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Budget cuts translate into closed facilities, lesser services to fight domestic violence

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By **JULIA GLICK**
The Press-Enterprise

Christina escaped a husband who threatened and imprisoned her and her 10-year-old daughter in their remote home. She said they could never have gotten away without the assistance they received from the Temecula office of Alternatives to Domestic Violence.

This month, Christina attended her last group counseling session there and watched as staff packed up to close the office for good.

Christina, who asked that her last name be withheld for her safety, and other victims of domestic abuse now have fewer places where they can turn for help.

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Volunteer Angelica Costello formerly was a client advocate for Alternatives to Domestic Violence in Temecula. That outreach office is being closed due to a lack of funds.

In response to deep state funding cuts, several domestic violence agencies in Riverside and San Bernardino counties closed some of their outreach centers this month and began reducing services. Agencies said they will maintain their emergency shelters, 24-hour hot lines and other crisis services.

"It just puts us all in a terrible bind. The cuts just seem to me to be an inhumane way to save money," said Lynn Moriarty, executive director of Shelter From the Storm in Palm Desert, which aids battered women from Banning out to the Mexico and Arizona borders. "It will probably cost more money in the long run in law enforcement and health care costs, not to mention women and children are going to die."

On July 28, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger slashed \$20.4 million in funding from 94 nonprofit shelters and outreach centers around the state. In doing so, he cut the entire balance of the state's Domestic Violence Program, which has been funding agencies since 1996. The cuts amounted to double-digit percentage reductions to several local agencies' budgets.

Schwarzenegger's line-item budget veto was one of many needed to help close a \$60 billion state budget deficit, said Rachel Cameron, a spokeswoman for the governor's office.

"The governor understands how difficult these cuts are and sees the real Californians

and the real consequences behind them but had no other choice because the Legislature failed to pass a budget that closed the entire deficit," she said.

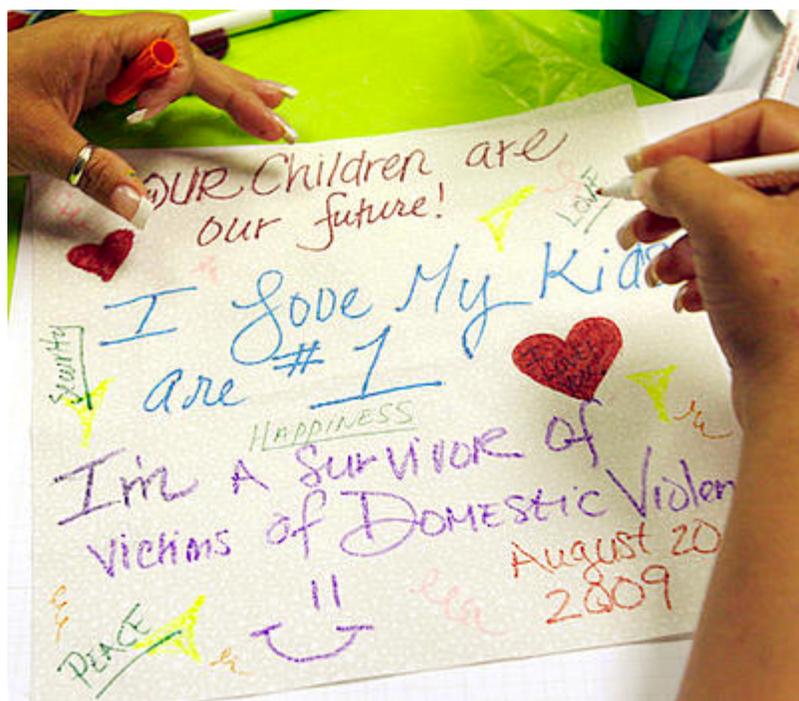
Cuts to Services

At least two Inland agencies said they had no choice but to shut down an outreach office.

Outreach centers can provide endangered women and children, who often lack resources and transportation, with counseling and basic necessities like food and clothing. The offices help clients to access social services, take out restraining orders and find safe permanent housing, among other services.

On Monday, Alternatives to Domestic Violence will close its Temecula office, one of four centers the nonprofit agency operates across Riverside County in addition to its 60-bed shelter.

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A client at the Riverside location of Alternatives to Domestic Violence creates a square for a support-group quilt.

The Temecula office has been open more than 15 years. Last fiscal year, it handled 515 crisis line calls, assisted about 400 families, including children, and sheltered four women from the Temecula area, said Chief Executive Officer Eliza Daniely-Woolfolk.

The governor's veto resulted in a loss of \$207,000 to the agency's roughly \$1.6 million annual budget, she said. The rest of the agency's funding comes from federal, local and private sources, she said.

People in southwestern Riverside County can still call the hot line but will need to travel to offices in Riverside, Corona or Hemet for face-to-face services and counseling from the agency, she said.

DOVES of Big Bear Valley is the only domestic violence agency serving communities in the San Bernardino Mountains. The governor's veto eliminated \$207,000 from its annual \$785,000 budget, said executive director Kathi Harper.

DOVES kept its 17-bed shelter and its main office in Big Bear Lake open, just barely, but had to shutter its Blue Jay outreach center this month and lay off four of the agency's 17 employees, she said. The Blue Jay office served the mountain rim communities from Crestline to Running Springs, which have no public transit link to Big Bear Lake.

"We are just broken-hearted about closing our rim office," Harper said. "We just feel like we are abandoning our victims down there, which we don't want to do. We are just trying to be creative in finding ways to reach out to them."

Rise in Demand?

Shelter From the Storm is still determining how it will absorb a \$250,000 cut to its \$2.3 million budget, Moriarty said.

It is seeking more private support, but individuals and foundations have less to give in the current economy, she said.

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The agency provides 200 spaces in its emergency shelter and transitional housing complex and runs eight Coachella Valley outreach centers. It has seen demand increase by about one-third at the same time funding is being cut, Moriarty said.

Option House, a domestic violence agency in San Bernardino, assisted 300 people in July at the county courthouse, up from the agency's monthly average of about 200 clients, said executive director Velda Griffin. The agency did not receive the state funding that was cut so it was not affected. But Griffin said she expects to see a

continuing increase in demand as neighbor agencies make cuts.

Government agencies keep some statistics on domestic violence, but they are not recent enough to show whether the state is seeing a rise in cases related to the economic downturn, said Camille Hayes, spokeswoman for the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence.

The coalition of more than 200 domestic violence organizations promotes awareness and advocates for policy change in Sacramento.

Member organizations have reported that more people are requesting their services, Hayes said. The economy has increased stress in families, and victims have fewer resources to escape dangerous situations, Hayes said.

Closures like the ones in Temecula and Blue Jay could exacerbate the problem, she said.

"Multisite agencies that are closing one or more offices, they are potentially leaving residents of certain areas more or less high and dry," Hayes said.

"They may now have to drive 50 or 60 miles to get help, which really isn't feasible, particularly when someone is in an emergency situation," Hayes said.

Christina, the client of Alternatives to Domestic Violence, had no choice but to take her husband's car to escape abuse, although she later returned it, she said.

After her husband stranded them in a freezing home with no electricity just before Christmas, she and her daughter fled the state where they lived with little but the clothes they were wearing, she said.

She has found a place to live in southwestern Riverside County and put her daughter in school but worries her girl has not fully recovered from the stress. She hopes to put her in programs the agency offers for children.

"Now, I will have to find time to take her to Hemet, Corona or Riverside," she said. "Things are going to be harder for the people who need help to get help."

Reach Julia Glick at 951-369-9442 or jglick@PE.com
