

Calls to sexual assault, domestic violence hotlines up

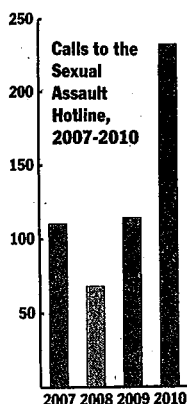
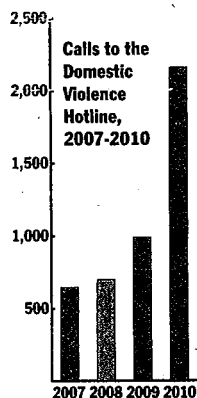
By **TAHLIA HONEA**
Staff Writer

Within the past year, calls for help — such as emergency shelter or need for legal referrals — from victims of domestic violence and sexual assaults more than doubled, according to Skagit Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Services.

“That’s a ridiculously big jump,” said Courtney Long, sexual assault services coordinator with the agency.

Long said it’s hard to say what has caused the increase in calls to the hotline — if more people are being assaulted, more people are becoming aware of the agency’s services or if the lack of other resources due to budget cuts elsewhere is bringing more people to the agency.

Dramatic increase



“Everybody’s tapped,” she said.

Long also said the tough economic times may be contributing to higher stress and exacerbating domestic violence and assault situations.

“It’s the perfect storm,” Long said.

In 2009, the agency received 988 domestic violence-related calls. That number jumped to 2,161 in 2010. Similarly, the hotline received 114 sexual assault-related calls in 2009, which increased to 233 in 2010.

Emergency shelter use also has increased.

“Now we’re full almost all the time,” Long said.

Law enforcement officials say they haven’t seen a noticeably large increase in reports of domestic violence or sexual assault.

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and there will be several events in the county to bring

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attention to the issue.

“It’s a terribly under-reported crime,” said Anacortes Police Chief Bonnie Bowers. “We just hope victims would come forward and we’re creating an environment where victims feel safe to disclose.”

Skagit County Sheriff’s Office Chief Criminal Deputy Tom Molitor said two detectives with his agency have started an undercover sting operation where they pose as teen girls on the Internet and try to lure men to meet them for sex. Within the first day, officers made two arrests.

“Unfortunately we found that it is a problem here,” Molitor said. “It took off very quickly into more than we thought it would. We’re going to keep working it. It’s not welcome here.”

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Get involved

Several events will be held around the county for Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

What: Skagit Take Back the Night Rally and March

When: 6 to 8 p.m., Thursday, April 28

Where: starting in the Skagit Valley College Multipurpose Room and continuing onto College Way.

The rally will include several community members sharing their experiences of surviving sexual violence and providing support to those who have experienced violence. A march will follow.

What: Wear Denim, Raise Awareness of Sexual Violence

When: all day Friday, April 29

Where: Everywhere Denim Day is an annual event based on a 1998 Italian Supreme Court ruling that overturned a rape conviction, setting free a 45-year-old man on the basis that his alleged victim’s jeans were so tight she must

have helped him remove them, therefore making it consensual.

Residents are asked to wear denim and a button that reads “Ask Me About Denim Day.”

For more information about the buttons: 360-336-9691.

What: Shatter the Silence

When: 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, May 4

Where: Skagit Valley Food Co-op, Community Room 309, Mount Vernon

“Shatter the Silence” will be a forum exploring different ways that bystanders can intervene to create a community free of sexual assault.

For more information about the events or domestic violence and sexual assault services, call Skagit Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Services, 360-336-9591 or visit www.skagitdvsas.org.

The agency provides confidential assistance for victims of domestic violence; rape, child sexual abuse, stalking, elder abuse, sexual assault and sexual harassment.