



## **DEATH OF A FORMER RESIDENT**

By DJ Brown, Residential Director

CASA staff is in the habit of listening to the news and reading the newspapers every day to see if any of our residents or former residents has had trouble. Recently, all media carried the news that locally there had been a murder of a female and we knew she had been a former resident.

That news affects staff and current residents in several different ways. Current residents are affected by the sheer reality that people die from domestic violence and they had made it to safety. Often they have known the murdered woman from their community. Staff, while hurting themselves, meet with the residents as a group or individually as requested or needed. Time must be given to the residents for them to talk, grieve and experience the gamut of emotions. It gives new meaning to the safety planning that we continuously do with residents.

Staff is affected and relate different emotions. Sadness prevails at first as we gather to talk, check her file to see who she had listed as her abuser, who she had listed as her emergency contact, her lethality assessment and how long she had stayed with us. Time must be given to staff for them to talk, grieve and share their emotions. After the sadness you hear comments about “being mad at her” for going back and we have to remind each other that she had the right to her own decision; or guilt that perhaps we could have done more or said something that would have made a difference, but our notes show we did all we could. You hear “is it ever going to stop”, “are we making any difference”, “why didn’t she call us again”. Staff also reflects about all the other residents who return to their abuser and we never hear from again. The sadness remains, but the crisis phone rings again. A resident is at the office door needing something so as we return to work we hug each other and go back to our work a little more worn of heart but with renewed commitment that it won’t happen to the next one.

Staff is also affected in a secondary way in that they may have had contact with the woman and/or the abuser while in the community. In this particular case, the murderer was known in the community. He had just been in a store where one of our employees works a second job and engaged her conversation. We also began to worry about the Victim’s Advocate that works at the Police Dept., and how she was handling the news since she had brought the woman to us in the first place. Staff called the Victim’s Advocate to offer her the

opportunity to come by and talk with us, grieve with us and to just know we cared about her also.

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