THE LAST TIME!

Andrea Danielson, Board Member,
Livingston's Tri-County Network

Speaking Up Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

"If the numbers we see in domestic violence were applied to terrorism or gang violence, the entire country would be up in arms and it would be the lead story on the news every night."

—Rep. Mark Andrew Green

It was supposed to be the last time. Tana had seen it go downhill from here too many times—the screaming, the kids in the middle, even being thrown down the stairs. She called the police and they came... lights flashing, the neighbors peeking through their curtains. The last time... but it wasn't. The pair of policemen separated them and took statements, ran IDs, and arrested... *her*? An unpaid fine from a decade ago—forgotton, dormant and costly. Tana was taken into custody on a Friday. No one knew about it except for her abusive husband. He refused to post bail and left her stranded and at the mercy of a court glitch—for six days.

When she finally was released the following Friday, she found their home empty—her kids and husband gone. It was the last time, but it wasn't. The judge issued a restraining order, the kids were found and rescued, and the family found refuge in a women's shelter. He found the shelter. They moved into another shelter in another county—our county. And after a messy court battle, it finally was the last time.

Many women don't get out... Tana is the exception. The average battered woman goes through NINE TIMES of leaving and returning before she finally leaves for good. Many lose their lives well before the ninth chance. This is when services from a domestic violence program are critical.

In 2003, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, more people were abused by a batterer in Montana than there were babies born. More than 18,000 women stayed in domestic violence shelters, hotels and safe homes. In Livingston, our shelter helps three counties, Sweet Grass, Park and Meagher, with education and services. October was Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The Tri-County Network's major fundraiser, *Soup Against the Silence*, which happened last month, honored the victims who sadly passed away before they could escape.

As a survivor of emotional abuse myself, this is a personal hot-button for me. In addition, two of my business consultants have fled to our shelter. Tana (obviously not her real name) was one of them. This was her story.

One out of every four women will experience domestic or sexual violence in her lifetime. Nationally, homicide during pregnancy and postpartum is the second leading cause of death for women. This is a very private battle played out behind closed doors—a personal battle, but we can make it our own.

The Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, based in Helena, has prepared a prevention plan—a road map for creating healthy communities in Montana. With its eight goals, we hope to stem the tide of Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence (IPSV) perpetrated against all Montanans. Here is a brief overview of these goal:

1) Montanans will better understand gender stereotypes and biases, the components of healthy relationships, and the role of gender norms in healthy relationships.
2) Montana middle-school and high-school students will understand and have skills for building healthy dating relationships.

3) Montana students at colleges and universities will understand and have skills for building healthy dating and marriage relationships.

4) Parents and families who are expecting will have the knowledge and skills to cope with changing roles and demands on their relationships throughout the preconception, pregnancy and postpartum periods.

5) Leaders in the faith community will teach and model healthy relationships to congregants and others in their community.

6) Montanans will have a better understanding of the impact of IPSV and the need for greater equity and respect among and between all ethnic and racial groups in Montana.

7) Montanans will have more accurate data collection systems and reports, as well as a better understanding of how often IPSV happens.

8) Sufficient state funds will be allocated and distributed for IPSV intervention and prevention services, programs and technical assistance in Montana.

Although the victims and young family members are hurt the most, our communities as a whole suffer from the consequences of IPSV. These crimes destroy families and indeed, they destroy the very fabric of our communities. They also have emotional and economic costs for the survivors. (And there's the untold cost to the perpetrators.)

If you need immediate help removing yourself from a violent situation, please use the hotlines listed here. If you need support to help prevent a bad situation from getting worse, be proactive and call one of these centers. As referenced in the quote above, if the extent of this problem were made more public, our whole nation would be involed in prevention and support against IPSV.

Tana was lucky. She found help in time and her kids are safe. Let's not continue the shame-filled silence surrounding this devastating and prevalent destroyer. The Coalition is currently forming groups to implement these specific goals. Get involved. Speak up. Put your caring and commitment into action within your community, your church or your local shelter to help the Coalition make these goals a reality for Montanans. Let's teach our women to stand up against abuse. Let's help our families with their struggles and find ways to support the respectful, empowering and safe treatment of all people. ■

MONTANA DOMESTIC & SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESOURCES

BILLINGS • *YWCA*
Domestic Violence Program/Sexual Assault Services • Office: (406) 245-4472
24-Hour Crisis Line: (406) 259-8100

BOZEMAN • *HAVEN*
Office: (406) 586-7689
24-Hour Crisis Line: (406) 586-4111
www.havenmt.org

BUTTE • *Safe Space, Inc.*
Office: (406) 782-9807
24-Hour Crisis Line: (406) 782-8511
www.safespace.org

GREAT FALLS • *Mercy Home*
Office: (406) 453-1018
24-Hour Crisis Line: (406) 453-1018

HELENA • *Friendship Center*
Office: (406) 442-6800
24-Hour Crisis Line: (406) 459-3254
www.thefriendshipcenter.org

LIVINGSTON
Tri-County Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence • Office: (406) 222-5902
24-Hour Crisis Line: (406) 222-8154
www.tcnadsv.org

MILES CITY
Custer Network Against Domestic Abuse & Sexual Assault • Office: (406) 234-0542
24-Hour Crisis Line: (406) 951-0475
www.endomesticviolence.org

MISSOULA • *YWCA*
Office: (406) 543-6691
24-Hour Crisis Line: (406) 542-1944
www.ywcaofmissoula.org

National Domestic Violence Hotline:
1-800-799-7233

MONTANA COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC & SEXUAL VIOLENCE
www.mcadsv.com
(This website has a list of ALL Montana's domestic violence programs.)