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Domestic violence in El Paso County: Records show we're among worst in Colorado | Part 1 of 4

By: **Kaitlin Durbin** Dec 17, 2018 Updated Dec 20, 2018



Editor's note: This is part 1 of The Gazette's 4-part "Shattered Lives" series on domestic violence in El Paso County.

Angie Ragsdale begged her sister-in-law not to marry Gregory Lorbiecki in 2000, describing their previous three-year, off-and-on-again relationship as “tumultuous.”

But Karyn Ragsdale Lorbiecki was strong-willed and ready to start a family. Ragsdale thinks that’s why Karyn stayed with Greg, despite the warning signs that the relationship wasn’t the fairy tale she’d hoped.

Shattered Lives: Domestic Violence in El Paso County

Sixteen years later, Greg would shoot Karyn to death in their Widefield home. He's now serving life in prison.

El Paso County is rife with similar sad stories and has one of the worst records of domestic violence in Colorado.

Colorado Springs police respond to about 35 to 40 domestic violence calls a day — about 5 percent of their calls for service. That's thousands of more calls than in Denver, despite Denver's slightly larger population. Police records show domestic violence accounts for less than 3 percent of calls for service in the capital city.

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Resource information: Multiple local agencies are available to help victims of domestic violence.

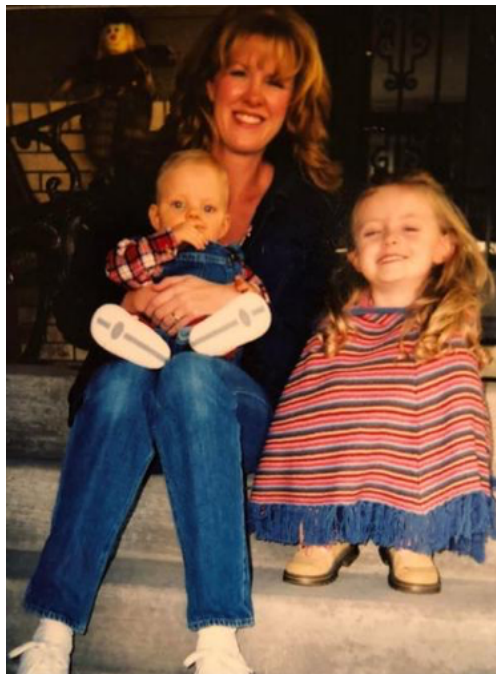
Part 3: Are offenders capable of change? One man's transformation.

In the last fiscal year, which ended in June, Denver did file 657 more misdemeanor domestic abuse cases than the 2,791 filed in 4th Judicial District, which encompasses El Paso and Teller counties, a Gazette analysis of state court case filings showed. But that's still a lot of cases for this district, double the number of theft cases and about 12 times more than most other misdemeanors.

The 4th District also has a higher number of requests for protection orders from abuse than any other district in the state, in excess of 2,000 requests annually. That number is two times that of the next highest district, 17, which covers Adams and Broomfield counties. The 18th Judicial District — which includes Arapahoe and Douglas counties and is most comparable in size to El Paso — had 340 filings in the same time frame.

There was no comparison for Denver, which keeps its records separate from the state and says it does not track specific domestic abuse protection orders.

Denver also apparently doesn't track the number of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking survivors whose addresses it agrees to shield through the Address Confidentiality Program, but a spokeswoman said numbers were "pretty low." Out of 40 requests this year, only two fell in that category, she said. El Paso County has 16, the Assessor's Office said.



Karyn Lorbiecki sits with her two children in the early 2000s. She was shot and killed by her husband on Nov. 23, 2016. courtesy of Angie Ragsdale

Because as much as 75 percent of abuse goes unreported, those numbers account for just a fraction of the abuse occurring, domestic violence experts say.

Officials say they don't know why domestic violence is thriving in the community; there are no running themes relating to economic status or military experience. But a new task force headed by Mayor John Suthers is working to answer that question and take steps to reduce and prevent domestic violence.

A deadly cycle

Violence Free Colorado, formerly the Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence, reports that the numbers of domestic violence-related homicides have spiked more than 60 percent since 2015.

Locally, the Colorado Springs Police Department and El Paso County Sheriff's Office have reported a combined 40 domestic violence-related killings since 2013. Seven of those deaths occurred in 2016, accounting for 22 percent of homicides that year. At the same time, domestic violence was behind 19 percent of Denver's homicides.

Although 2016 wasn't the deadliest year in terms of domestic violence — agencies reported nine abuse deaths in 2017 and another eight this year — it was the year with some of the most starkly vivid deaths.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOMICIDES IN EL PASO COUNTY

Colorado Springs Police Department

2013 - 6; 2014 - 3; 2015 - 5; 2016 - 3; 2017 - 9; Jan.-Nov. 2018 - 7.

El Paso County Sheriff's Office

2013 - 2; 2014 - 0; 2015 - 0; 2016 - 4; 2017 - 0; Jan.-Nov. 2018 - 1.

That year, Julie Tureson was shot and killed by her ex-boyfriend James Woo, who left her body in a storage unit before trying to board a flight to Hong Kong. Darnell Reedy was stabbed to death by his wife during a feud. Karen Canfield and Valerie Hills were shot and killed by their husbands, who then killed themselves. Alicia Christmas-Moore was gunned down by her ex-husband, who died in a shootout with police. Janice Nam was shot to death by her estranged boyfriend, Glen Galloway, who skipped town before he could be sent to jail on a stalking charge and returned six months later to kill her and another man.

And Karyn Lorbiecki was killed by her abusive husband, Greg. Her story is a textbook example of the hidden cases of domestic violence happening every day in the community.

A lifetime of abuse

It's difficult to predict when offenders may turn homicidal, but Karyn's family said the warning signs came early.

Four months into dating, Greg Lorbiecki was arrested on suspicion of domestic violence after destroying their shared apartment in a fit of rage and reportedly holding Karyn in the bathroom at gunpoint. Angie Ragsdale recalls Lorbiecki serving time for the crime, but his criminal record doesn't indicate if he was charged.



The urn of Karyn Lorbiecki sits at her sister-in-law Angie Ragsdale's home in Colorado Springs.
Dougal Brownlie The Gazette

As a joke, Greg would leave Karyn's car running overnight so that it would be dead when she tried to leave for work. Then Karyn's pet bird, Andrew, disappeared. Greg told her he released it because he was mad at her. Family secretly moved Karyn to a new apartment while Greg was at work, but the couple soon got back together.

Then Greg left Karyn, for four months, and the family thought it was over. Karyn, who was 30 at the time, announced she was pregnant and she and Greg married that month. Most of her family refused to attend the small ceremony, but Ragsdale recalls Greg smashing the cake into Karyn's face, even though she asked him not to.

After marriage, Greg would randomly change the house locks. He'd take the keys to their vehicles so she couldn't drive. He'd break her phone. During one fight, he drove their Suburban through the closed garage door; in another he threw a wrench at Karyn's car as she tried to flee. (He was arrested in that incident, but the case was dismissed when Karyn declined to testify against him.)

As a long-haul trucker, Greg would be gone for a week at a time, but when he once returned home early to find his family had gone out to eat at a restaurant, he unhooked the stove and moved it to the garage because, "if you're not going to cook, we don't need a stove." Another time when Karyn hosted Easter, Greg told her the food was awful and went out for fast food instead.



Karyn Lorbiecki was shot and killed by her husband on Nov. 23, 2016.

Submitted by Angie Ragsdale

“He would just do shit like that all the time, and we wouldn’t find out about it until things got really bad,” Ragsdale said. “Then Karyn would cry, call and ask for help and we’d try to help her and do whatever, but she’d go right back to him.”

What domestic violence looks like

Why did Karyn stay through all of the abuse that eventually led to her death? Why does any victim stay, as they often do? The question blames the victim for the abuse, rather than the abuser, and dismisses the many reasons why victims feel the need to stay.



Domestic violence resources in Colorado
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The first and simplest reason is love, according to 30-year domestic violence educator and victims rights’ champion Jean McAllister.

“Nobody would stay with someone who punched them in the nose the first time they met them and kept doing it every day,” McAllister said. The relationship devolves over time. It starts with affectionate gestures like picking a partner up from work or offering to drive them to the store, and turns into victims being unable to travel anywhere without their abuser.

But offenders frequently cycle back to the good times to remind their partners of their initial bond, McAllister said.

That’s how it was with Greg and Karyn, too.

He took her out. They went to the movies and to concerts with their children. He bought her the latest technology and paid for their \$225,000, five-bedroom home with a hot tub off the deck. After one fight over Greg’s infidelity, Greg took the family on vacation to Las Vegas.

On the way, Ragsdale said Karyn texted her, “He’s really sorry now. I’m not going to leave him now that he’s sorry and now that he’s being nice. And the kids love their dad.”

McAllister says it’s an easy trap for anyone to fall into.

“Most of us can think of times when we have let something go too far, maybe not violence, but something with someone we cared about because we cared about them. We do that all the time — we let our kids get away with too much, we have a good friend that drinks too much and we don’t talk to them about it, we let friends borrow money and not return it,” McAllister said. “We love them and they’re family members so we don’t want to make a



A portrait of Karyn Lorbiecki is held by her sister-in-law Angie Ragsdale, left, and Carrie Scott at Ragsdale’s home in October in Colorado Springs.

Dougal Brownlie The Gazette

problem about it.”

The same compromises are made in intimate partner relationships, McAllister said, only, “those bonds are much deeper and much more difficult to sever.”

Other reasons to stay

Victim blaming also negates the very definition of domestic violence, which is a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviors designed to keep victims in the cycle of abuse. The abuse can be physical, emotional, sexual or financial.

What are the usual signs? It can be tampering with a partner’s cellphone to disconnect them from their family or the outside world, breaking sentimental valuables, child or pet abuse, or verbal harassment, said Rachael Powell, a deputy district attorney with the 4th Judicial District.

“It’s everything you can imagine and everything we haven’t heard about before,” Powell said, and it affects people of all ages, races, religions, genders and economic statuses.

This pattern works to break down the victim’s sense of self-worth and identity to keep them dependent on their abuser.

SherryLynn Boyles, executive director of domestic violence center TESSA, said victims begin to second-guess what’s right or normal in a loving relationship. They question whether the abuse is their fault or whether their partner could change. Because the majority of domestic violence victims are financially dependent on their abuser, they question whether they can care for themselves or their children on their own — will they be homeless, can they put food on the table? Sometimes their partner threatens to have their children removed altogether. And perhaps most detrimental, victims begin to question whether they can leave safely.

Research shows that women who attempt to leave a battering relationship are more likely to be seriously injured or killed than those women who stay.

“It’s not uncommon that families think, ‘If she’d just leave she’d be safe,’ but the reality is that’s not true, it’s actually the opposite. She’s more likely to be hurt when she leaves,” McAllister said.

Amy Pohl with Violence Free Colorado said 75 percent of domestic violence victims who have been killed were in the process of leaving.

In a relationship dependent on one person's control over the other, leaving is the ultimate act of defiance. It's the point at which most relationships turn physically violent, even deadly, if it hadn't already. Even law enforcement openly acknowledges that domestic violence calls are among the most dangerous.

"Does that mean that survivors shouldn't leave? Absolutely not," Pohl said. "It means there is a lot of safety planning that needs to be done."

That's where TESSA and other domestic violence organizations come in. They help victims form a plan for how to leave safely. They can help petition for a protection order, secure finances or provide housing.

The 'last night of peace'

Karyn had no plan for leaving and apparently did feel trapped, her family says. Greg was threatening her. He verbally abused their son, who had high-functioning autism. He would punch and "paddle" their 15-year-old daughter.

The daughter told Ragsdale that Karyn once said, "I would leave if I could, but if I left he would kill me."

Instead, Karyn tried to control the abuse from inside the relationship, something experts say victims often do, thinking they can mitigate or even stop the violence. Because Greg was away for work four days a week, Ragsdale said she believes Karyn "thought she could handle it."

The day before Greg returned home that final time, Karyn reportedly told her daughter, "Well, it's our last night of peace."

Tragically, she was right.

Greg came home early for the Thanksgiving holiday on Nov. 22, 2016. They went out for ice cream and listened to '80s music in the basement while playing ping pong. The children said their parents danced together, which was rare. The daughter remembers going to bed happy around midnight — could things finally be getting better?

She woke 45 minutes later to find Greg smashing Karyn's head against the tiled shower wall. By this point, she was trained not to call police when her parents fought — Greg always told her if he was arrested he'd come after her next — but she'd say Karyn looked so dazed it scared her.

Greg smashed her cellphone so the girl snatched the house phone and ran. She'd later tell Ragsdale she could feel Greg's fingers around her ankle as she raced up the stairs but somehow he didn't catch her. She ran around the corner and called 911.

During the reprieve, Karyn reportedly ran to her son's room and hid with him in bed, but Greg found her and dragged her to near the front door where he held her hostage until police arrived. Ragsdale said police told her they heard Greg say, "I'm going to decide how this ends," before he shot her.

Unanswered questions

Ragsdale said she remembers once warning Karyn to get rid of all guns in the house, “because if you don’t, I’m going to be raising your kids.” She adopted her niece and nephew this year.

“While they miss their mom, I think they’re actually happy to not live like that anymore,” Ragsdale said, adding that the children are thriving. The oldest will graduate high school this May with a year of college credits, and her brother started high school this year more social than ever before.

Ragsdale said Greg has never explained why he killed Karyn. She watched video of him at the police station, hours after the shooting, and he had his feet up on the table and his arms resting behind his head. At one point, it looked like he’d fallen asleep. He would decline to give a statement.

At his sentencing, she said Greg’s attorney told him to write an apology to read to the court. But he only held up a single piece of paper with three dots drawn in the middle — an ellipsis.

Carrie Scott, Karyn’s best friend since they were 12, said Greg’s silence spoke volumes.

“The thing that bothers me the most is that we’ll never know why,” Scott said.

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Gregory Lorbiecki shot his wife to death in their Widefield home and is serving life in prison.

courtesy of el paso county sheriff's office

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Domestic violence in El Paso County: It's difficult to win protection orders against abuse | Part 2 of 4

By: **Kaitlin Durbin** Dec 18, 2018 Updated Dec 19, 2018



Editor's note: This is part 2 of The Gazette's 4-part "Shattered Lives" series on domestic violence in El Paso County.

El Paso County has the second highest number of domestic violence cases in the state, with 40 domestic violence homicides in the last five years, yet it's one of the hardest counties in which to win protection orders to guard against that abuse, according to experts and records.

In fiscal year 2017, there were 2,612 people who petitioned for civil protective orders against their intimate partners, the most in the state, excepting Denver, which does not specifically track those orders. Only about 19 percent of those requests were granted, Colorado Judicial Branch records show.

Even when advocates for TESSA, a nonprofit that helps victims of abuse, step in to assist in the process, the odds don't improve. From June 2016 to February 2017, the nonprofit helped with 74 contested protection order cases for victims of domestic violence or sexual assault. Less than half — 29 — were granted.

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“Unfortunately, we see that in our jurisdiction it is more difficult for women to get protection orders for reasons that are not clear,” TESSA Executive Director SherryLynn Boyles said.

There are countless stories of victims petitioning for protection two or three times before the order is granted.

Some experts say the process is too hard — victims must prove by a preponderance of the evidence that they're in great danger and that the behavior is likely to continue or even escalate, a standard much higher than probable cause. And all of that must largely be conveyed in only a couple of lines on the request form (in one section, victims can use up to a page).

Others say the process is too intimidating, forcing victims to go before a judge, with the offender often present, to testify about the abuse, because civil protection orders must be won in court. El Paso County Judge Douglas Miles, who oversees the domestic violence court, said many victims don't want to go through that or don't know how to safely, so they recant or drop the request or hold back evidence.

"We say, now you have to get up on the witness stand with him watching you and you have to be perfectly honest and fearless. That's absurd," Miles said. Offenders can be both men and women, but in his experience, most are men.



El Paso County Judge Douglas Miles oversees the domestic violence court.

Courtesy of 4th Judicial District

The District's Chief Judge, William Bain, however, argues that "our county is not different from the other most populated counties throughout the state." We're "in the middle of the pack," he said.

No county can even come close to touching El Paso as far as protection order requests, and records do show El Paso's average rate for granting protection orders in the last 4½ years isn't far off from most other parts of the state. Jefferson tied at 17 percent and Arapahoe granted 18 percent. But other parts of the state are doing better.

Adams, Pueblo and Weld counties hovered between 20-21 percent, and Mesa had 28 percent.

Most of the time when petitions are denied, Bain says it's out of the court's hands. The court estimates that victims don't show up for the hearing 25 percent of the time, or they show up and want to drop the request. Other times protection orders are applied through other means so the civil order isn't needed or victims don't present evidence to support their claim.

"The list could go on and on because there are so many reasons (protection orders) are not ultimately granted that have nothing to do with the merits at a full-blown hearing," Bain said. "At the very least, what is not going on in Colorado is judges denying (protection order) requests because they are not sensitive to the terrible, cyclical nature of domestic violence."

'No face, no case'

Protection orders are a tool meant to prevent further violence, and if that violence continues the District Attorney's Office can step in to prosecute protection order violations or file other domestic violence charges. But the district doesn't have a good reputation for doing that, either.

MORE INFORMATION

TESSA advocates are available to assist with the filing of Protection Orders for victims of intimate partner violence, sex assault and stalking. Find them Monday-Friday 8 - 9:30 a.m. in the courthouse self-help center, room S101.

Records show El Paso and Teller counties have one of the lowest rates for prosecuting protection order violations. Ten districts have higher numbers of violations, though fewer requests for protection, and many districts report more violations than petitions. But in this district, the ratio is about one violation to every 9 petitions for protection.

And in the latest fiscal year, which ended in June, those cases accounted for about 54 percent of the 890 arrests Colorado Springs police say they made on various protection order violations.

The district also is one of only six in the state that has seen a drop in protection order violations over the last 4½ years, though numbers are starting to climb back up this year. Other lagging districts include those encompassing numerous small counties in the southeastern and northwestern corners of the state.

It could be that offenders here heed protection orders better than others parts of the state, but it's more likely that the disparity comes from the district's stinginess in granting protection orders. If there isn't a protection order, there can't be a violation.



District Chief Judge William Bain says most of the time when petitions are denied, it's out of the court's hands.

courtesy photo

Bain said he couldn't comment without knowing what year the protection orders were issued versus when they were violated, but he thinks a policy change that went into effect last year could get the district back on track.

Previously, in criminal domestic violence cases, the court would automatically instate a protection order that lasted seven days. Now, that protection is extended throughout the duration of the case, unless the victim asks for it to be lifted.

"El Paso, at least prior to the change in Sept. 2017, would have thousands (and possibly tens of thousands) fewer protection orders that could be violated," Bain said in an email. "Without those thousands upon thousands of protection orders even in existence, of course, the number of violation of protection order cases is going to be far lower than the other jurisdictions."

'We don't just give up'

Criminal domestic violence convictions have an even worse record.

Miles said "there's a huge population of cases where nobody gets convicted and cases get dismissed."


He estimated that over 80 percent of misdemeanor domestic violence cases are dismissed, most often for "failure to prosecute," which he said usually means the victim refused to participate. He referred to the practice as, "No face, no case," meaning if victims don't show up, the case gets dropped.

Chief Deputy District Attorney Jeffrey Lindsey said the term comes from defense attorneys who use it to get victims to act in a way that benefits their client. In the last six months, he said, the office filed for sanctions against an attorney who reportedly told a victim if they show up, their husband is going to jail for two years, but if they don't, everything will go away.

In some ways, the motto is true, because if a witness doesn't show up, that denies the defendant their right to confront those testifying against them. In that case, "we can't proceed with a case," Lindsey said. But the office can occasionally move forward by calling witnesses to the abuse, bending the rules to the hearsay law or offering more lenient pleas to get a person in treatment if they can't get a conviction.

"We don't just give up," Lindsey said. "We're sort of the ones that are stomping our feet and pounding our fist on the table and saying this person needs to be held accountable."

Colorado law says that a prosecutor cannot drop domestic violence charges unless they believe it would be impossible to prove the case at trial. And sometimes, especially in the absence of physical abuse, there isn't enough evidence without a victim's testimony.



Colorado Springs domestic violence survivor Tara Loo shares story of nearly being killed by boyfriend
TARA LOO, Special to The Gazette

That's why domestic violence cases are inherently "the hardest cases that we prosecute here in the DA's office," Lindsey said, because they're he-said-she-said crimes and because victims do recant or refuse to show up, even under court order. Or, if they do participate, sometimes it's for the defense.

"Imagine sitting on a jury and hearing, 'you know what, that didn't happen. What I told the cop that night, didn't happen. I made it up. I lied or I hit him first ... or I was trying to get him out of the house because I was mad at him because I was drunk,'" Lindsey said. "Then a jury has to say, 'OK, which story do we believe?' When it's a toss-up, guess which one they're going to say?"

To prevent that, domestic violence advocates say judges and juries need to be better educated about why victims might recant their stories of abuse or refuse to pursue charges. Because sometimes victims need to be protected even if they can't ask for it.

TESSA Advocacy Manager Courtney Sutton said in her experience, juries tend to dismiss accusations by absent victims, assuming if they were really afraid they'd show up and speak, and certainly wouldn't stay with their abuser.

Domestic violence resources in Colorado
Kaitlin Durbin

That's not how it works, experts say.

Domestic violence is a pattern of abuse — emotional, verbal, financial or physical — used to coerce or control a person. It can leave victims feeling trapped in the relationship — maybe they don't have money to support themselves, maybe they have shared children or

fear what their abuser would do to them if they tried to leave.

There's any number of reasons why victims stay and try to mitigate or hide their abuse. Which is why Miles says victims need to first believe victims and then, "We need to respect victims."

He understands the frustration of inconsistent victims but says that's "the nature of the relationships. They're good one week, they're bad one week.

"She's not being crazy or inconsistent," Miles said. "It's very logical what she's doing ... Victims understand what they need more than anybody."

The goal, he says, should not be to force victims to act, but to leave the door open so they can act when they're ready and when they feel safe.

"I think the system has to protect people even when we believe the people we're protecting don't appreciate the level of risk they're in," Miles said. "When we treat a victim in a way that that victim says, 'I'm never calling the police again,' then the system has made that victim more vulnerable, more at risk."

Janice Nam's desperate example

That journey toward safety can often start with getting a protection order, experts say, because it's the court telling the offender to stop and to stay away. And sometimes that works.

Some abusers do heed the no contact order, and for those who don't, it gives police grounds to arrest them. Protection orders also can signal to the court how fearful victims may be and how dangerous offenders really are, because breaking a protection order is "telling the court, 'I will not follow your orders,'" Deputy District Attorney Rachael Powell said.

This process only works, though, if victims have access to the protection.

One of the most memorable examples of the struggle victims can face in their fight to get protection involved Janice Nam.

Three times she sought protection from her estranged boyfriend Glen Galloway for reportedly harassing her, breaking into her house, abusing her dog and threatening to kill her.

"I have a gun and I'm not afraid to use it, I will kill you if you say another word," she quoted Galloway in her petition for protection, describing an encounter where police came to the home and confiscated three guns.



Hours after police tore down the caution tape and reopened the street, a police vehicle and the El Paso County Coroner's Office was seen parked out in front of 6042 Miramont St. again about 10 a.m. Tuesday. Owner Janice Nam was found dead in the home Monday evening. (Kaitlin Durbin, The Gazette)

"I have no doubts about him killing me," she concluded. The order was denied.

Two weeks later she tried again, accusing Galloway of chasing her out of a store and parking outside her house, despite police telling him to stay away. "I'm worried he will not stop until he kills me," she wrote. It also was denied.

The third time she described herself as a hostage in her home and said he left bruises on her arm during an encounter at their shared work. That protection order was granted, and quickly violated — Galloway would be convicted of stalking before eventually killing her.

Powell prosecuted that stalking case and said it wasn't just the court making the protection process difficult; Galloway was very cunning. He called co-workers to vouch for his character and attack Nam's. He even filed a protection order against her, which was denied.

It wasn't until he killed Nam that coworkers admitted he'd made death threats against her, though they said they never believed he'd act on them.

Miles said he knows all the tricks offenders use to avoid taking responsibility for their actions. He's worked with them intimately in domestic violence court for six years. He doesn't grant civil protection orders, but says his experience with offenders has taught him one thing:

"First of all, we need to believe victims," Miles said, because victims don't put themselves through the inconvenience of going to court and testifying in front of and against their abusers "just to get back at somebody."

Do protection orders protect?

Despite their name, protective orders are not fail-safes against future abuse. Actually, they can incite it.

Research shows that leaving a relationship is the most dangerous time for domestic violence victims. About 75 percent of domestic violence homicides occur after a person made the decision to leave a relationship, said Amy Pohl, with Violence Free Colorado, formerly the Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

Leaving is also the point at which victims are most likely to seek protection. In a relationship based on one person's control over another, the action can be interpreted as defiance, leaving offenders desperate to regain control by any means necessary, including murder.

Since 2013, there have been 40 domestic violence killings in the county. Many of the victims had protection orders in place against their abuser.

How to talk to domestic violence victims about abuse
Kaitlin Durbin

Mark Peters reportedly mocked his wife's protection order against him before he shot her in July. He texted, "You think you're protected but you're not," records said. He would use force to learn where she was hiding and disguise himself as a saleswoman to get her to answer the door before shooting her.

He remains jailed without bond, pending trial on first-degree murder and multiple associated crimes.

Maxwell Garihan also mocked his wife's protection order against him in 2015, reportedly telling her, "A restraining order never stopped anyone. Research that ..." A month later, he would shoot Margaret Temple Garihan in the head — she survived — and kill her boyfriend. Maxwell is serving two life terms in prison without parole, plus another 144 years.

And of course, Galloway mocked Nam's protection order by repeatedly violating it, up until the day he killed her and another man in a murder spree for which he was convicted in June.

Powell said Nam did everything she could to stay safe. She fought for a protection order until she won. She took her abuser to court. She stayed with family for a time. And she developed a safety plan, which included installing security cameras and alarms at her house, buying two guns, constantly updating her family about her whereabouts, and even asking neighbors to watch for signs of Galloway.

None of it saved her.

Videos of Nam's last moments in her house showed her turning on the alarm and double-checking that windows and doors were locked just a few hours before Galloway broke in and shot her in bed.

"I don't think there's a surefire way (to protect yourself) and that's probably the saddest part of it all," Powell said. "Honestly, she did all of the things I would think you would want to do to keep yourself safe."

The story is just one in a long line of tragedies that underscore the limits to the protections available to victims. But experts stress that doesn't mean that victims shouldn't pursue them.

"I'm not saying holding up the no contact protection order while someone's coming at you with a gun is going to save your life, obviously," Powell said.

"But having as many hurdles for the offender is what we're looking for, because sometimes that's all we can do"

Importance of a safety plan

Those other hurdles — protections — include things like enrolling in the Address Confidentiality Program, changing their identity, transferring schools or relocating to another state. But that's in the most extreme cases.

A simpler step victims can take is developing a safety plan so they know what to do when violence does happen. Do they have an emergency bag packed? Do they have a place to stay? Who can help them leave? Do they have transportation?

And resources such as TESSA can help with that. In the end, though, experts say there's only so much victims can do. It's up to the offender to make the decision not to abuse or to take steps to change their behavior. And, sadly, victims and their families are left to deal with the consequences.

Take Nam's case — Galloway was sentenced to life in prison, but there still is no real justice for Nam or her family, Powell said. She's still gone.

“(Galloway) got his consequences, we've gotten the result, but that sorrow, that wishing that she's not another face or name in your list of women who've gotten killed by their offenders, just wishing that was never ever the case...” Powell said, her voice trailing off. “Why do we have to be here to begin with?”

Powell said she can only hope that stories like Nam's lead to change so that maybe she will be one of the last names on the long list of domestic violence victims.

“Maybe it saves somebody else's life. I hope to God it does,” Powell said. “I hope it saves all of their lives.”

Editor's note: This story was edited to reflect that the standard in civil protection order cases is a preponderance of evidence.

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Domestic violence in El Paso County: Are offenders capable of change? One man's transformation | Part 3 of 4

By: **Kaitlin Durbin** Dec 19, 2018 Updated 23 hrs ago



Editor's note: This is part 3 of The Gazette's 4-part "Shattered Lives" series on domestic violence in El Paso County.

Three years ago this month, Geoff was just starting El Paso County's Domestic Violence Court program after a 65-day stay in jail for violating terms of a permanent protection order.

He was facing three to five years in prison for the charge — his second that year and one of 15 domestic violence allegations he'd battled in as many years — when someone approached him about the program. It was a "get out of jail free" card that also offered the chance to clear the charge if he was successful. Thinking back to wishing his son a happy Thanksgiving from jail, Geoff said his answer was a no-brainer.

“This is make or break right here,” he remembers thinking. “I was about to lose everything I have — my family, my son.”

Today, Geoff says he is rehabilitated. He co-owns his own contracting business. He has a great relationship with his 14-year-old son. And, perhaps most importantly, he hasn't reoffended; records show he has not had another criminal charge since entering the program in 2015.

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Resource information: Multiple local agencies are available to help victims of domestic violence.

“I wouldn't be where I am today without this program,” Geoff said. “It saved me.” The Gazette agreed not to use his full name at his request.

County Judge Doug Miles has overseen the specialty court since its inception six years ago. He calls it “extremely intense monitoring” for repeat offenders who can't seem to end the cycle of violence or comply with the terms of their probation.

“It's sort of a last chance to succeed,” if they've failed all of the other regular channels, Miles said. Because if they also fail domestic violence court, they go to jail or prison, he said.

Breaking the cycle

The program moves offenders through several phases of rehabilitation based on the results of a 14-point risk assessment, which ranks a person's threat level, likelihood to reoffend and determines the type of treatment they need.

The program looks a little different for each participant, but it generally includes specific domestic violence education classes, weekly appearances in court and random drug screening.

Geoff was low risk, despite his lengthy rap sheet. Fifteen times he'd been accused of domestic violence related crimes, though more than half of them were ultimately dismissed. Four different women would file eight times for protection orders against him, three of which were granted.



El Paso County Judge Douglas J. Miles

“Domestic violence is a cycle, and I cycled through the court,” Geoff admits.

Court records show Geoff was never accused of hurting any of the women and none of them said he threatened violence against him, but they still feared him. They said he called, texted and emailed incessantly wanting to talk to them after their breakups. He drove by their house or followed them in his car. Some of the women said he broke into their house, and one said he left a shrine to the relationship on their bed. Others claimed he spit on their car.

“I’m constantly looking over my shoulder and checking my locks cause I fear him being around,” one of the women wrote in a petition for protection that would be denied.

The first protection order to stick came from Geoff’s ex-wife after their 2012 divorce. She said she caught him lurking outside of her bedroom window. His next girlfriend accused him of breaking into her garage and driving by her home. The girlfriend after that said he hacked into her Facebook, was in her backyard and broke into her house to call her from her house phone.

Then came the protection order violations, four of them in 2015. He would be convicted twice, leading him first to jail and then to the program.



Before Geoff was ordered to treatment through El Paso County's Domestic Violence Court, three women had petitioned eight times for protection against him, saying his behavior became worrisome when they tried to end the relationship. He never threatened physical harm against them, but they accused him of breaking into their homes, spitting on their cars and following them.

"I'm concerned that he can't handle how to properly end our relationship and what he may do to me," the last woman wrote in her first, failed protection order complaint. Her second request was granted, though the woman eventually dropped it after Geoff completed the court program.

Geoff said the woman was right; he didn't know how to have a healthy breakup.

When he first entered the program, he remembers feeling angry, bitter, jealous and suspicious all the time in his relationships. He didn't know how to de-escalate a fight, how to resolve issues or even how to trust, a vice he said came after his ex-wife cheated on him.

"It was my fault for getting too quick into relationships without being in a good place in my own mind," Geoff said. "Nothing I did was physical, but it's still domestic violence. It's still against the law."

That mindset is actually the guiding principal of the Domestic Violence Offender Management Board, which sets and reviews standards for the court-ordered treatment program: "domestic violence is a crime and not the result of a response to a failing relationship."

Some of the other key concepts include:

There is no one stereotype of people who commit acts of domestic violence. Offenders run the gamut of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, mental health condition, financial status, cultural background and religious belief.

All domestic violence behavior is the sole responsibility of the offender.

And one of the most important concepts: offenders are capable of change.

Rehabilitation

The purpose of treatment is simple — to prevent future abuse by challenging destructive core beliefs and teaching positive, nonviolent behavioral skills. How that is achieved, though, varies.

Colorado previously had a one-size-fits-all approach — if you completed the 36-week course, you graduated. But Jesse Hansen with the Office of Domestic Violence and Sex Offender Management said it became clear that offenders knew how to “b-s their way through treatment.” They knew their end date and did just enough to reach it.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOMICIDES IN EL PASO COUNTY

Colorado Springs Police Department

2013 - 6; 2014 - 3; 2015 - 5; 2016 - 3; 2017 - 9; Jan.-Nov. 2018 - 7.

El Paso County Sheriff's Office

2013 - 2; 2014 - 0; 2015 - 0; 2016 - 4; 2017 - 0; Jan.-Nov. 2018 - 1.

Now, regular assessments determine if participants are really meeting core competencies or if treatment should be extended, Hansen said.

Miles said he's seen the difference in the program's success, locally. His data show about 50 percent of El Paso County participants graduate, meaning they tick all the boxes in their treatment and have no new offenses.

“I wasn't terribly happy with 50 percent until somebody pointed out that when you start with 100 percent failure, increasing to 50 percent is not bad,” Miles said, explaining that all participants come into the program with some kind of domestic violence conviction or multiple. “It's not bad, but I'd like it to be better.”

For the half that doesn't graduate, it's not even always that they remain abusive. “We see very, very low domestic violence reoffense,” Miles said, though it does happen.

Instead, he said participants most often struggle with substance abuse and trauma. That's what Geoff said he witnessed too.

He was able to complete the program in 11 months, but said many of his friends were there two years or more. He recalls only two participants reoffending; the others who regressed either didn't come to class, didn't show up to court or were caught using drugs or alcohol.

"The system is not set up for them to fail, but they want you to be accountable," Geoff said. "I watched guys regress out of the program and go to jail for like, 10 to 12 years. You have to have the mindset to succeed. For me, it was a mindset that something in my lifestyle had to change. I didn't want to step one foot back in (the Criminal Justice Center), not even for one hour."

The state's domestic violence board said low-level offenders like Geoff are the most likely to succeed.

Their 2016 Standards for Treatment with Court Ordered Domestic Violence Offenders report, prepared by Hansen, showed that low-level offenders graduate about 91 percent of the time, as opposed to moderate risk offenders with an 80 percent success rate and high-risk offenders at 46 percent.

The board is scheduled to continue to evaluate the program through at least 2022 and suggest tweaks to make the program more successful.

"There are no other states that are doing this," Hansen said. "What's becoming more and more apparent is, not only does treatment work, but which interventions work for each population."

Taking responsibility

Right now, participation in the domestic violence program is voluntary, but Miles said there is talk of making it mandatory for some offenses. As someone who has gone through it, Geoff says he does wish the program would have been offered to him sooner.

After his first protection order violation, he was ordered to complete a domestic violence class as part of his probation, but he said it didn't have the impact the court program did. The second time around, he said he learned how to de-escalate, how to problem solve, and how to express his emotions safely.

"I learned a lot about how the brain works in that program," Geoff said, advocating that the classes should be mandatory for any person in a relationship.

But he especially found group therapy helpful.

“It was an outlet for guys who have been told our whole lives, ‘don’t wear your emotions on your sleeve,’ ‘don’t show emotion at all,’” he said, puffing his chest out in a mock macho manner. “In reality, we have very real emotions and we have to have an outlet for that.”

(While domestic violence does impact both men and women, the majority of offenders do tend to be men. Miles said he’s had four women offenders in the program’s history.)

Domestic violence resources in Colorado

Graduating didn’t save Geoff’s previous relationships, though Miles said some offenders do return home, but he believes it’s helped him in his relationships since. There have been two, neither longer than a couple months, but they ended amicably, not with a protection order.

The program, he said, made him more accountable in all aspects of his life, so much so that’s it’s hard to relive his past and imagine the place he was once in.

“I went in saying, ‘she did this, this and this to me,’ and I came out saying, ‘I’m responsible for this or I’m responsible for that,’” Geoff said. “They were right, I can’t control anybody else; people are going to do what they want to do. I can only control myself and my reaction.

“Life is good.”

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Domestic violence in El Paso County: Leaders, advocates say small steps can equal big change | Part 4 of 4

By: **Kaitlin Durbin** Dec 20, 2018 Updated 23 hrs ago



Editor's note: This is part 4 of The Gazette's 4-part "Shattered Lives" series on domestic violence in El Paso County.

Karyn Ragsdale Lorbiecki stayed with her abusive husband for nearly 20 years before succumbing to his rage in a shooting, leaving her family feeling “like there’s nothing that can be done” to prevent or stop the cycle of domestic violence.

They offered to help Karyn escape Greg Lorbiecki’s control, even moving her to a secret apartment at one point, but Karyn always returned to the relationship. After her death, Karyn’s family said they found a binder with pamphlets and domestic violence resources she’d collected over the years but never used.

“You can’t change their mindset,” Karyn’s sister-in-law Angie Ragsdale said as she wiped away tears. “There’s got to be something else.”

While advocates don’t agree that victims can’t decide on their own to leave an abusive relationship — because many do — they do agree that more needs to be done to protect victims and prevent violence. It’s not just about victims leaving, or police arresting away the problem or courts imposing lengthy sentences on offenders, TESSA Executive Director SherryLynn Boyles stressed at her organization’s Champions for Change Summit last year.

“We have to ask, what is it in our climate, in society, that we can affect to reduce the violence?” Boyles said. “Prevention is focused on changing the conditions that make it possible for violence to happen.”

Out of that summit, Colorado Springs Mayor John Suthers formed the No Excuse for Abuse Task Force to develop strategies to reduce and prevent domestic violence in the community. It pulls together heads from all sectors, including public officials, law enforcement, youth outreach, the faith community and business leaders.



TESSA Executive Director SherryLynn Boyles. (The Gazette)
photos by linda navarro, The Gazette

District 20 House Rep. Terri Carver, who sits on the task force’s public policy committee with Mina Liebert of El Paso County Public Health, says they are discussing ways to adjust policies or strengthen laws to effect change.

Shattered Lives: Domestic Violence in El Paso County

The committee is working to establish a local domestic violence fatality review board to examine tragedies in an effort to learn from them. The board will look at what steps victims might have taken to end the cycle of abuse and ask: what worked, what didn't and why?

Those findings, Carver said, can be used to form better policies or training for professionals who work with domestic violence victims.

Denver has had a board for more than 20 years, and Gov. John Hickenlooper approved a statewide board last year, but a local board would be better able to identify "opportunities for intervention" within the Colorado Springs network, Carver said. There's no timeline for when the board will be in place.



Terri Carver is running for a third term to represent House District 20, which includes Cascade, Chipita Park and Green Mountain Falls. Courtesy photo

Another committee, Carver said, has made arrangements for advocates to go into Harrison School District 2 to educate youth about abusive relationships, because some do start at that age or kids could be seeing it at home.

That was one strategy Karyn Lorbiecki's family suggested, but with more teeth. Karyn's teenage daughter told Ragsdale she did have a domestic violence speaker at her school once but the type of abuse covered was at the extreme end of the spectrum; it didn't match what her family had been suffering for years. Ragsdale remembers her niece saying, "I never considered that domestic violence would be tied to my life. It was just the way life was."

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Part 4: Leaders, advocates say small steps can equal big change.

Helping hand: How to talk to domestic violence victims about abuse.

But even small steps like those can add up to big change, advocates say. And some changes have already occurred:

- In 2015, the Address Confidentiality Program was created to give survivors of stalking, sexual assault and domestic violence a legal substitute address and mail forwarding to shield their real address from the public, including their offender. The Assessor's Office said the program currently protects 16 people in El Paso County.
- In 2016, the Habitual Domestic Violence Offenders law was passed to increase penalties against any person with three or more prior domestic violence convictions. It elevates an offense from a misdemeanor to a felony and "allows for more stringent punishment when prior punishments haven't worked," Carver said.
- In 2016, strangling someone was made a felony offense, allowing judges to impose stricter penalties, because strangulation is a major indicator that a person may be homicidal, advocates say.
- In 2017, the "No Bail for Stalking and Domestic Violence Offenders" denied bond to certain offenders prior to sentencing. The bill stemmed from the death of Janice Nam, after her convicted stalker Glen Galloway cut his ankle monitor the night before his sentencing and disappeared. He would resurface six months later to kill Nam and another man in a crime spree for which he was sentenced to life in prison in July.
- In 2017, the law requiring certain medical professionals to report suspected injuries from domestic violence was amended to allow some injuries to go unreported if the victim is at least 18 years old and requests confidentiality.

Amy Pohl with Violence Free Colorado, formerly the Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence, said the change is important because the mandatory reporting law, despite its good intentions, actually made victims less safe. "We heard from survivors that said they didn't seek medical care because they worried the doctor would have to report the abuse and things would get worse," Pohl said. "They weren't ready (to seek help), didn't have resources in place to leave the relationship. If police got involved before that time, they could be in more danger."

- This year, the state extended its Rape Shield Law to civil cases, barring attorneys from using a victim's prior sexual history against them in court. Carver said the practice previously turned victims away from pursuing compensation for damages.
- A 2018 bill strengthened revenge pornography laws to better prosecute offenders who post or threaten to post pictures or videos of their intimate partner.

“I think that in Colorado we have strong support in both parties to strengthen laws,” Carver said.

Yet, gaps must still exist. This year, eight people were killed in suspected domestic violence related incidents in the county: Dionte Harris, Richard Martinez, Michelle Peters, Brandon Watkins, Shakir Cook-Troynel, Candice Jones, Corky Oliver and Courtney Jackson. Some of them had protection orders against their partners. Some were killed over jealousy or affairs. Police killed one man who was holding his girlfriend at gunpoint.

Knowing the number of protections already in place leaves some wondering what more could be done to end domestic violence.

“Think about it in the context of a homicide,” said Jeffrey Lindsey, an attorney for the 4th Judicial District. “We aggressively prosecute homicide cases, we routinely win on homicide cases and people go to prison for their lifetime or close to their lifetime, and murders still happen. So, I guess, what’s going to stop crime ever from happening?”

Be aware

It can’t just be up to police and courts to hold domestic violence offenders accountable, Pohl said. The community can also play a part by paying attention to the actions of those around them.

Maybe a guy grabs a woman’s arm a little too hard in the grocery store, or maybe a woman threatens to hurt her partner with a weapon. Those are instances where members of the community can step in and ask if help is needed, separate the two, or, at the very least, let the offender know that someone is watching, Pohl said.

Domestic violence thrives in secrecy, so intervention is the real key to prevention, she said.

“If we want to prevent incidents of domestic violence, we as a community have to stand up and say we’re not going to tolerate this any longer,” Pohl said.

Educate

What does domestic violence look like?
What are the penalties for violations? What resources are available for victims or offenders?

Domestic violence can be counter-intuitive to the average person, making it hard to recognize or understand, 30-year domestic violence educator and victim rights’ champion Jean McAllister said. Abuse can be so much more than physical; it can be



“We heard from survivors that said they didn’t seek medical care because they worried the doctor would have to report the abuse and things would get worse. They weren’t ready (to seek help), didn’t have resources in place to leave the relationship. If police got involved before that time, they could be in more danger.”

Amy Pohl with Violence Free Colorado

Submitted by Amy Pohl

limiting a person's access to friends or family or a phone, verbal threats or cutting off financial resources.

People need to be able to spot the early warning signs before it escalates to violence, she said. They also need to have a better understanding of how offenders behave — it's easy to think the violence will stop if a protection order is issued, if police make an arrest or if victims leave, but that's not necessarily true.

"For the most dangerous batterers, they won't stop," McAllister said.

Taking those steps to protect themselves can also be dangerous for victims.

"It's not uncommon that families think, 'If she'd just leave she'd be safe,' but the reality is that's not true, it's actually the opposite. She's more likely to be hurt when she leaves," McAllister said.

Research has shown that 75 percent of victims who were killed by their abuser had said they were leaving or were already in the process.

McAllister recommends better education for the public on how to spot domestic violence and how to support victims, even while they remain with their abuser.

"Demands that the victim to do something right away often leaves the victim feeling trapped with the offender and unable to access support," McAllister said. "The last thing you want to do is cut them off."

Hold offenders accountable

To end domestic violence, experts say people need to stop asking why the victim didn't act a certain way and start asking: Why does the offender abuse? This holds the abuser accountable for their actions, McAllister said.

Then, law enforcement and the courts need to follow up with legal sanctions.

"The quicker any of that can happen, the message to offender is, this is not acceptable behavior," McAllister said.

That includes swift penalties for offenders who violate terms of their bond or fail to participate in court-ordered treatment, McAllister said, because too often she sees offenders sent back to court or to group therapy without additional penalties. The lack of consequences "gives offenders permission to engage in violence again," she said.

Prosecuting violence shouldn't fall entirely on a victim's shoulders, McAllister said. When abusers violate protection orders or offend multiple times, the courts should step in to hold them accountable, regardless of whether a victim asks for it.

"When it's up to victim, then you are leaving it up to person who is controlled by the most dangerous offenders to make the decision to do something against that offender, which doesn't happen," McAllister said. "By having consistent and speedy response (to domestic violence accusations) and higher consequences, I think we could make a difference in the number of people who get killed."

Screen for violent offenders

After an offender is convicted and sentenced to treatment, often through the county's domestic violence court, they are evaluated to determine what level of intervention they need based on their likelihood to reoffend or be homicidal.

5 simple tips for home cooks.

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El Paso County Judge Douglas Miles oversees the domestic violence court.

Courtesy of 4th Judicial District

This risk assessment tool takes into account a person's prior criminal history, substance abuse, employment status, use or threatened use of a weapon and community support, among others. But it comes only after multiple crimes have occurred, because as El Paso County Judge Doug Miles said, domestic violence court is "sort of a last chance to succeed" when previous interventions have failed.

But advocates argue the tool could be used earlier to prevent crimes by determining whether it's safe for an offender to be released from jail prior to trial or if victims need to take additional steps to be safe.

Currently, organizations like TESSA, which serves as a resource for victims, encourage domestic violence victims to take the "Danger Assessment" developed by Jacquelyn Campbell, renowned professor in the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing. The tool can help victims determine the threat level of their partner based on their yes and no answers to 20 questions.

The website, dangerassessment.org, calls 10 or more "yes" responses "concerning," but McAllister says, "If have more than eight of those factors, you need to do something pretty substantial to protect that victim."

The website touts that the assessment has been used by law enforcement, healthcare professionals and domestic violence advocates for 25 years, and McAllister says she's used to it in court when testifying retrospectively about the danger a victim was in prior to being killed. But she wonders why courts don't use it when an alleged offense occurs.

"If it was done ahead of time, there may have been some intervention to get the victim to safety," McAllister said.



“We don’t just give up. We’re sort of the ones that are stomping our feet and pounding our fist on the table and saying this person needs to be held accountable,” Chief Deputy District Attorney Jeffrey Lindsey said.

Dougal Brownlie

After 21 years with the 4th Judicial District Attorneys Office, Lindsey doesn’t see that ever happening. The court system is set up to respond to crime, not necessarily to prevent it, he said, and the system demands a person’s presumption of innocence until proven guilty.

“The defendant has a right to remain silent,” Lindsey said. “So if he has to go through this assessment, pre-conviction, he then is required to talk about what happened or to some fashion they’re going to try to get his version of the events, right? What defense attorney is

going to allow that to happen?”

Instead, Lindsey argues that the best defense starts with law enforcement’s probable-cause affidavit, which details the alleged crime committed. Judges use this report to determine an offender’s bond.

“Though the court system is an imperfect system — I think we all agree with that — it’s a good system and it’s something we all ascribe to and believe very strongly in, otherwise we wouldn’t dedicate our lives to the criminal justice system,” Lindsey said.

Set appropriate bonds

A bond is a formal agreement between the court and the accused that the person will appear for hearings and not reoffend, in exchange for their freedom prior to conviction. Currently, those bonds are determined based primarily on the alleged crime committed.

But Judge Miles said he believes courts should set bonds based on an offender’s risk and lethality, which can be determined through an assessment.

That may have prevented Alexander Bruce Jasmine’s second attack on his wife this year.

Jasmine was first accused in October of threatening his wife to the point she locked herself in the bathroom and called her mom for help. When she tried to run, she said Jasmine came up behind her and she felt “a sharp poke to her back” where he scratched her skin with a knife, court records said. Jasmine posted his \$10,000 bond and went free.

A little over a month later, just after the woman dropped the court’s no contact order with Jasmine, he reportedly stabbed her with a kitchen knife 15 to 19 times in her back, sides, chest and neck. She survived. Jasmine is now being held in the El Paso County jail without bond on suspicion of attempted murder and assault.

Make it easier for victims to get out

TESSA is dedicated to helping victims of domestic violence with whatever need they may have.

For the 10,000 people it serves a year, sometimes that means creating a safety plan, petitioning for a protection order or just being there to talk. And increasingly, it also means finding victims housing if and when they decide to leave the relationship.

LOCAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOMICIDES

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Abusers often manage the finances in a relationship to further isolate their victims, because without means to support themselves, it's harder for victims to leave, advocates say.

But there are options.

TESSA has a 32-bed safe house for victims fleeing violence; it serves more than 300 women and children a year, Boyles said. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Victims of Crime Act also gave \$325,000 last year to help TESSA house victims at risk of homelessness. Boyles said that money allowed them to house 87 families, including 150 children.

This year, TESSA also acquired the Women's Resource Agency, which teaches and empowers women to achieve self-sufficiency and economic dependence. Most domestic violence victims are women.

There are ample resources available to guide victims of domestic violence through uncertain transitions and allow them to escape abuse and take back control over their own lives. And advocates stress that support will always be available, whenever victims are ready to use it.

Contact the writer at 719-636-0362 or find her on Twitter: @njKaitlinDurbin.

6 Wow Bosch Kitchen Remodels.

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https://gazette.com/news/domestic-violence-resources-in-colorado/article_4e5ce160-f4e8-11e8-a486-0fb492777dd6.html

Domestic violence resources in Colorado

By: **Kaitlin Durbin** Dec 17, 2018 Updated Dec 18, 2018

There is help for victims of domestic violence in El Paso County, the Colorado Springs area and the rest of Colorado.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline: If you're in a domestic violence crisis and need immediate help, call (800) 799-7233 to connect with local emergency resources. You can also chat with advocates online at <https://www.thehotline.org/>

Violence Free Colorado: Formerly the Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the organization can connect victims with resources in their area. Visit violencefreecolorado.org for more information.

TESSA: Domestic violence victims in El Paso and Teller counties can access a variety of support services: crisis intervention, counseling, housing, legal advice. TESSA's local safeline is (719) 633-3819. More resources can be found on their website, www.tessacs.org/

Colorado Department of Criminal Justice: Victims of domestic violence are guaranteed certain rights under the Colorado Victim Rights Act. If you feel your rights have been violated, you can file a complaint at <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dcj/file-vra-complaint>. The state's victim compensation program also provides financial assistance to help victims recover.

The Address Confidentiality Program: Provides survivors of domestic violence, sexual offenses and stalking with a substitute mailing address and confidential mail forwarding service to protect their location. Applicants must have evidence of victimization and have or be willing to move within 90 days. To apply, visit the Colorado Division of Central Service's website at <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dcs/acp>

Domestic violence in El Paso County: Records show we're among worst in Colorado | Part 1 of 4

Colorado Springs domestic violence survivor Tara Loo shares story of nearly being killed by boyfriend

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Reporter

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https://gazette.com/premium/colorado-springs-domestic-violence-survivor-tara-loo-shares-story-of/article_29942594-f4c2-11e8-bcc1-b3a001a34671.html

Colorado Springs domestic violence survivor Tara Loo shares story of nearly being killed by boyfriend

By: TARA LOO, Special to The Gazette Dec 17, 2018 Updated Dec 19, 2018



Editor's note: Some of the photos with this first-person story from Colorado Springs native Tara Loo are graphic and may be disturbing.

On Dec. 12, 2009, I almost lost my life at the hands of my then-boyfriend. He'd been one of my best friends in high school, but we'd lost touch after graduation and I'd gone on to get married and have two daughters. Fourteen years later, we reconnected through Facebook. I had just gotten a divorce and was not looking to start dating, but since we knew each other so well, I figured why not give it a shot? Things moved very quickly.

At first, everything seemed perfect. He was caring and kind to my daughters. I liked his family, and mine thought highly of him. He always seemed so concerned about me and what was going on in my life. I didn't see red flags so we moved in together after a month of dating. Soon after, things began to change. I would later learn that "concern" for me was actually an attempt at controlling me.

THE SERIES

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Resource information: Multiple local agencies are available to help victims of domestic violence.

Part 3: Are offenders capable of change? One man's transformation.

It started subtly. He would get upset with who I was hanging out with but said it was only because he cared about me. He would criticize my choices, saying he only wanted the best for me. He started questioning where I was going and what I was “really” doing. He accused me of having an affair with my ex-husband. A month into living together his criticism became constant — I began to feel I couldn’t do anything right to make him happy. He started calling me a slut, a drunk or a bad mom, and said I was lucky to have him because no one else would put up with me.

Deep down I knew none of the things he said were true, but I began to question myself anyway. After every argument, I would feel like I was going crazy. If I disagreed with him, I was wrong; if I agreed with him, I was still wrong. There is truth in the saying that if someone insults you enough, you start believing the lies about you are true. By month four I was crying every day, doubting myself and beginning to lose my entire sense of self. I knew it was an unhealthy relationship, but I never considered it abuse.



Tara Loo with her daughters.
photos courtesy of Tara Loo

It's important to know that I came from a very loving home, and although my parents divorced, I never saw them fight. My dad has always been kind and loving and treated women with respect. I never witnessed abuse, nor was I educated in what an abusive relationship looks like. If you had asked me what it meant to be in an abusive relationship, I would have described it as physical abuse. I didn't know how damaging emotional and verbal abuse could be.

By December, my boyfriend had moved out but we were still trying to make things work. I had tried to end things with him multiple times, but he would always apologize profusely and promise it would never happen again or threaten to hurt himself if I didn't take him back. But I did end it on Dec. 12, after he accused me of being an embarrassment at dinner with friends. I told him to be out of the house by the morning and I went to bed — I didn't know that the most dangerous time for a woman in an abusive relationship is when you make the decision to leave.

The next thing I remember is waking up on the bathroom floor as he repeatedly punched my body with all his force. The bathroom was covered in blood. He had strangled me to unconsciousness while I was sleeping and then carried me to the bathroom to continue his violent attack. I had this gut-wrenching feeling I was going to die.



My abuser was a foot taller and 100 pounds heavier than me, I knew I couldn't fight back, so I began pleading for my life. I was staring into his blank eyes while he continued to punch me and then tried to cut my throat with a knife. I told him he was killing me and begged him to think about my girls growing up without their mother.

After Tara Loo's boyfriend strangled her to unconsciousness the first time, she remembers waking up in the bathroom to find the area covered with her blood.

Submitted by Tara Loo

He responded, "They would be better off without you." What he said next is forever burned into my mind: "I've gone too far, done too much. I'm going to have to kill you." He put his hands around my throat and strangled me until I blacked out again. While I was unconscious, he sexually assaulted me.

I have no doubt that he believed I was dead when he carried my lifeless body outside, wrapped only in a bloody towel, and went back inside to clean up. But by what I can only describe as a miracle, I regained consciousness and was able to run away. When two neighbors didn't answer their doors, I collapsed in the shadows and screamed for help until someone found me and called 911.

Domestic violence resources in Colorado
Kaitlin Durbin

I spent a week in the hospital recovering from hypothermia, internal and external bruising, a broken heel and wounds so deep it felt as if my body was being held together by staples and stitches: the fingers on my left hand were cut to the bone where I'd tried to push the knife from my throat — 27 stitches; there was a gash on my forehead — more stitches; I had a traumatic brain injury; and bruising that stretched from behind my ears to my chin that doctors said was caused by the strangulation.

They would later discover a 3-inch gash on the back of my head that was previously hidden by my blood-matted hair.

My abuser was sentenced to 16 years in prison.

As bad as my physical wounds were, nothing could prepare me for the mental and emotional wounds that followed. It took therapy, the support of family and friends, and years of finding myself again to heal.

Many people ask why I stayed as long as I did. The truth is, there are a plethora of reasons women stay in abusive relationships, and that looks different for each one.

New TESSA board member Tara Loo draws on her own survival to help domestic violence victims

We as a society need to change the narrative from, “Why did she stay?” to “Why does he abuse?” No one enters a relationship knowing it is going to be abusive. Abusers are master manipulators. My abuser was not physically abusive until I told him I was leaving. I know now that if someone is capable of emotionally, verbally or sexually abusing you, it is usually just a matter of time before they become physically abusive. Abuse does not get better over time, it only gets worse.

But awful as that relationship and that night was for me, I can honestly say I am stronger and wiser because of it. I’ve learned the importance of trusting my instincts, loving myself and setting healthy boundaries. I am in a healthy and supportive relationship with a man who has shown me the true meaning of love. My daughters and I have grown closer and healed together. I became a certified confidential victims’ advocate, and I serve on TESSA’s board of directors. I travel throughout Colorado and around the country sharing my story to raise awareness, educate and hopefully prevent others from going through what I went through. I have gone from victim, to survivor, to thriver, and I have learned there is life after abuse.



Today, Tara Loo says she is in a healthy and supportive relationship and has grown closer to her daughters, who help advocate for domestic violence awareness. “I have gone from victim, to survivor, to thriver, and I have learned there is life after abuse.”

Submitted by Tara Loo

Contact the writer at 719-636-0362 or find her on Twitter: @njKaitlinDurbin.

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https://gazette.com/news/winning-protection-often-comes-down-to-evidence-whose-story-is/article_39186aba-f4d2-11e8-bb53-773be500aac0.html

Winning protection often comes down to evidence, whose story is more believable

By: **Kaitlin Durbin** Dec 18, 2018 Updated Dec 19, 2018

Phone Number:	E-mail:	
FAX Number:	Atty. Reg. #:	
The address of the Protected Person may be omitted from the written order of the Court, including the Register of actions.		Division Courtroom
VERIFIED <input type="checkbox"/> COMPLAINT <input type="checkbox"/> MOTION FOR CIVIL PROTECTION ORDER		

I, _____ (name of person) request this Court to issue a Civil Protection Order, and in support of this request state the following:

1. I am seeking this Civil Protection Order as a victim of the following: (Mark the applicable circumstances.)

- Domestic Abuse (§13-14-101(2), C.R.S.)
- Stalking (§18-3-602, C.R.S.)
- Sexual Assault (§18-3-402(1), C.R.S.)
- Unlawful Sexual Contact (§18-3-404, C.R.S.)
- Abuse of the Elderly or an At-Risk Adult (§26-3.1-101(1) and (7), C.R.S.)
- Physical Assault, Threat or other situation.

Caption +

Civil Protection Order forms can be picked up at the El Paso County courthouse, 270 S. Tejon St., room S101.

Show More>Show Less

During an August contested protection order hearing a woman filed against the father of her child, winning safety came down to whose story was more believable.

The man had never left physical evidence of his abuse, but for an hour, she outlined a binder filled with hundreds of texts from her ex that she said proved he was stalking, harassing and threatening her. She wanted an El Paso County judge's order mandating that he stop.

The request was a battle from the beginning.

The couple separated in February, but the woman said three months later her ex was still

sending her aggressive text messages. Once when she didn't respond to the messages, he threatened to send her a picture of his genitals "at the wrong time," until she replied.

THE SERIES

Follow along with The Gazette's four-part "Shattered Lives" series on domestic violence in El Paso County.

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Later, the woman said he threatened to fight her new boyfriend and "stick him dead in his face," and said he had a gun.

She clutched the binder as proof that in the last three months she'd asked him to stop texting her about anything other than their daughter 48 to 52 times.

While she spoke, her ex scoffed, smiled or shook his head at her allegations. "Is all this necessary?" he asked her before El Paso County Magistrate Marcus Henson deemed the question inappropriate.

The man admitted to texting the woman but denied sending lewd or harassing messages. Perhaps someone took his phone and sent the messages without him knowing, he said. He accused her of being "spiteful," considering their child custody case, and said he'd never sent inappropriate messages, she just "interpreted" them that way.

When confronted with an email in which he reportedly called her weak and other derogatory names, and criticized her parenting, he said, "she just doesn't like what I'm saying."

The man's denial nearly crumbled the woman's case.

Despite the binder texts, she couldn't prove the messages came from him. The program she used to print the text exchanges only listed the phone number on the first page, which she didn't have because she said it would have required her to print years worth of conversations.

Without the phone number, Henson would not allow the binder to be entered into evidence, but he did allow the woman's comments about the texts and how they made her feel to stand.

It's the only thing that won the woman's case. Henson called her ex's threats of retaliation and "quite scary" perceived threats of gun violence concerning enough to grant a permanent order. He also ordered the man to relinquish firearms he owned within three days.

"I don't presume this is going to be an end to the issues you're dealing with," Henson told the woman, referring to their fights over parenting differences.

"But this order is entered to prevent something from happening."

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