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NEWTON

Campaign focuses on ending domestic violence



City Hall hosted a White Ribbon event in conjunction with The Second Step, Wednesday, March 2. Wicked Local photo/Laura Lovett

Domestic violence impacts all communities, no matter how affluent, Mayor Setti Warren told a City Hall gathering last week.

On Wednesday, March 2 community members, city officials and sports teams came to City Hall to take the White Ribbon pledge against gender-based violence.

The White Ribbon campaign focuses specifically on getting men involved in the movement. When attendees arrived for the event they were “pinned” with a white ribbon and given information about The Second Step, a nonprofit the city has partnered with to address issues of domestic violence.

“It is about re-imagining manhood,” said Matthew Swoveland, deputy director of The Second Step.

The event was focused on what men can do to become part of the solution. The Newton North wrestling team and the Boston Maccabi Rugby team came out to show their support for the issue.

Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian is the co-chairman of the White Ribbon Campaign this year. He became involved in initiatives against gender-based violence when he was a prosecutor and has worked with various organizations over the years to raise awareness about this issue. Decades ago, men were not involved, said Koutoujian.

“It takes men standing up, showing masculinity and a strong man doesn’t mean using force but using moral integrity. No one should ever lay a hand on a partner,” said Koutouijan.

Among the speakers was Kerwyn Maynard, a teenager, who told a personal story about domestic violence in his home and how The Second Step helped.

“After Second Step I felt safe and protected,” said Maynard. “It changed my life and gave me a whole new outlook.”

The Second Step is dedicated to assisting survivors of domestic violence. The organization offers many different services including housing, education and emergency financial aid. Victims can live in transitional housing for up to two years. Prior to coming to The Second Step families on average moved four of five times after fleeing abusive situations, according to its website.

Once a family begins working with the organization they each have an individualized plan to help them achieve success. The organization has case managers and advocates that help victims navigate challenges from mental health to benefits to social and emotional wellbeing, according to Swoveland.

After two years, residents transition to finding more permanent homes but continue to be connected with support systems.

“Our services have a huge emphasis on building communities,” Swoveleand said. In domestic violence situations the abuser tries to create isolations, he said.

The community programs also help people who are preparing to leave an abusive situation.

The Second Step provides legal services to domestic violence victims, who often have specific needs.

During the White Ribbon night here, youth programs were discussed at length. District Attorney Marian Ryan discussed her prevention initiatives with young people. The DA holds a conference called Empowering Girls for middle and high school students, which focuses on building confidence and educating girls on healthy relationships.

“We know [domestic violence] is cyclical,” said Ryan.

Swoveland works with youth groups at The Second Step, where the emphasis is on prevention.

One of the groups is comprised of 18 young men that meet on a weekly basis to talk about different issues and the role of masculinity. All of the members have experienced domestic violence in their lives. Many members participate in actives that give back to the community.

[Domestic violence] touches all of us, men and women,” said Warren.