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Advocates stress the difference a good dad makes

SOUTH BAY: Crisis center wages campaign to show key role fathers play in preventing domestic abuse.

By Kate Mather Staff Writer

When discussions about domestic violence come up, one important topic is usually overlooked.

Tobi Quintiliani and the staff at the 1736 Family Crisis Center want to change that.

"The conversations that you have in the world of psychology about parenting usually focus on the mother and kid relationship," Quintiliani said. "What we find is that fathers add so much and sometimes are less talked about."

But Quintiliani, director of special programs at 1736, and the rest of the center's staff are working to shed more light on this influence.

For the past year, Quintiliani has overseen the center's What a Difference a Dad Makes campaign, which aims to show how a father's positive relationship with his children could prevent them from becoming involved in domestic abuse later in life.

As the nation celebrates Father's Day today, it is becoming increasingly clear why it is so important to have a good man in the lives of children.

"The relationship between a father and a son or daughter and the strength of it — or lack thereof — is very important in the outcome of our clients' lives," she said. "So we really want to get that message out there."

The quality of a girl's relationship with her father can greatly affect her later in life, Quintiliani said.

"Let's say a girl has a father who is affectionate or loving and has a healthy relationship with all the qualities opposite of a batterer," she said. "Then she will be able to identify a batterer faster in her life. We find that usually a woman who is affected later in life by domestic violence usually has an unhealthy relationship with a father."

Piper Moretti, community education specialist at 1736, said girls who have positive relationships with their fathers have an advantage over those who do not.

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How to help

- Donations in exchange for the Project Halo headbands and neckties can be made by visiting the center's Web site, www.1736fcc.org, or by calling 1736 at 310-543-9900, Ext. 210.

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"I can actually speak from experience because my parents were divorced and my dad wasn't around a lot," she said. "I would look around at my friends who had dads and, again speaking from experience, they were a lot more secure in their life and they had a lot more self-esteem and they had a lot more confidence. I think that they have a huge edge on life, and they have a lot more going for them at an early age."

Men are also affected by the relationship they have with their fathers as children, Quintiliani said.

"When they have a father who is a very healthy role model, they imitate," she said. "It's usually almost 100 percent that a father has shown this behavior and they are learning from it and imitating it."

In an effort to better educate clients about the effect a father can have on his children, 1736

has spent the past year trying to get the campaign off the ground. While the ideas are intact, Quintiliani said more is needed to jump-start the effort.

"We do have plans," Quintiliani said. "We just don't have the funding right now to put any of our plans into action."

In an attempt to raise funds, 1736 launched its Project Halo marketing campaign, where neckties and headbands decorated with art created by the center's clients are given to those who make a suggested donation of \$35 or \$20, respectively.

Quintiliani said the center was inspired to use client artwork in the merchandise because art is one of the main therapeutic exercises 1736 utilizes.

"Sometimes it's very hard for them to verbalize their experiences because it's been so horrendous, so we use art," she said. "Art just opens it all up in the therapeutic world, of course with children — that's one of the main ways anyone works with children — but even with very traumatized

adults. It's just an amazing thing."

The proceeds from the sales go entirely to 1736 and help keep the center running during trying financial times.

"At this point in time, we're just wanting to keep afloat and keep our services going," Quintiliani said. "We want this to be a helpful means."

Should more funding be available for the What a Difference a Dad Makes campaign, Moretti said 1736 had high hopes for spreading its message.

"Billboards, bus stops — I would love to see a PSA done that would run all the time," she said. "I would love to see it as big and as out there as possible."

The effort is crucial, Quintiliani said, because — like every 1736 campaign — the message can save lives.

"Every outreach is so important because with every campaign we save lives," she said. "So we want it huge."

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