

Abuse victims find help closer to home

Satellite court offers protection, counseling and medical treatment

By Sarah Kelley
Examiner Staff Writer
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The victim, a 14-year-old boy, should have been at school, but instead he was describing to a judge how his father beat him with a belt until he was covered with whelps and bruises.

The seventh-grader, dressed in a Navy blue and white school uniform, said his father whipped him repeatedly about the arms, legs, back and neck. He explained every brutal detail to a Washington Superior Court judge, but rather than having to sit in a cold, uninviting courtroom, he calmly talked via a Web-camera in a quiet room at Greater Southeast Hospital.

Within minutes the judge issued a

MONITORING ABUSE

IN WASHINGTON

- More than 3,200 people were granted temporary protection orders in 2004
- More than 1/4 of those petitions were filed at Greater Southeast Hospital's Domestic Violence Intake Center.
- 1,600 victims sought counseling

NATIONWIDE

- 90 percent of domestic violence victims are women.
- Every 9 seconds a woman is beaten in the U.S.
- 1 in 3 women experience at least 1 physical assault by a partner during adulthood.
- Domestic violence is statistically consistent across racial and ethnic boundaries.

National Domestic Violence Hotline	800-799-SAFE
My Sister's Place, local shelter and hotline	202-529-5991
House of Ruth, local shelter and hotline	202-347-2777
House of Imogene, local shelter and hotline	202-387-4960
Women Empowered Against Violence, counseling	202-452-9550
D.C. Superior Court Domestic Violence Intake Center	202-879-0152
Greater Southeast Domestic Violence Intake Center	202-561-3000

Source: Washington's Superior Court, American Bar Association and American Institute on Domestic Violence

Nick Shwaery/Examiner

Graphic by Nick Shwaery/Examiner

temporary protection order to the boy and his mother, who are among thousands of Southeast residents to seek help at the hospital since its domestic violence intake office opened more than two years ago.

Superior Court launched the satellite office at Greater Southeast because nearly two-thirds of domestic violence cases in the city come from east of the Anacostia River, said Paul Roddy, director of the court's domestic violence unit.

Having to travel downtown, often without a car and with several children in tow, might prevent a victim from going to court, Roddy explained.

"We decided we needed to do more about what is happening to victims in that part of the city," said Meshall Thomas, former director of Women Empowered Against Domestic Violence, an advocacy group that works with the court. "The rest is history. That place is functioning and it shows there was a need."

The Southeast intake center is considered a "one-stop shop," meaning victims may receive medical treatment for injuries, counseling and obtain a temporary protection order. The temporary orders last two weeks, then the victim must appear in court to seek a civil protection order, which lasts one year.

On a recent Monday - usually the busiest day at the intake office - a steady stream of clients filed in to tell their stories to the judge. Among them was Charles Grant, one of only a handful of men who visit the center each month.

When his name was called, Grant sat before the video monitor and told the judge he was asleep when his girlfriend came after him with a steak knife. The judge issued a temporary protection order and reminded Grant that if he doesn't show up at court in two weeks, the case will be dismissed.

Metropolitan Police Officer T.D. Wells, who works at the intake center, said victims often seek a protection order, but then change their minds when the abuser apologizes. That's why it's so important to provide counseling right away.

"Basically everyone here is a counselor, even if we don't have that title," she said.

Superior Court Judge Brook Hedge, who formerly presided over the court's domestic violence unit, said the Greater Southeast location provides a service for victims who might not otherwise seek help at such a vulnerable time. She said it's working because "it's in the community and it's not as scary or as much of a hardship as coming down to the courthouse."

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