

Minn. woman pushes for domestic violence scrutiny



LAKE CRYSTAL, Minn. (AP) — Many people who lose their daughters, sisters or friends to domestic violence aren't able to stand before a crowd of people and tell their story.

Anna Gronewold isn't one of them.

She wants the world to know about what happened to her daughter, Ashley Sullivan, and husband, Chet. Gronewold recently marked the one-year anniversary of when her daughter and husband were murdered by Sullivan's ex-boyfriend, Shawn Haugen.

Haugen, who had been able to post bail three times after violating court orders to stay away from Sullivan, killed himself Jan. 17 after shooting Sullivan and beating Chet Gronewold to death.

When the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women released its 2010 Femicide Report at the State Capitol, Gronewold was the keynote speaker. Her husband and daughter were among 28 women, children and men killed as a result of domestic assaults in Minnesota last year.

Sullivan's two sons are among at least 10 children left without a mother as a result of domestic violence.

"It's healing to talk about what's going on, but it's also good that people hear from a victim or a survivor of domestic abuse," Gronewold said.

The Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women has been releasing the Femicide Report since 1989, said Liz Richards, the organization's director of programming.

The original reports simply chronicled the names of victims and what happened to them.

Now the reports also examine what the legal system can learn from each incident and how the system can be changed to avoid similar incidents.

There are assessment guidelines that judges and law enforcement officers can use to identify factors that make certain domestic situations more dangerous than others, Richards said. Those factors include recent separations, specific threats of violence and access to handguns.

"Basically, what we believe is if any of those factors are present, there should be heightened scrutiny," Richards said.

In Sullivan's case, she had recently left Haugen to live with her mother and stepfather, Haugen had violated protection orders, and he had access to guns, Richards said. She's hoping Gronewold's story and others like it will help legislators make better policy and funding decisions for programs related to domestic assault.

"We can't afford to get this wrong," Richards said.

"In other areas, when you make a mistake, you can go back and fix it. With domestic violence, when something bad happens, it's too late. We can't afford to get it wrong because the stakes are too great."

There are other high-profile incidents from the area included in the Femicide Report. Svetlana Munt was allegedly murdered by her ex-husband in the Rasmussen Woods parking lot in March, and their children witnessed the shooting. James Nibbe was allegedly shot to death by his wife at their house south of Lake Crystal in August.

The speech Gronewold recently gave was about how Sullivan's relationship with Haugen changed over time. He "swept her off her feet" at first, but the relationship eventually turned to one where he demanded complete control.

The relationship escalated to violence a month or two before Sullivan and Chet Gronewold were murdered.

Haugen was arrested and released three times before the murders. The last time Haugen was released, Sullivan was terrified, Anna Gronewold said.

"I don't want another life taken due to domestic violence," she said in her speech. "We all have to do our part. For me, I am committed to raising awareness about the signs of domestic violence and the devastating effects of domestic violence."

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