

Dept. of Children and Families: Governor's Council on Domestic Abuse presents Outstanding Achievement in Domestic Abuse Issues Awards

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(MADISON) – The Governor's Council on Domestic Abuse, in partnership with Governor Tony Evers and the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, honored three individuals for their contributions in the fight against domestic violence during a special virtual ceremony held today. The ceremony was hosted as part of [Domestic Violence Awareness Month](#), a statewide effort to raise awareness about the effects of domestic abuse.

"This month serves as a critical reminder for all of us to reflect on what we can do help prevent domestic and intimate partner violence in our communities and to thank the dedicated individuals who work every day to help prevent violence and support survivors," said Gov. Evers. "Their work is needed perhaps now more than ever as the pandemic has further underscored the need for services. The folks we are honoring today play a critical role in those services in their communities and they have gone above and beyond to protect their neighbors, friends, and loved ones. On behalf of our entire state, we are truly grateful."

Since 1991, the Governor's Council on Domestic Abuse has selected recipients for Outstanding Achievement in Domestic Abuse Issues awards. This year's awardees are:

Jody Johnson of Shawano received the *Justice Award*, which honors an individual or

organization for outstanding accomplishment in promoting safety, empowerment, and justice for victims of domestic abuse and their children. Johnson, a law enforcement officer with Shawano Area School District, has spent the past 35 years working in the emergency services field. In this role, her compassion has helped countless survivors access help while also bringing abusers to justice. Additionally, Johnson has been a member of Safe Haven Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault Support Center's Board of Directors for almost 20 years and has helped the agency grow from its early infancy, working to raise funds and oversee multiple expansions, while also being one of the agency's strongest allies.

Cheryl Davis of Wisconsin Rapids received the Courage Award, which honors a survivor of domestic abuse who has turned adversity into triumph by creating positive change within their community to end domestic abuse. As a survivor, Davis has used her personal experience to help guide and uplift individuals experiencing abuse and has quickly become an inspiration to many. Davis, who is a pastor at First English Lutheran Church, regularly listens, counsels, advocates, and encourages individuals who are experiencing abuse and has helped countless individuals on their healing journey. Davis also sits on the Board of Directors at the Wisconsin Rapids Family Center and has established quarterly "Coffee with the Clergy" gatherings.

Sharon Lewandowski of Madison received the *Patricia J. Waschbisch Lifetime Achievement Award*, which honors an individual who has provided exceptional services to many survivors of domestic abuse over the course of a career and who has promoted a vision of ending violence and achieving social justice. The award is named for and commemorates the legacy of an advocate who lost her life in a domestic homicide in 2013. Lewandowski worked for the State of Wisconsin for 35 years, with the last 25 working in the domestic abuse program. In this role, she guided and supported the high quality and outstanding work now being done throughout Wisconsin to prevent and respond to domestic violence. Some of Lewandowski's great accomplishments include developing and supporting increased funding to culturally specific programming, her work building the capacity of programs to support children and teens as primary clients, and her deep commitment to anti-oppression and anti-racism work.

On a single day in Wisconsin, approximately 2,500 victims seek assistance from a domestic abuse program. Through a strong partnership between DCF and non-profit, county, and tribal partners, individuals are receiving specialized trauma-informed care that is allowing them to heal and become independent again.

“The passion, dedication and empathy of those who provide services and supports to domestic abuse survivors in Wisconsin is awe-inspiring,” said DCF Secretary Emilie Amundson. “Every day they perform the important work of ensuring all families feel safe from harm, and for that, we are forever grateful.”

DCF continues to work on preventing domestic abuse, educating a range of audiences about the impact the issue can have on families. In partnership with End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin, DCF launched [Dare2Know](#), a statewide, youth-focused media campaign about healthy relationships and the prevention of domestic and dating violence.

Additionally, DCF will be launching the Living Independently through Financial Empowerment (LIFE) program later this year. The program, which is funded through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, will provide temporary financial assistance to families whose safety is at risk due to domestic violence so they may be financially empowered to live independent, violence-free lives.

Learn about the types of domestic abuse and where to find domestic abuse services at <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/domesticabuse> or by following @WisDCF on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).