

## Domestic violence tops list of charges in Framingham

**By Laura Krantz/Daily News staff**

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FRAMINGHAM — Four and a half years ago, a Framingham man was found guilty of beating his wife and 11-year-old stepson to death with a hammer. The 2006 slayings rattled the community. And after that, things changed. Police and victim advocates began working together more deliberately to combat domestic violence.

Domestic assault and battery was the charge Framingham Police issued most frequently last year, after local warrant and outside warrant arrests, according to data from the police. Police recorded 173 charges of domestic assault and battery in 2012.

That statistic doesn't include 21 charges of domestic assault and battery with a dangerous weapon, two of domestic assault with intent to murder and about 56 other domestic-related charges. Every year, police also respond to hundreds of family matters that don't rise to the level of a domestic assault.

Those statistics don't surprise advocates who work to curb violence that happens at home. Instead, they say the numbers show police officers' better understanding of domestic violence and their strong partnership with advocates. The liaison is designed to stop violence before it escalates into incidents like the 2006 double-murder.

But the statistic also worry Mary Gianakis, director of Framingham-based Voices Against Violence, because the numbers don't reflect violence that continues, unreported.

"Those numbers are really a subset of the incidents of domestic violence in all of our communities," she said.

Nether do the statistics surprise Framingham Police Deputy Chief Ken Ferguson, who works with Gianakis. Ferguson said in recent years the number of domestic incidents has trended down.

"We don't get excited about it," he said, because it likely means fewer people are calling the police. Typically during tough economic times, domestic violence increases.

Budget cuts slashed a four-person domestic violence team the Framingham Police had in the 1990s, Ferguson said. Now they have a detective who specializes in domestic violence investigations. After the 2006 incident, the police developed a team to respond to high-risk domestic conflicts and gave all officers more general training.

They looked closer at how the court system handled domestic violence arrests and began working with prosecutors from then-Middlesex District Attorney Gerry Leone's office. The arrest statistics also don't reflect violence that was prevented by creative policing.

"Framingham has always had a reputation as being innovative around domestics," Ferguson said.

In other states an arrest is mandatory when someone claims to be a victim of domestic violence. In Massachusetts, an arrest is preferred but not required.

"We want them to arrest if they can, but we want them to have the decision backed up by training that allows them to intervene in that particular situation in the way that is safest for the victim," Gianakis said. Advocates step in while the victim is safe from the alleged abuser and advocates offer services.

Voices Against Violence is the local branch of Jane Doe Inc., a statewide coalition fighting domestic violence. Advocates help men and women caught in situations that don't have an easy exit.

"Victims say they don't want the relationship to end, but they want the violence to stop," said Toni Troop, a Jane Doe spokeswoman.

Sometimes the sheer volume of domestic and family issues police respond to every week make the work discouraging and repetitious.

"Remain vigilant," is what Ferguson tells his officers.