

Contact: Pam McKeown
ODMHSAS Public Information
(405) 522-5102

Oct. 3, 2003

PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE MARRIAGE LEAVES LONG- LASTING SCARS

After years spent in an abusive marriage, Sarah Williams* made two telephone calls that changed her life. The first was a “911” phone call. The second was to Domestic Violence Intervention Services (DVIS), Inc., in Tulsa.

Although Williams’s husband had physically and emotionally abused her for years, the last straw came the night he flew into a rage, broke down every door in the house, destroyed the furniture and tried to strangle her.

“At that moment, I realized my life was never going to get any better,” she said. “I thought, ‘It’s never going to change. It’s never going to improve. This man’s going to kill me one way or another.’”

“It wasn’t just one situation that made me ask for help, but that was the proverbial ‘straw that broke the camel’s back.’”

That night was a turning point in Williams’s life. After years spent as a virtual prisoner in her own home, she found new hope and a new life through one of the state’s largest domestic violence agencies. DVIS staff and volunteers offered shelter, protection and emotional support. They gave her a hand to hold during legal proceedings, counseling

(more)

and classes to help regain her self-esteem, and ongoing assistance to ensure her future was brighter than her past.

And, it has been.

Williams – who attended a 16-week program that helps victims and survivors regain lost self-esteem, change old thought patterns and learn new ways of living – said she grew up in a physically and emotionally abusive household where she was told it was her fault she was being beaten.

“This type of relationship was all I knew,” she said. “I thought the violence was all my fault.”

DVIS, however, helped her change those thoughts and regain her self-esteem.

“I learned I *didn't* cause the violence. I *don't* have to take it. It's *not* what I deserve and I *can* make it without my husband,” she said. “The emotional abuse was much more damaging than the physical abuse, because it unraveled me. The ridicule, the criticism, the control, the not letting me associate with any of my friends and the constant threats against my children hit me at my core. Bruises, even a broken nose or arm, will eventually heal. But the damage abusive partners can do emotionally can last a lifetime, unless you get help.

“If I could give one piece of advice to women who are thinking about leaving an emotionally or physically abusive relationship, it would be this – don't wait,” she added. “It's not going to get better. You're not going to say or do the magic thing that turns this man around, where he's going to love you and respect you. It won't get better. It's just going to get worse. And with every year that you stay with him, whether it's physical,

(more)

mental or emotional abuse, your life will erode until there's nothing left.

“If you have children, get out for your sake and for their sake,” she added. “I used that excuse for a long time – that I would stay for my children – but what I found out is that I could've made it just fine without my husband. I know that now. If you have children, your children are going to be injured one way or another, even if they never get hit. If you stay in the relationship, chances are your children are going to bear the brunt of the verbal or emotional abuse. And children who watch their daddy beat up their mommy, even once, can be traumatized for life.”

DVIS, a contract facility of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, offers a range of services for victims/survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, including a crisis line, shelter, transitional living quarters, counseling, emergency transportation, support groups, court advocacy and referral to community resources. The agency also offers counseling for children and abusive partners. For more information about DVIS, call the agency at (918) 585-3163 or the 24-hour crisis line at (918) 585-3143.

ODMHSAS helps fund a number of other domestic violence shelters throughout Oklahoma, as well. For more information about any of these facilities, call the agency's 24-hour **“Safeline” at 1-800-522-7233**. The hotline provides shelter referral services, as well as information for victims regarding their legal rights, including instruction on how to file a victim's protective order.

###

**Sarah Williams is not the victim's real name, which was changed to protect her identity.*

