

FORMER VICTIM OF ABUSE DISCUSSES BREAKING CYCLE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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Nerissa Carter never really knew that what was happening to her was wrong. After all, her mother had gone through it so had her grandmother.

So Carter just endured the insults, tolerated the violence and cleaned up after every bloody nose, busted lip and black eye her boyfriend gave her. "Back then, and still today, the attitude was as long as the guy is paying the bills and you have a roof over your head, take it," Carter said. "Nineteen years ago, the resources weren't there. No one ever told me to get out of that situation."

Carter was a speaker Tuesday at a luncheon sponsored by **Destiny by Choice**, an effort to focus attention on the problem. The event was billed as the only one being held in western Palm Beach County recognizing victims of domestic violence during Domestic Violence Awareness Month. It took five years before Carter, battered physically and mentally, got out of that abusive relationship. Today she runs an organization that tries to stop domestic violence before it begins. The organization, Youth Empowerment Services, targets students.

"Domestic violence was the norm for me," Carter said. "The way I got out of it was realizing that I was basically choosing my daughter's husband. This is a cycle, and you have to break that with the children."

Destiny by Choice, founded by the Rev J.R. Thicklin, is a faith-based community empowerment organization. One of its primary missions is to help educate people about domestic violence. "It affects every part of our society," Thicklin said, adding that 80 percent of prisoners in the United States either were abused as children or grew up in an abusive home. "So every facet of the community must become involved in combating domestic violence. Churches especially must begin to deal with it from the pulpit." Thicklin said everyone needs to do more to inform domestic violence victims that there are resources to help them. "This is a subject that must be at the forefront from the White House to the church house and from the church house to the school house," he said.

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