

Voices Against Violence Holds Annual Race in Framingham, Reports Increase in Survivors Helped

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Voices Against Violence reports an increase in domestic violence calls made to the center and the amount of survivors it has helped. But its director expressed concern over a lack of available homeless shelters statewide.



Runners at the start of the Voices Against Violence eighth annual Purple Passion 5K Walk/Run to Break the Silence fundraiser in Framingham Saturday morning. Voices against violence is a domestic violence agency and rape crisis center. [Daily News and Wicked Local Staff Photo/Ken McGagh]

FRAMINGHAM — “A dark past I did survive / A bright future I will thrive.”

A visibly pregnant Joanne Marchand, 26, of Framingham, leaned over a table as she wrote those words with a black marker on a yellow shirt, hung with more than a dozen others on a clothesline outside the South Middlesex Opportunity Council on Bishop Street.

It's for The Clothesline Project, a display of T-shirts created by survivors of domestic violence. It's inspired by members of the Cape Cod Women's Defense Agenda after discovering that while 58,000 soldiers were killed in the Vietnam War, 51,000 women were killed by men who claimed to love them.

Marchand was due to give birth to a son – Gage – on Friday.



Joanne Marchand, a domestic abuse survivor, adds a shirt to the Clothesline Project during the Voices Against Violence eighth annual Purple Passion 5K Walk/Run to Break the Silence fundraiser. . Her shirt read "A dark past I did survive, A bright future I will thrive." [Daily News and Wicked Local Staff Photo/Ken McGagh]

"I feel overdue," joked Marchand, wearing a Purple Passion 5K Walk/Run shirt and baseball cap, her pigtails braided. After seven months of dating her baby's father, he started "getting physical," she said.

"It started with really forceful pushing," said Marchand, detailing the abuse she suffered in the summer of 2018. One day, after they had both been drinking, he severely beat her,

pushing her to the ground and repeatedly kicking her in the head more than 20 times, resulting in a concussion and black eye.

"I was begging him to stop," she said, her neck nearly broken over a table corner. During the attack, her first concern was, 'Oh my God, he's going to go to jail.'"

While he was tossing things out the front door and screaming at her, a man passing by with his dog rushed into the house. Police arrived a short while later and arrested her ex-boyfriend.

"He really hurt me. He might have killed me if some guy wasn't walking by and saw him," she said. Her ex-boyfriend has Asperger syndrome and other mental health issues, she said, blaming it for his violent acts.

For more than a month after the attack, she couldn't look up without feeling dizzy. At the hospital, medical professionals asked what happened and she would only say, "Somebody kicked me" She wanted to protect him, so she didn't disclose his name.

"It's crazy that I justified him almost killing me," she said. "He claimed he was 'blacked out,' but I gave him that excuse before he could come up with it."

She ended up dropping the charges, and the restraining order ended. The ex-boyfriend moved back in after he was kicked out of his mother's home.

"I think after I OK'd him doing that, he was OK with just blatantly hitting me," she said, withstanding more hair-grabbing, pinching, punching and screaming. After buying a new television, he put his head through it.

"I forgave him every time," she said, hiding his behavior from everyone she knew and feeling guilty for it. "I always felt like I needed to protect him. I felt like a mom to him."



Jessica Balcom and Nick Loscocco of Ashland listen to speeches before the eighth annual Purple Passion 5K Walk/Run to Break the Silence fundraiser in Framingham Saturday morning. [Daily News and Wicked Local Staff Photo/Ken McGagh]

He stalked her at work, and she was fired from her job after her ex attempted to steal dozens of glow sticks from her employer. She was later kicked out of her home – partly due to her ex's behavior.

"We became homeless in a matter of three days," said Marchand, who currently stays at a homeless shelter. Last winter, he abandoned her at a library and blocked her on his phone and on social media. He knew she was pregnant at the time.

"He ended up leaving me for dead at a street corner and I haven't heard from him since," she said. On the right side of her chest, she has a domestic violence survivor ribbon tattooed.

"I always forgave wicked easily," she said, admitting that if that stranger hadn't stopped by while her ex was attacking her, she wouldn't have gone

to the hospital, and would have told her employer that her black eye was the result of a drunken mishap.

"When you're in that situation, it's kind of hard to get away from it," she said. "I absolutely loved him."

During Saturday's eighth annual Purple Passion 5K Walk/Run to Break the Silence fundraiser, she said events like this, where abuse is given center stage rather than whispered behind the scenes, helps her realize she's not alone.

“Because it doesn’t seem like such a problem when it’s your own little world,” she said. “I completely understand why some of these women end up getting murdered.” Peering down at her stomach, her hoop earrings dangling, she said, “at least I get him out of it.”

Marchand is among thousands of women worldwide who will suffer abuse from the hands of



Annie Carberry of Milton, a domestic abuse survivor, hugs Framingham mayor Yvonne Spicer after sharing her story during the Voices Against Violence eighth annual Purple Passion 5K Walk/Run to Break the Silence fundraiser in Framingham Saturday morning. [Daily News and Wicked Local Staff Photo/Ken McGagh]

those who claim to love them, and was among dozens at the annual Purple Passion 5K Walk/Run. The event is hosted by Voices Against Violence, a Framingham-based domestic abuse and rape crisis center serving 14 communities in MetroWest.

Money from the race supports domestic violence survivors and the resources they need to get help.

More than 100 runners participate in the race, which is growing by “leaps and bounds,” said Patricia Hohl, director of VAV, foreseeing the center crush its \$45,000 goal this year.

“That’s the biggest yet,” she said, noting the first race raised a little less than \$20,000.

During its most recent fiscal year, VAV helped more than 5,600 people, including direct services to more than 1,800 – a 20% increase from last year, said Hohl. Support calls have increased by 59% in just the past year, she added, and the organization has doubled its prevention staff.

“We think that’s a good thing,” Hohl said, because it shows that people are seeking help. “The #MeToo movement has definitely given people the courage to find their voice and come forward, but it’s still a very scary thing to do.”

While more seek help, one thing remains stagnant in Massachusetts – its number of homeless shelters, where many abused men and women, especially those undocumented, go when abuse leads to homelessness.

“Every domestic violence shelter in the state is full every night,” Hohl said. Stays are getting longer due to a continued lack of affordable housing. The average stay used to be about six to eight months – now, it’s about a year, she said.

“That’s a long time to live in a communal shelter,” she said. “It’s rough.”

Two shelters exist at SMOC: The Turning Point Shelter, an 18-bed shelter for single adult men, and Pathways Family Shelter, a 14-family congregate shelter for homeless families. There are three other shelters in Ashland and Marlborough.

According to the 2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, homelessness in Massachusetts grew by 14% from 2017-2018 - the largest increase in the nation.

Lauren Young writes about immigration, politics and social issues. Reach her at 315-766-6912 or lyoung@wickedlocal.com. Follow her on Twitter [@laurenatmilford](https://twitter.com/laurenatmilford).