

Announcer:

In this special episode of Tim Talk, we're dispelling some myths about domestic violence.

Tim Dentry:

Welcome to Tim Talk. I'm Tim Dentry, President and CEO of Northern Light Health. I'm so glad that you have joined us today. And on prior podcasts we discussed the invisible, the topic of people feeling invisible, and also the invisible lives that people feel that they lead sometimes. So today I want to shine the light on the invisible. October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and we decided to record a special podcast to address this topic. Actually, those who work and live with this issue most intimately refer to October as Domestic Violence Activism Month. And I think that is fitting with Northern Lights position on being active on issues of social, racial and medical justice. Equality, inclusion, and diversity need to be embraced and defended. Today I ask you to join me in advocating for every person's right to feel safe in their relationships, homes and communities.

Tim Dentry:

These are uncertain and challenging times we are living in. Marginalized people are rising up and speaking their truths, and we are listening, learning, and amplifying their voices in service of all people, black, indigenous, people of color, immigrant, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer survivors. Just survivors need us now more than ever. Come along with us as we push ourselves outside of our comfort zones, into a space of learning, understanding, growing, and evolving together. We are fortunate to have some dynamic guests. Two of whom are Northern Light colleagues of ours who are sharing their stories to help us all have a greater standing of domestic violence.

Tim Dentry:

Joining me now are Tricia Mercer, Northern Light Director for Medical Group Practice Management and Ann-Marie Williams, Associate Vice President of Patient Care Services at Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center. You may know them both as I do, as senior leaders at Northern Light Health. They believe very strongly in our efforts to promote medical and social justice for all. But you're about to learn that they're both survivors of domestic violence who have courageously agreed to tell their stories, to dispel some of the myths and erase some of the stigma surrounding domestic violence. Also joining me today is Amanda Cost, Facilitative Director at Partners for Peace, a domestic violence prevention organization serving Penobscot and Piscataquis counties. Thank you all for being here today, Tricia, Ann-Marie and Amanda.

Amanda:

Thank you for having us.

Ann-Marie:

Thank you Tim.

Tricia:

Thank you Tim.

Tim Dentry:

So let's start Ann-Marie. You asked to be on our podcast because sharing your story is important to help people understand domestic violence. Please share some of your survivor experience and the most important messages you would like our listeners to hear and understand.

Ann-Marie:

Thank you Tim. I think for me, joining this podcast was important so that if I could help one person, one person being a colleague, one person being a coworker, then it was really important to come here and join this group and talk about some of the realities of domestic violence. And a couple of those realities that I like to really talk about is that domestic violence doesn't discriminate in terms of socioeconomic class. I think for me, people who didn't know that I had been in a domestic violence situation would say, "Gee, I never knew that you were in that situation. How is it that you as a strong woman, educated, how is it that you were in that situation?" So my first message is that it could happen to anyone of us. And secondly, to really look at domestic violence and think of it not only as a physical, sexual, but the emotional piece of domestic violence.

Ann-Marie:

And one of the terms that I learned along the way in my journey was the term gaslighting, where an example is that the victim cannot do anything, I'd say correctly. It's, "The food would've been better just if you'd added cheese to the recipe. You're not cleaning the house correctly. You're not doing something else correctly." For me, some of those trigger words were, you need to, because those were words that were said to me often, you need to, and then it was followed by whatever I needed to do better according to him. So those are the two messages again, coming to help someone dispelling the myth of, it could be any one of us and it's not people that are weak. It's anyone and it's not just about physical violence.

Tim Dentry:

Terrific. Thank you so much. And Tricia, please also share some of your survivor experience and-

Tricia:

Well, thank you so much.

Tim Dentry:

... the most important messages. Yes.

Tricia:

Thank you so much for having all of us here today. I think the most important message that I have is that when you're in this situation, the only one who really doesn't believe that you're there is you, and that your friends and family, they can see it, but they're helpless to help you. They're standing by waiting, but they can't do it for you. So as a person who watched my children be tortured by their father and then he blamed me for it, saying that I didn't love them enough to discipline them, you begin to believe that you are what they tell you you are. And you lose you to their opinion or their version of you. So talking about it, you have these doubts in your head. You have these visions in your head that this might be abuse, but then you talk yourself out of it and you determine that you could just be stronger, you could cook better, you could clean better, you can do better, and then everything will be okay.

Tricia:

So the hardest part is continuing to stay in the situation than actually coming out of it. When you find you again or even just a spark of you again, life gets easier. I had physical abuse in my house, not at me, only a couple times did he ever touch me, but it was mostly my children that he abused, but the emotional abuse is far stronger and far more debilitating. And the psychological torture, for lack of a better word, is far more debilitating and far more invisible than physical abuse. It's much harder to rise up against and to find the courage to stand up against because you're pushing on an invisible force field and you doubt yourself because over time, they break down your confidence in your own judgment.

Tricia:

So speaking about it and talking about it is extremely important. And if you find yourself in that situation, talk to a friend in confidence about what you think you're feeling, pay attention to what they say back, because they will reflect back to you, even if they don't tell you to leave, they will say, "You probably should pay attention to that." Or my dad would say, "Are you sure this is what you want?" That was his way of telling me to pay attention. So there's cues from people. You have to learn to trust yourself just for one second to say it out loud.

Tim Dentry:

Thank you Tricia. So now at this point I would like to bring in Amanda Cost from Partners for Peace. For the benefit of our listening audience Amanda, could you please first explain a bit about Partners for Peace and what services you provide.

Amanda:

Absolutely. Thank you for having me here Tim. And what an honor it is to be here with Tricia and Ann-Marie, to hear you share your stories and what you've been through in hopes that you can help others. That's what we do at Partners for Peace. We are the domestic violence resource center as Tim said, that provides support and services to people affected by domestic abuse and violence in both Penobscot and Piscataquis counties. There are organizations like ours throughout the state. And we also partner with the Wabanaki Women's Coalition in the Maine Immigrant Resource Center. Our job is to provide information and options and a listening ear to survivors so that they know that there's somebody around who can be helpful to them 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Our mission is twofold. We are about providing support, but we're also about making change.

Amanda:

That's why Domestic Violence Activism Month is a really important month for us. We want to make sure that we can work with partners like Northern Light. We want to work with other systems in our community to make sure that we are responding to the needs of survivors and victims of domestic violence. And also holding those who are committing the crime of domestic violence accountable for what they're doing in hopes that there can be some sort of restorative justice in our world, where domestic violence no longer exists. We are fortunate to have been in this community for almost 50 years now. We're the third oldest domestic violence organization in the entire country. We have an incredibly rich history of supporting individuals. And every day we learn something new because every day a different victim survivor comes forward and shares their story and hopes to get help and support and safety and also help others.

Tim Dentry:

Thank you. And Amanda, when you heard Ann-Marie and Tricia talk a bit about their personal story and the messages that they would like people to take away, what resonated with you the most as you heard their stories?

Amanda:

A couple of points I've been reflecting on, one being that domestic violence is something that can happen to anybody. There are a lot of ideas out there about who it happens to. Maybe we get an image or a profile in our head, and we can't believe that it could happen to our neighbor or our friend or a family member of ours, or even a colleague. And we have to dispel that myth because really it can happen to anybody, and it does. The other point that came to mind for me was everyone's situation is different. You may experience very similar abuse. Your abuser may use similar tactics as your friend, but the resources that you have access to, the things that you grew up knowing, what you value and believe may look very different from one person to another. And that really can impact a person's situation.

Amanda:

So everybody's situation looks a little bit different. It's a really complex thing, domestic violence is. For years we've been having people ask the question, "Why doesn't the victim just leave? Why don't they just pick up, pack up their bags and go, and that it would be all over with?" And we know that it's much more than that. There's so many different factors to think about. There's so many different unknowns. And in conversation earlier, listening to Tricia and Ann-Marie talk about those unknowns and that fear of the unknown, just really resonated with me because that is what we help survivors do every day, is imagine those unknowns and then put plans in place to help deal with them.

Tim Dentry:

Thank you so much. And Ann-Marie and Tricia, I wonder, with all of our listeners, if there's someone now listening to this podcast, once it's released, and this is striking home very personally to them. And if you were in front of them, what would you say? How would you connect and make them feel as embraced as we want all Northern Light individuals to feel embraced? And I'll start with Tricia and then Ann-Marie.

Tricia:

I think I would tell them that they're not alone and that life with your abuser is so much harder than life without it. And that when you're in that situation, getting out seems impossible, like you're just not capable, but that if you just take one step forward, and it doesn't have to be a full step, it just has to be researching domestic violence so that you can understand that you're in a bad situation, talking to somebody, asking questions, start to acknowledge that the situation is what it is because you can't solve anything until you believe there's a problem. You have to identify that there's an issue before you can fix it, and that no matter what you do, every day is one day closer to the end.

Ann-Marie:

Tim, I would say to those people listening and thinking about this is coming, maybe they're thinking that this is pertinent to their situation, would be not to feel guilty about not acting before now. That we all do the best we can do day-to-day and given the situation, and coming forward and asking for help. There are people that are not going to judge you for what you did, didn't do about the past, it's about looking forward and getting out of a situation safely for you and your children, and making that situation safe. It may even be your family members, extended family. So I would say, don't look back and feel

guilty about coming forward now, "Why didn't I do this sooner?" Everybody has their own threshold or breaking point maybe, and it's different for every person that's in that situation.

Tricia:

I think I would also tell them to take a look at the amount of strength it takes to stay, because it is incredibly difficult to stay. And when you're in that situation, the amount of time and effort and the amount of you that you give to staying, it's all of you. And getting into your own life, you actually will have capacity to give to others that you don't have when you're there. So staying is incredibly hard and knowing that you're already in a really hard place.

Ann-Marie:

I think the other piece too is that you're probably going to feel unsure, scared of those unknowns that Amanda spoke of when you're leaving or made that decision. And looking back, I was in that relationship for 17 years and I really wish that I could go back again and be able to partner and reach out to Partners of Peace and really connect with somebody who could help me with this roadmap because I didn't have a roadmap. And I think that there are resources out there. And the other piece too, is that some of our listeners may be listening to this and think, "Well, geez, I thought of myself being as a domestic violence victim." And again, it can look differently in every situation. And Tricia, I think spoke well to the psychological piece of domestic violence, it doesn't have to be the physical piece. But I would say that I agree that the torture was the right word for that. So maybe some of this is resonating for our listeners for the first time that they may be in a situation that's not healthy for them or their children.

Tricia:

It's okay to do something that's going to put your abuser in a situation where they're uncomfortable or unhappy. As an abuse victim, and I got to tell you, I had a hard time with that word for a long time. And I didn't like the word survivor either. I had to come through it to appreciate the terms. As an abuse victim, you spend your entire day, all your waking hours making sure that they're happy or that they're not unsettled. And coming through this process of getting out, it's okay that they're not happy. It's okay that they're unsettled, because you are moving towards a solution that's better for you and you deserve it.

Tim Dentry:

And you deserve it. Beautiful words to end this part of the discussion on. And I can say that before we sat around the microphones for this podcast, when the four of us huddled together and Tricia, you mentioned a wristband with a saying on it, be stronger than the storm. And so Ann-Marie and Tricia, you've shown incredible strength. Thank you very much. Before we go, if you or someone you know is a victim of domestic violence, Partners for Peace is a 24 hour help line, the number is 1-800-863-9909. Again, that's 1-800-863-9909. And their website is partnersforpeaceme.org. That will wrap up this episode of Tim Talk. A huge thank you to all our guests for sharing their stories, keep up the amazing work that you all do. And thank you to our listeners. Until next time, I'm Tim Dentry, encouraging you to listen and act to promote our culture of caring, diversity and inclusion, caring for one another. Thank you.

Announcer:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Tim Talk. If you enjoyed this podcast and would like to learn more about this subject, you can find additional information at northernlighthealth.org/podcast. We

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welcome you to join us for our next podcast on November 5th, when we will start expanding our conversation into the broader community.