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Turning Point honors supporters

By **JOANNE PERSINGER**

Even as those allied in the fight against domestic violence looked their enemy in the eye Monday evening, the air was filled with an undeniable aura of hope.

The occasion was Turning Point Domestic Violence Services of Jackson County's annual report to the community, putting down in black and white the statistics of domestic violence and also hearing speaker Ray Williams tell of his own personal tragedy, the murder of his daughter by her husband.

But thanks to community support and people such as Williams, who take their stories public to raise awareness of the problem, more and more people are becoming aware of the issue of domestic violence, and more help has become available for victims.

In recognition of that support, Turning Point's Mission Partner Award went to the Cummins Foundation for financial support — \$10,000 annually — that has helped make possible Rhea Murray's position as community service director for Jackson County for Turning Point. It also allows her to spend the majority of each week in this county. The larger Turning Point organization offers domestic violence and rape victim emergency services for Columbus, Greensburg, Seymour, Greenwood, Shelbyville and Madison.

"I'm only here three days a week because of (the need for more) funding," Murray said, but added that "a very vital support group" also has been established in Jackson County.

This year, the Volunteer of the Year Award went to not one, but four, recipients, all part of a Leadership Jackson County team. Those team members were Kim Allman, Missy Woods, Crystal Self and Charlene Mellencamp. The women were honored for their efforts in collecting used cell phones and distributing shoe safety cards throughout the county.

The Turning Point Survivor Award recipient remained anonymous, but her story was revealed.

In a bad situation that she hoped would get better, "Hope died hard one night, when she had to run for her life," Murray said, when the woman's abuser tried to shoot her.

She has since dealt with slashed tires, cut brake lines and a day in court that, thanks to a burdened legal system, never seems to arrive.

But, Murray said, "She keeps moving forward."

She enrolled in college, and she's still attending classes, even though she's been told by her doctor that her optic nerve was damaged and her vision fading.

"Her dream is still intact," Murray said.

Wrapping up the evening was Pat Smith, executive director of Turning Point, who keyed in on safety as a rallying point for Turning Point, its supporters and those they serve.

Three things that victims can do to be safe, he said, were to go to a shelter, contact a domestic services agency and file for a protective order.

Turning Point is a United Way agency, and Ruth Ann Rebber, United Way of Jackson County's executive director, asked for a moment at the end of the program.

Rebber took that moment to urge those present to "let the county commissioners and county council know you want the third court in Jackson County. ... Jackson County courts are jammed."

Several community leaders are advocating for creation of a third court, one that could be designed to handle family issues and relieve pressure on the existing circuit and superior courts.

Legislation allowing a third court could be proposed in the 2006 Indiana General Assembly, but financial support through Jackson County Council is considered an essential prerequisite for legislators approving any such bill.

About Turning Point

Turning Point is a nonprofit organization designed to provide 24-hour emergency services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

It provides these free services: emergency shelter, emergency transportation, advocacy, support groups, community outreach services, information and referral and children's programs

It offers help to domestic violence victims through its outreach offices in five Indiana counties, including Jackson County (523-3472).

Its 24-hour crisis line is (800) 221-6311. (If you are in immediate danger, call 911.)

Turning Point is a Jackson County United Way agency. Donations may be made by contacting United Way at 522-5450.

Source: ww.seymour.org/Community/tp/TPFAQ