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Crisis center trying to raise \$7,500

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Domestic abuse is a complicated issue, and each victim has specific needs. Few local organizations know that better than the Kodiak Women's Resource and Crisis Center.

Throughout the month of October, the nonprofit is running a fundraiser to help pay for services needed by people trying to escape domestic abuse. It hopes to raise \$7,500 by the end of the month, according to Outreach Coordinator Ellamy Tiller, who said this money is crucial.

"The kind of needs [victims of domestic violence have] vary, like almost anything," Tiller said. "If we can help the person with whatever that thing is, if we can buy them that service or that resource, that can be the difference between them achieving some safety and starting over or not."

Tiller chose not to state examples of how this money could be used in order to protect the identities of the people who have sought help through the center.

The Kodiak Women's Resource and Crisis Center receives the majority of its funding through grants from the state and the federal government. Unfortunately, the grants that keep the lights on in the shelter and fund the staff cannot be used to buy groceries, fix buildings or pay for cabs that can drive victims away from their abusers, Tiller said. Each grant has a specific purpose and everything else is covered by donations from the community, according to Tiller.

In the past, the center has hosted fundraisers as needed, Tiller said. In the spring, the center raised \$1,400 to create garden beds in the shelter's yard and before that it raised \$5,000 to fix the shelter's roof.

Kodiak Women's Resource and Crisis Center is holding its current fundraiser in conjunction with Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Tiller said.

Donations make up about \$100,000 of the Crisis Center's budget, according to Executive Director Rebecca Shields. This money goes a lot further than the things it can buy: It is tangible proof that the Kodiak community supports the Kodiak Women's Resource and Crisis Center's efforts, which makes the center eligible for certain state and federal grants, Shields said.

"The fundraising that we do [is] a very important part of being able to keep our agency strong and healthy and able to do the work that we do," Shields said.

This past year, the Crisis Center has faced unique and unprecedented challenges due to the pandemic, according to Tiller.

Nationwide reports of domestic violence have increased dramatically since the start of the pandemic, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found. This is due in part to the fact that more families stayed home, which forced victims to be in closer proximity to their abusers for longer periods of time, according to the CDC.

In Kodiak, call-ins to the shelter have declined, according to Tiller, but she doesn't think it's because abuse has stopped. Tiller suspects that cases of domestic violence are increasing, but victims are facing more obstacles in seeking help.

"We were hearing less from people, but we knew they weren't safe," Tiller said. "That was really scary: to know that there were people who needed help but the people who were hurting them were right over their shoulders and stopping them from getting help."

Since things have started to open up, call-ins have increased, according to Tiller.

The shelter can house up to 25 people at a time, Tiller said. Even though it is rarely full, it's never been empty during the two and a half years that she's worked there.

"We all love Kodiak and we want it to be a good, safe place for everyone, [but] there are a lot of people who are not safe and who are being hurt," Tiller said. "There's a lot of things that anybody can do to make that better."

Giving money to the center is one way that people can help, according to Tiller. Learning about the issue and listening to victims is another, she said.

The Kodiak Women's Resource and Crisis Center has a 24-hour hotline for victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. On Wednesday at 6 p.m. there will be training sessions over Zoom for people interested in volunteering for the hotline. These volunteers allow the full-time staff at the shelter to dedicate more time to working with victims at the shelter, Tiller said.

Local 24-hour domestic violence crisis hotline: 907-486-3625

U.S. National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 or TTY 1-800-787-3224