

Domestic violence group names Scarborough woman as volunteer of the year

Safe House of Saco also receives recognition.

Mary Lou Smith, 82, from Scarborough, has been named Volunteer of the Year by a national domestic violence-prevention organization for her work with Finding Our Voices.

The Purple Ribbon Awards is run by experts in the domestic violence field and, according to DomesticShelters.org, "is the first comprehensive awards program honoring the countless heroes of the domestic violence movement, including advocates, programs, shelters, survivors and members of the community support system."

Judges include Ruth Jewell of Maine who founded the Penobscot Nation domestic violence/sexual assault program; Barry Goldstein, the leading international expert on domestic violence and child custody; and Katie Ray-Jones, CEO of the National Domestic Violence hotline.

Smith, who taught first grade in Old Orchard Beach and Raymond, said "I am humbled and honored to receive The Purple Ribbon Award for my commitment and passion to Finding Our Voices.

"I stand tall beside all

my sister survivors who work tirelessly to bring awareness and hope to those still living in abusive relationships. I lost my soul to domestic violence for 43 years. It took courage and hard work to resurrect the REAL Mary Lou. I want our young children to learn early that "LOVE DOESN'T HURT" and to feel safe and strong and not accept any kind of abuse."

Smith's abuser and husband of 43 years was a University of Southern Maine professor.

Patrisha McLean, founder/president of Maine-based Finding Our Voices, said "Mary Lou's boundless energy and huge heart are an inspiration to me and countless others. Despite the darkness she was under for so long, she exudes light and is all about bringing others into this light."

Smith co-facilitates, with McLean, a weekly online sister-support group and domestic violence-themed book clubs at the women's unit of Windham Prison and for the general public.

She has walked up and down long Main Streets from Eastport to Bridgton putting up Finding Our

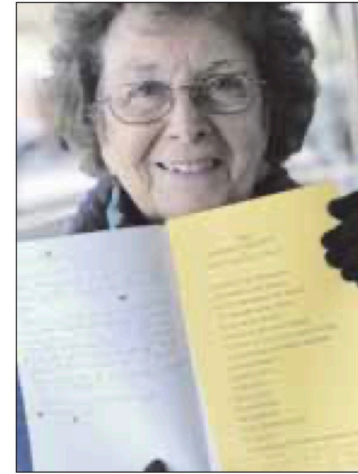
Voices posters and distributing bookmarks, along the way having important heart-to-heart conversations with store owners, managers, and customers. She provides sister support by corresponding — with her trademark red and yellow hearts — with countless victims/survivors, and is a tireless ambassador for Finding Our Voices, handing out the group's bookmarks even while being wheeled into the operating room last year for surgery. She also inscribes copies of domestic abuse-awareness books which, in a Finding Our Voices initiative funded by the Maine Humanities Council, are paired with a bookmark featuring the inscriber and gifted to Maine victims.

In the past five years, Smith also published many pieces about domestic violence in the Portland Press Herald and speaks about her journey in and out of abuse, including showing a video of this journey by Jen Widor Smith, to many organizations throughout Southern Maine.

Finding Our Voices, based in Camden, also won a 2022 Purple Ribbon for "outstanding awareness

campaign" for its bookmarks that are scaled down versions of the grassroots nonprofit's posters and feature the faces of 43 named Maine domestic abuse survivors including an incarcerated woman and Governor Janet T. Mills.

The survivor-powered bookmarks and posters broke the silence of domestic abuse in South Portland, Biddeford and the The Old Port in past weeks and on Aug. 11 are returning for the third time to the downtown businesses of Boothbay Harbor. The posters are in the dressing rooms of every Goodwill in Maine, New Hampshire and Northern Vermont, virtually all high schools in Maine, and also every Family Planning clinic



Mary Lou Smith, with a book she inscribed for a domestic abuse victim, one of the many ways she is breaking the silence all across Maine through Finding Our Voices.

Courtesy photo/ Patrisha McLean

in the state, and smaller versions are now going into bathrooms of restaurants.

Safe House out of Saco won 2022 Purple Ribbons

for Outstanding National Organization, Program/ Shelter of the year, and also Outstanding Service

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Domestic violence resource center needs Helpline volunteers

By Tammy Wells
Courier / Post

Calls to the Helpline for Caring Unlimited, York County's resource center that helps victims of domestic violence, are up considerably since the pandemic began — at a time when volunteers to staff the 24-hour Helpline are at an all-time low.

The agency, which began providing services in 1977, serves about 2,000 people experiencing domestic violence each year. They are looking for more volunteers to staff the Helpline.

Betsy Fleurant, Caring Unlimited's Helpline and volunteer coordinator, said the agency receives about 300 Helpline calls a month, up from 200 to 250 monthly calls pre-pandemic.

"There's an increase in volume and in severity," she said in a recent telephone interview. "There's more physical violence."

Typically, the agency has 20 to 25 volunteers staffing the Helpline, said Fleurant. At the moment,

there are only 10 volunteers. When volunteers are not available, staff members cover the Helpline, adding 16 to 32 hours a month to their workload, she said.

"Caring Unlimited is experiencing a critical need for helpline volunteers," said Fleurant. "Without their support, our capacity to provide much needed round-the-clock services to those affected by domestic violence is stretched to the point of those important services being in peril."

Helpline volunteers typically take calls a couple of times a month.

Caring Unlimited is starting Helpline volunteer training on Monday, Aug. 22. Caring Unlimited staff say all Helpline advocates must complete the training, which is mandated by the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence. The training includes practice calls and opportunities to shadow experienced staff advocates before volunteers' first shifts. Technology allows Helpline advo-

TIDE CHART

		HIGH		LOW	
		A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
Fri	August 12	11:57	-	5:42	5:52
Sat	August 13	12:10	12:49	6:34	6:47
Sun	August 14	1:04	1:39	7:24	7:40
Mon	August 15	1:56	2:28	8:12	8:33
Tues	August 16	2:47	3:18	9:00	9:27
Wed	August 17	3:41	4:08	9:49	10:24
Thurs	August 18	4:37	5:00	10:40	11:21
Fri	August 19	5:34	5:54	11:33	-

cates to take calls in their homes. To apply online, visit www.caring-unlimited.org.

The Helpline serves as the initial point of contact for many who reach out to Caring Unlimited for information, guidance, support, and safety planning.

"The Helpline ensures that anyone in need of services is able to speak directly to an advocate anytime, free of charge," said Fleurant. "For individuals experiencing domestic violence, the ability to access the Helpline 24 hours a day is essential: survivors often have limited options for when they can safely make a phone call and speak freely with an advocate."

According to the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, one in four women and one in 10 men have experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner and reported the impact (being fearful,

concerned for safety, needed medical care, needed help from law enforcement, missed work or school, etc.) during their lifetime.

Advocates from the coalition network, of which Caring Unlimited is a member, worked with 12,516 people statewide in 2020. Of the total served, 612 people found safety in a domestic violence resource center sheltering program, which represents fewer than 5 percent of the total number of people served in 2020, the coalition noted.

As well as the 24-hour Helpline, Caring Unlimited provides emergency shelter, transitional housing, individual and group advocacy and support, and legal assistance to those who experiencing domestic violence. The agency provides community education, training, and consultation to youth and adults.

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SMITH

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Launch for its free, national phone app directing people in crisis to resources.

Eliza Conley-Lepene, founder/CEO/president of Safe House, is one of the survivors on the Finding Our Voices bookmarks and posters.

The awards put Finding Our Voices and Safe House in the running for \$30,000 of prize money, with the selection announced at the virtual Purple Ribbon Awards celebration on

September 21.

The Finding Our Voices multi-media exhibit featuring Patrisha McLean's photo portraits of Mary Lou, Eliza, and 41 other Maine survivors, as well as documentation of the abuse the women transcended, is at the University of Maine Hutchinson Center in Belfast through October. For more information about the exhibit and Finding Our Voices visit FindingOurVoices.net. For more information about Smith, visit her Finding Our Voices website page at <https://findingourvoices.net/mary-lou-archive>

SACO

Continued from page 1

informed of the progress of all City Council directives, the general financial standing of the city, status of all negotiations, and the like.

The proposal that will go to the voters was amended. It was originally written to

The mayoral office proposal was introduced by Councilor Joseph Gunn, who said he agreed with the proposed change in the start date, because he wanted to avoid any perception he was trying to secure a City Hall office space for a particular mayor.

If approved by voters, according to information included in City Council

INSURANCE