

New Horizons hopes to ease the violence

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MIDDLETOWN — New Horizons Shelter for Battered Women and Children's main focus is to end domestic violence during October through Domestic Violence Awareness month.

The facility, located on Main Street, is one of the state's 18

shelters offering services to all of Middlesex County when domestic violence occurs — in other words, every day of the year.

Mary Ann Dayton Fitzgerald, director of New Horizons since July, urges public involvement and community participation in an active agenda for increasing awareness as a means for ending domestic violence.

This month, the shelter is selling purple ribbon-pins for awareness. Pins may also be purchased for \$5-\$10, in local stores. They will also be available on Make a Difference day today on the South Green in Middletown. Men are also being asked to raise awareness about domestic violence by donating to the shelter.

Fitzgerald encourages com-

munity involvement through education and through volunteerism. In working toward the Director's goal of reaching out to non-English speaking and otherwise oppressed populations volunteers will serve as community educators. New Horizons is offering a 20 hour training program mandatory for prospective volunteers. Successful comple-

See NEW, A8

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•From A1

tion of the program beginning October 25th gives volunteers official certification. All desiring volunteer status are invited to contact Fitzgerald or to visit New Horizons.

When Fitzgerald, a child of deaf parents, came to Connecticut she was 19, she said she was running from a possessive and controlling boyfriend. She said he tried to keep her from going to college.

Obviously he didn't stop her because now she holds a master's degree in Marriage and Family Counseling. And in addition to directing New Horizons, Fitzgerald is also coordinator of Women and Family Services at the Community Health Center in Middletown. She is enthusiastic

and passionate about her purpose in making a difference.

Fitzgerald said she enjoys working at the grassroots level in helping women to become self-sufficient, in helping women at the shelter get trained as volunteers, and in helping them identifying and removing chaos from their lives.

She added she has a great deal of respect for women she has worked with over the years.

"Many people not cared for as children end up in relationships mirroring their childhoods," Fitzgerald said, adding that a sense of community starts with family, and many families are fragmented.

Fitzgerald believes that we "...all have the same agenda; we want a decent place to live - we

want to be safe." She endorses helping women to connect to others, helping make positive changes in their lives, working to foster hope and purpose in their lives.

The director also said she feels that helping in this healing, and seeing people put the pieces of their lives back together in order to keep on going is a life affirming occupation.

"Domestic violence is about what we do to each other as humans," she said "Denial is powerful, sometimes we do not want to know it is happening."

According to New Horizons Program for Battered Women and their children, "A battered woman is someone who is being or has been physically, mentally, or sexually abused". An abuser can be anyone, and the action can occur at any time.

Today, all 11 beds in the New Horizons shelter are taken. When the shelter is full, people are referred to other shelters and transportation is provided at any time.

The New Horizons shelter focuses on providing a safe, confidential, clean, nondiscriminatory haven and associated services for women victims of abuse and their children 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and three hundred sixty five days a year.

The shelter also provides services including community education, crisis intervention, counseling to women and children in the community and in the shelter, support groups, outreach to women who may not need shelter but who want support, Spanish speaking staff, services

for children specifically, help for women dealing with police, hospitals, welfare, courts, and a 24 hour emergency hotline.

The shelter is supported on donations and contributions, and Fitzgerald said she is working to increase corporate sponsorships and independent or group support.

"We would like to see a sort of ongoing fundraising and community education process". Presently, a company called Mergent, in Rocky Hill, is actively supporting the shelter. Additionally, the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence acts as an umbrella organization providing much of the shelter's funding.

The New Horizons wish list includes towels and washcloths, bath accessories, magazine subscriptions, furniture, pictures, lamps, a microwave, a living room set, bookcases, and items for women and children starting over again - having left all possessions behind. Donations may be delivered to the Community Health Center on Fridays.

Facilities throughout the state and the nation are actively recognizing Domestic Violence Awareness month by sponsoring various events including candlelight vigils, clothesline projects in which participants make T-shirts honoring women and children victims of domestic violence, and the wearing of purple ribbons for increased awareness and recognition of domestic violence.

Domestic violence "hits all walks of life," Fitzgerald said.

The New Horizons 24-Hour Hotline is 347-6971.