

DAVAs show their appreciation to local shelter advocates

By Katisha Draughn, Naval Support Activity Hampton Roads Public Affairs

Domestic violence is a wide spread issue that affects members of various communities and people from all walks of life. October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month and allows knowledge and understanding of the issue to be brought to the forefront. The month also recognizes the significant achievements that have been made to help reduce domestic violence.

Domestic Abuse Victim Advocates (DAVA) from the Fleet and Family Support Center (FFSC) recognized and showed their appreciation to Hampton Roads Shelter Advocates during the Advocates Appreciating Advocates event, Oct. 21.

"You all have been that shoulder to cry on, the calm in the face of a crisis," said Tina Bridges, DAVA supervisor. "Above all, you have shown how much you care."

FFSC honored advocates from the Genieve Shelter in Suffolk, Help Emergency Response Shelter in Portsmouth, Samaritan House in Virginia Beach, Transitions Family Violence Shelter in Hampton and the Women in Crisis Center in Norfolk.

"The local shelters offer tremendous support to our clients. They have never said 'no, we cannot assist you with your client,'" said Bridges. "We wanted to take the opportunity to show our gratitude to the shelters, which have extremely dedicated, caring and giving staff members. Advocates usually give and give and expect nothing in return. This is our chance to show how much we appreciate the exceptional service that they provide our families."

During the appreciation event, each DAVA shared a personal story on why helping victims of domestic violence is important to them and they thanked the shelter advocates for all that they do to help victims.

"What they do can sometimes be a thankless task," said Peg Tackett, FFSC Mid-Atlantic regional program director. "But we wanted to honor the work they do and show how they reinforce the bond with military families."

Capt. Karen Tsiantas, Navy Region Mid-Atlantic Fleet and Family Readiness program director, provided remarks and presented awards to all the honorees.

"What you all do is extremely important," she said. "And from the bottom of my heart I thank you."

DAVAs provide a variety of voluntary services to victims of domestic abuse and their dependents and advocate on their behalf with commands, case managers, community agencies and the judicial system. Some of the direct services that they provide are safety assessment and individualized safety planning; crisis intervention; domestic abuse and judicial system education; information about rights as a service member or family member; accompaniment to investigative agencies, legal appointments, magistrate's office and court appearances; transportation to shelters, court, medical and legal appointments; and referrals to community agencies.

Robin Gauthier, a program director at the Samaritan House, started with the organization 12 years ago as an intern.

"It's so rewarding to see the clients come into a safer environment than where they were previously," she said.

The Samaritan House has a 60-day program and offers the victims emergency shelter and housing, support and education groups, and job and housing searches.

"Our goal is to see them become self-sufficient when they leave and free from their abusers," she said.

The FFSC works with the five shelters in the immediate region. Occasionally, they may reach out to an out-of-the-area shelter for a victim who may be relocating for safety purposes.

"We literally save lives," said Gauthier. "Seeing lives turn around is why I do what I do."

For more information on the DAVA program and other FFSC programs, visit www.cnmc.navy.mil/navylifema or call 444-2230.