. Sexual assault is not a problem that only happens out in the community; is most often carried out within the walls of our homes.

It is time we take a stand against these acts of violence and

as this year's national campaign for Sexual Assault Awareness Month says, "It's time to talk about it."

A report for child abuse is made every 10 seconds; that's 3.3 million reports made each year. More than five children's lives are lost every day due to child abuse. Although sexual abuse only accounts for 9.2 percent of reported child abuse cases, the number of victims is still shocking, at 91,412 minor victims of sexual assault per year. Moreover, child abuse is not an isolated problem that only affects the one victim; 30 percent of children who were abused or neglected will later abuse their own children.

Violence is a never ending cycle within relationships. It is important for our services to always be available so that we may educate and empower survivors. The instilling of positive values in our clients will go on to be reflected in our community. Children are ultimately the ones who will run our world in the future; therefore, we should be doing our best to provide them with a healthy and nurturing upbringing.

Locally, April has also been proclaimed as Sexual Assault Awareness Month and Child Abuse Prevention Month. It is great to have local elected leaders support our cause, recognizing the need for our services in the community.

Throughout 2012 Live Violence Free was able to serve 208 clients who were under the age of 18. Of these 208, 20 percent were survivors of sexual assault. Our Child Abuse Prevention and Rape Prevention Education programs provided over 300 presentations to over 7,000 of El Dorado and Alpine counties' youth. Our Home Visiting Program helped seven families parents to learn nurturing parenting skills in the comfort of their own homes. With these programs in place, we are doing our best work to prevent these crimes from happening.

We hope that you join us on our journey to create a violence free community and consider becoming a volunteer.

We will be offering Crisis Counseling Training through the Lake Tahoe Community College Connect Community Education workshop, classes will begin April 29. Our agency's greatest need is crisis line volunteers. If you're interested in becoming a volunteer, contact Scarlet Caldwell at (530) 544.2118, ext. 7634 or scaldwell@liveviolencefree.org.

Be sure to be on the lookout for our first Clothesline Project display on April 29 outside our main office.

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