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Vigil takes place to remember domestic abuse victims Lighthouse gives abused a safe haven to escape to

By ALAINA FAHY
The Eagle-Gazette Staff
afahy@nncogannett.com

LANCASTER -Dawna Wood credits the Lighthouse for being alive.

Wood was one of the speakers at the Lighthouse Vigil on Wednesday night. She shared her experience with domestic violence and explained how the Lighthouse helped her by providing counseling services and a safe haven for her.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The Lighthouse, a domestic violence shelter in Lancaster, organized a vigil Wednesday night, said Lighthouse caseworker Beverly Porter. About 100 people held candles in memory of the residents in Fairfield County who have died as a result of domestic violence and for those who haven't come forward yet.

"When I first went to the Lighthouse and talked to Bev, I just sat there and cried because I was ashamed," Wood said.

It's been 10 months since Wood left her abuser. And she's finally confident she would never go back to him.

"I believe that the Lighthouse helped save my life," she said. "And I believe that they've improved my son's life."

Patty Ciripompa, social programs director of Fairfield County Job & Family Services Adult Protective Services, said people often think domestic violence only affects women and children.

But Ciripompa shared a story about a client in the Adult Protective Services program who was a veteran from World War II and who was abused by his son.

Ciripompa said caseworkers noticed holes in the walls from someone punching the wall and empty beer cans scattered around the house.

The patient was being abused and caseworkers worked with the Lancaster Police Department to get a protective order to help the client.

Elder abuse is still a form of domestic violence, Ciripompa said. Not every case involves a young woman.

Some of the other speakers at the vigil included Suzanne Pelletier Walker, executive director of the Lighthouse; Judge Patrick Harris; and Kate Varga, from the family stability unit of Fairfield County Job & Family Services.

The sad thing about many vigils is that the only people to attend the event are those who already know domestic violence is a problem, Harris said.

If everyone at the vigil told someone they know about how to get help or how domestic violence affects others, maybe something more would be done.

"Take this message out to the community," Harris asked of the men and women who attended the vigil.
