

Annual Break the Silence Walk in Framingham raises \$20,000

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Winners receive awards following the Break the Silence 5K in Framingham Saturday morning.
[Contributed photo]

In the winter of 2010, Framingham resident Stephanie Deeley answered a hysterical phone call from her sister in East Bridgewater.

“Kim called me and said (her husband) Rich was harassing her and she was crying on the phone,” Deeley said, “and that wasn’t Kim.”

Deeley drove to her sister’s house, where she said she found Parker following his wife aggressively with a camera, saying she was crazy. When Deeley stepped between them, Rich screamed and shoved her, Deeley said. The police were called.

Kimberly Parker refused to press charges, but Deeley did. By their court date, however, Kim's husband had promised to stop drinking, and Kimberly begged her sister to drop the case.

"I did," Deeley said, "and I regret that to this day."

A year later, police would charge former Boston fire captain Richard Parker with holding his wife hostage and throwing knives at her, though he wouldn't be convicted until 2015 when he was sentenced to 4-6 years in prison. Two years before his conviction, 45-year-old Kimberly Boleza Parker would be found lifeless in their home. An autopsy came back without a cause of death.



Face-painting was available for children at the Break the Silence 5K in Framingham Saturday morning. [Contributed photo]

"My sister would be absolutely furious with me for telling her story," Deeley said, "but I would give everything I have for her to be yelling at me today, to have her here with me to be angry."

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Supporters of survivors and the cause to end domestic violence will wear purple to bring attention to the issue, and to help people understand what they can do.

"People think this doesn't happen in their community," said Patricia Hohl, component director of Voices Against Violence, under

the South Middlesex Opportunity Council umbrella. "We can tell you it does."

Voices Against Violence empowers survivors of domestic violence in a dozen MetroWest towns. The program goes to court with clients seeking restraining orders, helps them find independence through housing and jobs, and tries to change social perceptions of survivors and the core problems.

Saturday, Hohl donned purple for the program's annual Break the Silence fundraising walk in Framingham, along with about 150 others. The walk raised more than \$20,000 for the program, and served as a vehicle for spreading awareness – a particularly tough ask for this cause.

"She was so ashamed of the situation she was in that she didn't want anyone to know," Deeley said, of her sister's reluctance to bringing the realities of her relationship to light. She added, "He had undermined her confidence, and convinced her that she was a bad person, and that's why he did the things he did."

That reluctance is common in domestic violence relationships, but keeping the issue behind closed doors only strengthens it, Hohl said.

"Silence is the biggest scourge in domestic violence," Hohl said. "Silence keeps it going."

From the outside, the Parkers' marriage looked normal. Deeley said Parker took Kim out on dates, the couple traveled together, and the firefighter made a good impression on everyone he met.

"He won her over and he won all of us over," Deeley said, adding that Parker seems personable, nice, and funny. "He was well-respected, well-known, and just had this other side people just didn't recognize, except her."

Domestic violence crosses all economic, cultural and social boundaries, Hohl said, and abuse comes in many different forms. Verbal abuse can be just as damaging as physical abuse. Deeley said Richard alienated Kim's friends, threatened her dogs, and undermined her confidence and former fierce independence.

"People only assume this is happening to poorly educated women," said Deeley, who said Kim had a master's degree and worked in biosafety. "My sister made more money than her husband, was financially stable and successful, and it happened to her."

Hohl said the best thing someone who suspects domestic violence can do is support the person. It's important not to force someone in such a relationship to do anything – survivors already have too much power stripped away by their abusers.



Winners in the annual Break the Silence 5K receive awards Saturday in Framingham. [Contributed photo]

"We're dealing with people who have done nothing wrong, and yet they're the ones who have to make the changes in their lives," Hohl said, pointing out that survivors – not abusers – are the ones expected to leave their homes and more.

Donating to organizations like Voices Against Violence is huge, Hohl said, because the program is able to connect with survivors ready to free themselves, and give them the confidence and resources to remain independent.

Deeley wants to see an overhaul of the court system, so cases are heard and decided with more speed, and less weight on the confidence of the victim. She also wants to see more funding going to medical examiners, and programs like Voices Against Violence. Deeley also points to helpful pending legislation, like the Pet and Women Safety (PAWS) Act, which would help shelters take in pets along with domestic violence survivors.

A law change a few years back prevented police from publicly releasing the names of domestic violence offenders, reasoning that doing so identified the victim.

"I think it's a good thing," Hohl said of the law. She said being publicly identified takes away a survivor's control. "It goes to empowering survivors."

The issue is complicated. Deeley has a different opinion.

“Silence works in the favor of the person who’s committing the crime,” she said.

Kim would have been ashamed to be identified in the newspaper as the wife of someone accused of domestic violence, Deeley admitted. Society needs to stop blaming survivors of domestic violence, she pointed out, so offenders can be placed under public scrutiny.

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