

Foundation holds initial gathering at Cal State SB

By Michel Nolan Staff Writer

SAN BERNARDINO — It's the dirty little secret nobody wants to talk about, said Kathi Harper, executive director of Big Bear Lake-based DOVES, or Domestic Violence Education and Services.

On Thursday, local and national experts on violence against women and fund developers gathered at Cal State San Bernardino for Time for Change Foundation's "Leading with Strength" providers conference.

"Domestic violence is a state, regional and local problem. California looks at domestic violence as a criminal justice problem, but it is also a health issue," Harper said.

"Here is the face of domestic violence in San Bernardino County: In 2008-2009, our seven county agencies answered 7,954 crisis calls; provided outreach services to 8,220 victims; sheltered 854 adults and 806 children; and provided transitional housing for 176 mothers and children," said Harper, a former prosecuting attorney and member of the county's Coalition of Domestic Violence Shelters and the state's Partnership to End Domestic Violence.

"We do it all with funding — very little funding — so it's about collaboration, collaboration, collaboration."

Harper was among the experts and advocates at the inaugural conference

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sponsored by The California Endowment, a health foundation founded in 1996 to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities.

Budget cuts and ramping down of state services have made timing critical. Rosie Hidalgo, director of public policy for Casa de Esperanza, Washington, D.C., has been involved in helping advocates on Capitol Hill with some critical pieces of legislation.

"The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act, which was first authorized in 1984, is up for reauthorization — in fact already expired," Hidalgo said. "What we really need is the voices of constituents to talk about the critical need to members of Congress so they can prioritize and allocate funding."

Those immersed in their communities know the dire need, according to Hidalgo.

"As California's budget continues to be decreased, I want to make sure the state's homeless shelters and job training programs and other services people need to live do not bear the brunt of the fiscal irresponsibility of politicians in Sacramento," said Kim Carter, founder and executive director of the Time for Change Foundation, headquartered in San Bernardino.

"The best way I could do that is make sure that those who do advocate for domestic violence providers and shelters are able to help make policy work. That's life and death," Carter said. "The daylong conference is aimed at strengthening coalitions among area hospitals, shelters and domestic violence and sexual assault providers in the face of those state budget cuts threatening vital services to women and children in need."

Zaheva Knowles, spokeswoman for Time for Change Foundation, said, "At one point the governor line-item vetoed all domestic violence shelter provider funding in the state and these women worked together as a coalition to get that funding reinstated. We were facing shelters closing, no services available, especially communities out here where it's really necessary."

"What we'd like to do is build on that strength and encourage them to continue to advocate for the issues important to them and the women they work with," Knowles said.

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