

In Her Shoes — “Why Doesn’t She Just Leave?”

A COMMUNITY EDUCATION “GAME,” *IN HER SHOES* HELPS HCWC VOLUNTEERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS SEE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FROM THE VICTIM’S PERSPECTIVE.

Why doesn’t she just leave? It seems so simple, but in real life the choices facing a victim of domestic violence are much more complex. The simulation, *In Her Shoes*, allows players to think, make choices and experience the lives of family violence victims. *In Her Shoes* helps participants understand the complex and dynamic nature of domestic violence and the barriers that battered women face. The “game” reveals the unpredictability of relying on others or institutions for help as well as demonstrates how one person can make a huge impact on a victim seeking safety.

At the Fall 2012 Advocacy Training, HCWC’s Volunteer Coordinator Kate Shaw explained the game and formed teams of three. She gave different victim and abuser identities with a unique scenario to each team.

Team One was given Tiffany and Gary, a very young couple with a 10-month baby. Gary had thought Tiffany was “hot” the first time he met her. Now Tif-



fany was tired all the time, even though the baby was old enough to sleep through the night.

She wanted to go to the doctor. Gary had a good job as a mechanic, but didn’t have health insurance. Because Tiffany did not have a car, he drove her to the free clinic. Gary was mad that he had to miss work to drive her and that he had to mind the baby while Tiffany was with the doctor. He grew angrier when he found out that Tiffany was pregnant again because he hadn’t really wanted the first child. The anger would soon erupt into violence.

The first time Gary hit her, the team had to make a choice -- go to friends and family, law enforcement, social services, domestic violence advocates, lawyers or others. With almost every choice the consequences could be unanticipated. The police asked Tiffany to press charges against Gary. If he was arrested, how would she get to her doctor appointments without a car? ***What would you do?*** When Gary let his wrath out on the baby, Tiffany’s mother offered her a place to stay. Her

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mother lived in a one-bedroom apartment, and Tiffany would have to sleep on a sofa with a year-old baby while nine months pregnant. **What would you do?** When Tiffany later delivered a baby girl, Gary asked her to come home with him. If she stayed at her mother's place, she would have to share sleeping on a sofa with two babies and a mother who constantly criticized her parenting techniques. **What would you do?**

“ You want to make the best choice, but often it is a choice between the lesser of two evils. ”

During the exercise, the teams excitedly discussed the directions, choices and obstacles that kept steering their victim back to the abuser. Team One wondered how Tiffany could go to appointments with a legal advocate, obtain a protective order, attend a weekly domestic violence support group, see her doctor and regularly visit social services with two babies and no car. She needed a good job to support her two children, and that meant that she would probably have to go back to school. In the meantime, how could she afford childcare for two children? It was no wonder that she kept going back to her abuser.

Most teams could not finish the game because they ran out

of time in the 45-minute exercise, an apt metaphor for what happens in real life to a victim who may be running out of resources. HCWC facilitators debriefed the group as a whole. Teams learned about the very different journeys of all the victims. The complexity and numerous challenges that each victim faced helped participants understand that there are no simple answers.

“Our client died at the end of our exercise,” explained advocate-in-training Micaela Romero. “We ended the exercise with a degree of frustration, and the process was so difficult even if it was a scenario. You want to make the best choice, but often it is a choice between the lesser of two evils.”

Kathryn Rittenhour noted “I was surprised by how much

the victim had to do to escape from the violence that was taking place in her own home. I was exhausted just reading about the scenarios and having to decide which obstacle to hypothetically tackle first.”



Because one in four Americans is affected by family violence, almost everyone will come in contact with a victim at some point in their lives. A victim may reach out to you for help. What would you do?

In an effort to break the cycle of abuse, HCWC offers *In Her Shoes* to groups and organizations as part of our mission to provide education about family violence. If you would like to know more and schedule an *In Her Shoes* simulation, please contact Charles Vestal, Director of Development and Community Partnerships at (512) 396-3404 extension 260 or at cvestal@hcwc.org.



HCWC Interns Michelle Calderon and Sara Wood found it difficult to choose the right options.