

A look at combatting domestic violence in Gaston County

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Special to The Gazette

Combating domestic violence has been Bea Cote's life for 25 years. She works in five counties in the Charlotte region, and she told Belmont Rotarians recently that she "feels most welcomed and best heard in Gaston County."

Unfortunately, Gaston County is also where she is most needed, because she has more domestic abuser clients here than in either of her other counties, which include Mecklenburg, Cleveland, Lincoln and Union.

"You guys have a lot of domestic violence here," she said, pointing out two domestic violence murders have oc-

curred here in recent weeks.

While most domestic violence services are directed at helping victims, Cote's program, which she calls IMPACT+ Abuse Prevention Services, focuses on male abusers. Speaking at a Belmont Rotary luncheon program, she explained why by saying, "Only abusers can stop abuse. If we don't

provide them an effective way to do that, they are going to continue to abuse."

She went on to say, "Victims are our hidden clients. We work with the abusers for the victims. If you want to help victims, you must help abusers."

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Violence

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Cote, who takes no salary, said she has been working in Gaston County since 2007, and Queen of the Apostles Catholic Church in Belmont provides space to host her group sessions here.

Most of the abusers she serves are referred to her program by judges, and she laments that Gaston County has not established a dedicated domestic violence court. Each of the other four counties where she works has a special court for domestic violence cases.

"Domestic violence costs the county a lot of money," Cote said, "in lost wages, healthcare and education."

IMPACT+ Abuse Prevention Services is a nationally recognized non-profit program that cannot bill insurance and depends mainly on donations

for support. While abuser clients participating in the program are required to pay a modest fee, many can't afford it and contributions are mainly used to provide scholarships, so abusers can get the help they need to change their behavior.

In her many years of doing this work, Cote has seen lots of successes, but also some failures.

"Many of my guys become so much better after finishing the program," she said. "Some even come back as mentors to help other abusers."

But the failures can be hard to bear.

"The only abuser to complete the program and go on to kill someone was in Gaston County," she said.

To support IMPACT+ Abuse Prevention Services financially, or to talk with Bea Cote about getting help to change your behavior or that of someone you know, call 980-721-7268, or visit www.impactdv.org/#impact.



Bea Cote (left), founder of IMPACT+ Abuse Prevention Services, told the Belmont Rotary Club recently about her work to stop domestic violence by helping abusers change their behavior. Hosting the program was Rotarian Kathy Gauger, CEO of Catherine's House in Belmont, which serves homeless women with children. PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE BELMONT ROTARY CLUB.