

# Domestic abuse has some costly consequences

**By Sharon Hall**  
**The Nugget**  
*(October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. This is the second in a series series on the topic.)*

While nearly everyone can understand the non-monetary cost of domestic violence to its victims, the pain, suffering and unhappiness. Many, however, do not understand that they, too, share in the consequences of abuse, especially physical abuse. There is a financial cost of domestic violence that is shared by everyone, not only the victim, but the community, business and society as a whole.

Financial costs of domestic violence falls into two categories—direct and indirect costs. Many indirect costs still have an economic impact.

The most studied and easiest to quantify are the direct costs. These measure the value of goods and services used to respond to domestic violence. Direct costs include healthcare, social and welfare services, legal services,

police and criminal justice services, shelter and housing costs, special education and counseling services for children of abused women and the cost of replacing property damaged by an abuser.

"In 2003 the CDC (Center for Disease Control) estimated domestic violence cost the U.S. economy over \$5.8 billion," said Cara Ledford. "Last year it was estimated that domestic violence cost the U.S. economy over \$12.6 billion. That's more than double in the past 10 years."

Ledford is the executive director of NOA (No One Alone), Lumpkin County's shelter program for victims of domestic violence.

Healthcare is the biggest chunk of direct costs. It is estimated that one-fifth of patients treated in emergency rooms are there due to injuries suffered in a domestic violence incident. (Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics)

And it's not just the immediate medical care that is a consequence. According to the National Center for In-

jury Prevention and Control, health care costs for victims of domestic violence can persist as much as 15 years after the abuse takes place. The increased need for medical treatment can be a result of the impact on the body or the result of chronic stress. Conditions associated with domestic abuse include asthma, bladder and kidney infections, fibromyalgia, central nervous system disorders, joint disease and migraines, among others.

Mental healthcare is also a large part of the cost of abuse. Victims suffer from low self-esteem, depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, even obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizophrenia and bipolar disorders.

Battered women are 15 times more likely to be at risk for alcoholism, and nine times more likely to abuse drugs, according to a study by the Attorney General Task Force on Family Violence.

Ledford said NOA spends between \$30,000 and \$35,000 on individual counseling and

support groups each year for the women who enter its shelter program.

Another direct cost of domestic violence stems from law enforcement and the courts. In Lumpkin County, the sheriff's office handles between 10 and 20 domestic violence cases each week and they account for about 80 percent of all calls, said Chris Sosebee, Person's Crime Investigator. Depending on the severity of the situation, Sosebee said, anywhere from a couple of hours to all day can be spent on one case.

In addition to the cost of the initial response, there is the cost of obtaining a Temporary Protective Order, prosecution and probation services if the accused is found guilty.

There are also indirect costs that have an economic impact on victims, businesses and the public sector. For businesses, the costs relate mostly to lost productivity and lost days.

Victims of abuse often miss work due to injuries, but also because of fear their abuser may show up at their

workplace, or due to depression. The CDC estimates victims of domestic violence missed nearly eight million days of work in one year—the equivalent of losing more than 32,000 full-time jobs from the U.S. economy.

Friends and family members may also miss work in order to help the victim.

Even when victims of abuse are at work their productivity is often affected. Low self esteem, depression and elevated stress levels lead to poor concentration.

There is also a higher rate of turnover in victims of domestic violence. This causes employers the added cost of training new employees.

Another indirect cost of domestic violence is its effect on the children of victims. Disruptions in home life often cause children to miss school. The International Center for Research on Women estimates children in homes where domestic violence occurs are about half a year behind their peers. These youngsters also have higher dropout rates. Both results depress the earning potential of children and pass on the negative economic effects to the next generation.

Children who witness domestic violence also often have behavior problems, and increased levels of juvenile delinquency—another cost to the community and society. By witnessing abuse, they have learned that violence is an acceptable means of solving problems.

"The majority of children that come into shelter have many of the same issues," said Lindsey Plant, Case Manager for NOA. "The trauma of abuse affects most children in the same way. We see many forms of reactive attachment with mom; fear of abandonment; night terrors; bedwetting; poor anger management; high-risk play; either aggressive or passive or attention-seeking behaviors; defiance of authority; and poor boundaries. In most cases, mom has not set up appropriate boundaries and then the children are getting away with everything. And there are cognitive issues.

Trauma affects frontal lobe development and can create learning disabilities."

NOA case workers spend, on average, two hours a day working with children in one-on-one counseling, support groups and parenting classes with their mothers, Plant said.

"We also work in coordination with the school counselors and teachers to provide the best possible resources for these kids in all environments," she said.

Children who witness domestic violence often repeat the cycle. The cause and effect have been well documented. Boys who witness abuse are more likely to become abusers, and girls are more likely to become victims later in life.

While the costs cited above are startling, they most likely only scratch the surface of the true costs. Domestic abuse often goes unreported. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, as much as 75 percent of physical assaults by an intimate partner are never reported to law enforcement. For the 25 percent of cases that are reported, the abuse isn't reported until the victim has been battered by her partner or ex-partner 35 times.

"At the end of the day, DV impacts the lives of every single one of us, either personally or collectively," Ledford said. "Whether you are merely paying more in taxes due to domestic violence, an employer who lost a valued employee, a family member or friend of a victim or the victim, the message NOA wants to get out is that domestic violence is not acceptable—period. Our vision is to create a community with zero tolerance for all forms of violence and abuse."

If you are a woman in an abusive situation, NOA's crisis line number is 706-864-1986. Calls are handled by trained staff and is available 24/7, offering immediate crisis intervention, confidential emotional support, and information about its shelter and support services, as well as referrals to other resources in the community.

If you are under immediate threat, however, call 9-1-1.

## LOST

Continued from Front Page

That ruling is what created the need for the city and county to agree on a split of LOST proceeds on their own.

When the ruling first came down Oct. 7, the county decided to offer to sign an agreement with the city—for an 82.5 percent share of LOST, leaving 17.5 percent for the city. In addition, the board voted unanimously to file a motion to vacate Judge Christian's order of a 75/25 split.

The city voted to turn down the county's offer in emergency session Oct. 11, as reported in last week's edition of *The Nugget*.

Between Oct. 11 and Oct. 16 the mayor, city councilmen, county commissioners and the commission board chair probably spent a lot of time on the phone and sending emails back and forth. By 2 p.m. on the 16th city council met to discuss a compromise offer from the county. The county offered to go with the 25/75 split until Dec. 31, 2014. Presumably, the city and county would renegotiate a new split during the time prior to the expiration date.

And there's the rub. Both the Association for County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) and the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) advised local governments to submit "clean" certificates—certificates without condi-

tions, "... such as future termination dates ..." the joint letter states.

The city sent a proposal back to the county requesting it dismiss with prejudice its motion to vacate Judge Christian's order and stipulate it would not appeal the judge's ruling. They also requested the two local governments begin service delivery strategy meetings no earlier than two weeks from the date of the agreement, and then begin talking about LOST again once the service delivery issue is settled.

The two bodies met at 5 p.m. last Wednesday to discuss the certificate and terms of agreement.

Starting off the meeting, Mayor Gary McCullough said there had "been a lot of talking, accusing and a lot of things that probably shouldn't have been said." He then asked Commission Chair Chris Dockery if the county was willing to see LOST not be collected if the city didn't agree to the Dec. 31, 2014 expiration. The answer he got was in the affirmative.

"Well, I guess we need a motion to exercise the certificate," McCullough said.

Councilman Sam Norton made the motion and Councilman Johnny Ariemma seconded.

Discussion followed, with Councilman Gerald Lord voicing concerns about the expiration date. That one sentence, he said, could cause DOR to reject the certificate.

"The ACCG and GMA both recommend we submit a clean

certificate. This is not a clean certificate," Lord said.

Dockery said he had spoken with Clint Mueller with ACCG.

"The joint letter said the Department of Revenue may not accept a certificate that's not clean, but the intent was to say they would not facilitate a renegotiation in the future," he said.

Dockery also told Lord he spoke with Sen. Steve Gooch, who said State Attorney General Sam Olen said, "... if we come up with a certificate, sign it and submit it."

Gooch told *The Nugget* he spoke with Olen, officials from GMA and ACCG and the governor's office. "They all said if they can come up with an agreement, sign the certificate, clean or not, and get it turned in so the revenue collections don't lapse. Something had to be sent back in," he said. "I think the legislature will come up with some clear guidelines this session, and that there is some flexibility until that happens."

But no one knows for sure what the Revenue Commissioner will do.

"As to what the Department of Revenue will do with any certificate filed," said city attorney Doug Parks, "no one at this time knows until further action by the Supreme Court, the legis-

lature, the Attorney General or the Revenue Commissioner. One of those entities has to take the lead to bring some certainty to the situation."

Lord was also concerned about the cost of negotiation, he said, as was Councilman Johnny Ariemma.

"So in October 20014 we go into renegotiations. We've already spent a lot on legal fees," Lord said.


"I hope in the future we don't drag the public through another costly legal battle," Ariemma said.

"We're hoping the General Assembly gives us some clear guidance by then. This gives us an opportunity to hear what comes out of Atlanta," Dockery said.

"Any less money to the city also affects the county. We're all the same community," Ariemma told *The Nugget* after the meeting. "It's a shame to be exhausting the taxpayers resources because that point is not realized."

Dockery congratulated the board on its good behavior over the past few weeks.

"Tempers have run high," he said, "and I commend our board. There's been no name calling, and I'm proud of that. It's good to be able to sit at the table and reach an agreement."



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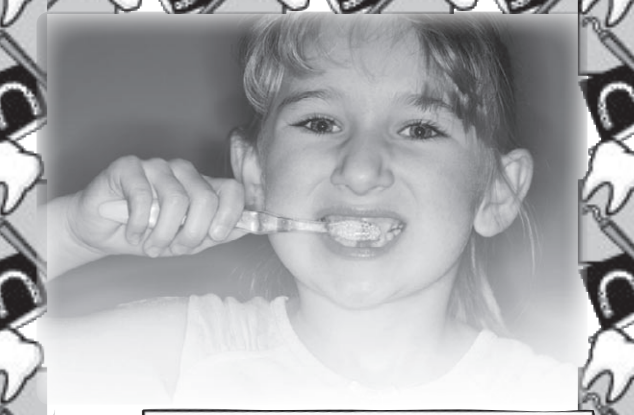
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**Former Lumpkin County student Robin Richardson Wooten extends an invitation to all to come out for a weekend of fun and live entertainment.**

The band **Southern Xposures FX** will be playing on **Sat., Oct. 26th** from 7-10pm at the **Etowah River Campground** between Dahlonega & Dawsonville, GA. Also they will be playing on **Sun. Oct. 27th** from **Noon-2** at the **Moonshine Festival** in downtown Dawsonville on the Finish Line Stage.

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### Nov. 5th Special Election for Continuation of 1% Educational SPLOST

- The **deadline for voter registration, name changes, or address changes is 10/7**. Go to <http://www.sos.georgia.gov/MVP/Login.aspx> OR call (706)864-6279 to check your status and precinct.
- **Sample Ballots:** Go to [www.lumpkincounty.gov/dept/election](http://www.lumpkincounty.gov/dept/election) OR come to the Lumpkin County Election & Voter Registration Office, 99 Courthouse Hill, Suite G, Dahlonega, GA.
- **Advance Voting:** 10/14 - 11/1, M-F, 8am-5pm at the Lumpkin County Community Center, (Parks & Rec) 365 Riley Road, Dahlonega, GA.
- **Vote by Mail:** Go online to <http://www.lumpkincounty.gov/dept/election>, "Links," "Absentee Information." Fill out and print the absentee ballot application, mail it, or fax it to (706)864-0731 OR call (706)864-6279 to request an application. All applications must be received by 11/1. All voted ballots must be received by 7:00pm on 11/5.
- **Vote Election Day:** Polling places are open 11/5, 7am-7pm. Be sure to check your status before Election Day.

**Advance Voting or Vote by Mail options are available to everyone.**

The ballots to be used at such referendum shall have written or printed thereon substantially the following:

Shall a special one percent sales and use tax for educational purposes be imposed in Lumpkin County for a period not to exceed twenty (20) calendar quarters and for the purpose of raising not more than \$19,500,000 of net proceeds by said tax, which shall go to the School District for the purpose of (i) adding to, renovating, repairing, improving, equipping, and demolishing existing school buildings and school system facilities, including, but not limited to, roofing, HVAC and physical education/athletic facilities and fields; (ii) acquiring new computer hardware and software; (iii) acquiring miscellaneous new equipment, fixtures, and furnishings for the school district, including, but not limited to, safety and security equipment; (iv) acquiring school buses and transportation and maintenance equipment and facilities; (v) acquiring, constructing and equipping new buildings and facilities useful and desirable; (vi) acquiring land; and (vii) purchasing textbooks, the maximum amount sales and use tax proceeds to be spent on projects (i) through (vii) shall not exceed \$19,500,000.

Yes
  No