



Monday, January 5, 2009 |  
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## Coalition combating county's domestic violence



Naem Mcfadden/STAR & ENTERPRISE

Various agencies presented information about their programs during a day-long workshop in Marion County recently.

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Marion County Pee Dee Coalition Coordinator and Advocate Sheila Awe is wearing purple.

A purple tablecloth drapes a table beside a wall of displays, with six candles in place, awaiting a flame. Awe says the candles are in remembrance of victims of domestic violence. The color she wears is in recognition of Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

The displays that line the interior walls of the auditorium in the Beeson Building in Mullins features educational items about community awareness and safety. The Pee Dee Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Assault, Marion County Advisory Council, Marion County Medical Center's A Women's Place, South Carolina Legal Services, Alternatives to Violence and Select Health of South Carolina, bring in their items for distribution.

All are part of a daylong community safety and information fair, where more than 50 women viewed student art displays and poetry written by victims of domestic violence. "We had 32 women die last year in South Carolina from domestic violence ... and Marion County is number one in the state in domestic

violence ... and South Carolina is seventh in the nation," Awe says, who has been at her position since July.

Sophia Davis and Clara Brockington, the director of alternatives to violence program works with the Pee Dee Coalition, helped to sponsor the event. Awe says 92 percent of first time offenders that participate in that program don't reoffend.

The event allows visitors to load plates of free food, highlighted by volunteer Ronald Anderson's chicken bog. Visitors also get an early start on Halloween, sitting down with a face painter. "If you're going through something, pick up the phone and call somebody," Awe says, adding that she provides a number of alternatives.

The group has a crisis hotline available 24 hours, at 1-800-273-1820. Individuals can also contact Awe at the Marion County satellite center at (843) 423-6568. Pee Dee Coalition covers seven counties, says Awe, and Brockington can be contacted at (843) 673-2008.

Community Liaison for Select Health, Felicia J. Blanding, says she covers the Pee Dee area, trying get the word out about health programs and how to choose the right plan. "Select Health is a Medicaid management care organization that offers expanded benefits where we pick up what Medicaid can't pay for, such as eye glasses, diabetes management, sickle cell management and asthma management programs," she says, adding that they've also partnered with the March of Dimes Healthy Babies program.

Select Health community events are open to the public and are free, she said, adding "Our health plan 'First Choice' provides free expanded health benefits to Medicaid families only. Our health plan 'First Choice Kids' provides free health insurance to uninsured children whose families earn too much income to qualify for Medicaid but not enough income to afford private health insurance."

More information on those programs can be found at <http://www.selecthealthofsc.com>. Mullins Police officer Betty Rowell, Marion Regional Healthcare System representative Patricia Montgomery, Trinity Behavioral Care prevention specialist Marquette Bethea and Brockington are part of the county's advisory council to the Pee Dee Coalition.

"I think it's a great event for the community because of the statistics in Marion County for domestic violence, so this is great for everybody. If you are a victim or know a victim, you can find somebody that can help," says Rhonda Johnson, another volunteer for the Pee Dee Coalition.