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Several times each month, APHSA receives a press release or proclamation announcing the designation of a day, week, or month to celebrate a specific human service program. I believe these events are very important to heighten public awareness, provide focus, and bring additional resources to critical needs and program areas. They provide an opportunity to acknowledge the unique challenges and to celebrate the many successes of our human service system. I have long contended that the most significant challenge we face in human services today is enhancing our public image and increasing the public's awareness of the role public human service professionals play in society. To some extent, our success is contingent upon the public's confidence in our ability to manage our programs efficiently and effectively. Therefore, efforts to improve public understanding through the designation of a specific time to reflect on human service activities are welcome.

I believe the most successful public awareness efforts are those that put a human face on the event and evoke a personal reflection or reaction to the need, problem, and program. There is one such event that accomplishes that for me—Domestic Violence Awareness Month. I believe most caseworkers experience some notable successes in their work. Unfortunately, the high-risk nature of their tasks sometimes also results in tragic outcomes. While I have been fortunate to have been involved in assisting some people overcome huge challenges to reach their goals, for more than 30 years I have also been haunted by the image of Carolyn, for whom the system did not work.

I had just begun my career as a county probation officer when Carolyn, the wife of a parolee on my caseload, visited my office shortly before Christmas. Carolyn requested that her husband's parole terms be revised to forbid him from physically abusing her. We subsequently learned that he had beaten her the prior evening for failing to surrender money she had saved to buy holiday presents for her children. Her husband wanted the money to support his drug habit. She related that earlier, when he was on parole for a different crime, a similar

warning was issued and the abuse subsided while he was under court supervision. Enlisting the support of the District Attorney's Office, Carolyn was transported to the hospital for treatment and then to the District Justice Office to begin legal proceedings. Unfortunately, in spite of multiple attempts, we were unable to persuade Carolyn to file a criminal complaint against her husband, which would have resulted in a lengthy

Since learning of Carolyn's death, I have never participated in a related public event without conveying the circumstances that led to this tragic outcome. I believe I owe it to Carolyn to preserve her story. A story of a woman who was courageous enough to withstand terrible abuse to bring the joy of Christmas to her children, and yet was so frightened and overwhelmed by a sense of hopelessness to take official action without adequate

## The Story of Carolyn: A Case to Remember

period of incarceration for him. She was simply too frightened of retribution to take that necessary step. Tragically, in those days, there were no domestic violence shelters, counseling programs, or other community resources available to ensure a safe haven and new opportunity for Carolyn and her children. The only recourse for the Probation Office was to revoke his parole on a technical violation. He was remanded to prison to complete the balance of his relatively short sentence. I had nearly forgotten about Carolyn until several years (and jobs) later when I learned that she had been murdered by her husband. I can't help but think, even after all these years, that there could have been a much different outcome for Carolyn had a safe shelter and a supportive domestic violence program been available to protect her.

Fortunately, we have made great strides since then to increase public awareness and have services available that address domestic violence and related issues. As a result of budget constraints, program reductions, and such correlating factors as higher unemployment and poverty rates, however, many of these services are underfunded or in jeopardy. According to the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, (Carolyn's home state), 126 residents lost their lives last year due to domestic violence, a 19 percent increase over the prior year. As someone who remembers when domestic violence programs did not exist, I believe we must safeguard against an erosion of this critical resource.

assurance that the system would protect her. There is a lesson in this tragedy that should not be forgotten.

Announcements of such events as Domestic Violence Awareness Month are often accompanied by extensive program and client statistics, which are usually measures of success and indicators of how much more needs to be accomplished. Given the large demands and pressures on human service professionals, it is understandable if complacency sets in regarding these statistics, especially since they occur with regularity and we are already overwhelmed with data. But for me, in the case of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, the statistic was actually someone I knew. I am sure the same is true for those who work in other human service program areas: at the end of all the press releases, data books, and public relations materials is a real person with human needs who may be in pain, at risk, and deserving of our attention. The next time a notice crosses your desk announcing a special day to focus on a human service, please take a few moments to reflect on the people who are in need of service, the program itself, and, perhaps, how you or your agency can help promote awareness and get involved.