

VIGIL REMEMBERS YOUNG WOMAN SHOT TO DEATH

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Instead of lighting a candle in the memory of a slain 22-year-old victim of domestic violence, the Rev. **J.R. Thicklin** wishes he was giving the young mother counseling or a place to stay.

All he could do was set up a fund for the funeral of Quinshala Gray, who was killed in her apartment Aug. 19. Gray's boyfriend has been charged with first-degree murder. Thicklin, Mayor Steve Wilson and about 25 others remembered Gray at a Thursday night vigil on the steps of city hall to recognize Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

"The sad irony for me was here was this young lady, her life cut down, and she really wanted to get out," Thicklin said. "She felt trapped." "It's not only the victims, those who passed, but those who remain and the survivors who are yet enduring," said Thicklin, of Destiny by Choice, a domestic violence prevention and outreach program in the Glades.

Domestic violence is a common crime, but officials say they often can't help because victims don't go to police.

"We're here to shed a light on America's dirty little secret," said Belle Glade Police Chief Michael Miller. "We've got to take it out of the darkness and into the light and let children and young ladies and women and even some men know there are solutions."

The good news is that domestic offenses are on the decline in Belle Glade. There were 107 last year, down from 137 in 2001 and 241 in 2000, according to police. But there were nine deaths related to domestic violence in the county last year.

Gray's death was Belle Glade's first murder in nearly three years, Miller said. She died from a gunshot wound to her head, allegedly at the hands of her boyfriend, Waymon Jenkins, 26, who had a history of violence.

"It is the primary illustration of what happens when domestic violence goes to its extreme," Miller said.

Thicklin said his goal is to break the cycle of violence through generations of a family, so that people like Gray's two young children don't resort to violence as adults. About 60 percent of men who batter come from violent homes. Women who experience violence at home at an early age are more likely to become victims as adults, according to Destiny by Choice.

"And we're talking about fighting terrorism," Thicklin said. "Terrorism starts right inside the home."

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