nities back from seriously making it

From her experience as a survivor,

Craig-Garren recommends a program

that establishes a payment structure

that makes paying for the initial costs

of moving into permanent housing

At the FCADV, Tiffany Carr sug-

gests that communities consider a

sliding-scale payment plan for survi-

vors moving into permanent housing.

needs for domestic violence survivors.

For Deborah Lloyd with Refuge

House, needs assessments are impor-

She also stresses the importance

a priority.

affordable.









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UNKNOWN

From Page 1A

economy makes permanent housing less accessible to low-income people, the housing offerings available to survivors are being stretched to capacity.

PRINT EXCLUSIVE

Big Bend agencies are finding ways to make the system work for domestic violence survivors, but options are limited. And for domestic violence victims, the unavailability of a safe place can mean the difference between staying in an abusive relationship and leaving.

According to advocates, making that decision appears to have become more life threatening as the number increased need for emergency shelter. of domestic violence homicides rises across the state.

A safe place

Once they decide to leave, domestic 2010 statistical year. It represents a violence victims in Florida are finding 40-percent increase in the occupancy home during a time when they can dren, I'd lose them," she said. "Chances their finances; it challenging to obtain safe haven. rate. Another notable occurrence was seek permanent employment and are I would have ended up doing what According to the Florida Coalition the Leon County shelter running over housing as well as access social ser- a lot of women do — go back." Against Domestic Violence, more than 7,000 victims were unable to access December last year. emergency shelters because of a lack of beds.

"We know that across the board the No. 1 need is housing," FCADV executive director Tiffany Carr said.

son women have to turn back home is difficult situation." because of the lack of affordable housing. If there's nowhere for her to go to shelter services results in a greater

In the eight-county area served by Refuge House, housing — at all levels — represents the No. 1 need for domestic violence survivors, Refuge House executive director Meg Baldwin said.

domestic violence survivors in Leon, to a national statistic stating that Gadsden, Wakulla, Franklin, Jef- 28 percent of homeless families cite day, Williford says that ECHO's proferson, Madison, Taylor and Liberty domestic violence as the reason for counties serves an area about the size of Connecticut. Refuge House runs two emergency shelters, one in Leon ing domestic violence and homeless-County that has a capacity of 35 and ness, but Pourciau estimates that cies equipped to provide that service another in Taylor County that has a about 75 percent of the women served don't have the space and adequate capacity of 15, and it has a transition- in the HOPE Community, the BBHC's al housing program with 72 beds.

served overall at the Refuge House or had been sexually assaulted.

I don't know it, but I'm about to

make my move. Things are about to

When I look back on the seven

I can't believe that was my life. It

seems so far away. I got out when I

was young enough to start over and

to forget that there was a time when

I allowed someone to control every-

I don't look back. The truth is I

can't. If I do, I know I will eventually

find myself making excuses. "I didn't

have it *that* bad. It's not like he ever

flat-out punched me. Maybe he didn't

mean to hit me with the door. He was

Years of counseling have given me

the ability to recognize that I am not

to blame, but there is a shame I can't

fully shake. And let me be clear, I no

longer make excuses for his sake. I

make them for mine. You see, this

wasn't supposed to happen to *me*.

I grew up in a loving, upper middle

class family. My parents, both educa-

follow my dreams. I was financially

independent, and I had family sup-

port, but it happened anyway.

tors, sent me to college and told me to

I was the victim of domestic abuse,

and it took me seven years to admit

that and get out. So, no, I don't ask

why battered women stay. I know

many of their obstacles are greater

No one knows how to deal with

When I moved out of the apart-

ment I shared with my ex-husband, I

packed up my car and left everything

than my own.

yelling, so maybe he didn't know he

was spitting in my face."

years I spent in an abusive marriage,

'It can happen to anyone'

thing I was and did.

ABUSE

From Page 1A

Democrat staff reporter David Sáez

has worked with the Tallahassee Democrat since March 2008. He worked as

a sports reporter covering high schools and colleges until last August, when he joined the metro news section of the Information Center as the public safety reporter. He has worked as a journalist for six-and-a-half years.

emergency shelters have shown some decreases annually (446 in 2008-09 and 478 in 2007-08), Baldwin says several new pieces of data show an

For instance, at the Leon County shelter 334 individuals were served in the 2008-2009, compared to 226 in the first six months of the 2009capacity in October, November and

"We've not seen it at capacity for economics has had a lot to do with that we have statistics that bear that out, but we do have more women who the program began. "We know that the one primary rea- are seeking shelter because of their

transitional housing.

Ties to homelessness

When there are no other affordable options, some survivors choose home-

Big Bend Homeless Coalition Exec-The one-stop service provider for utive Director Susan Pourciau points director TaSheika Williford. their homelessness.

No one has the local numbers linktransitional housing program, had While the number of individuals been in a domestic violence situation

"I think domestic violence, combined with the economic recession, is the reason we've seen an increase in the number of homeless families,"

Pourciau said. The increasing number of homeless families has resulted in BBHC making emergency shelter for homeless families with children one of its highis 42 beds for emergency shelter and 112 beds in transitional housing.

Time to recover

years ago, Kelly Otte had worked to purchase six apartments for transitic violence survivors.

"We knew even when we bought the apartment complex that it was not enough," Otte said.

Transitional housing helps survi- her personal goal. vors by providing them an affordable

from our state needs assessment and that," said Deborah Lloyd, the Refuge and 50 women and children annually, employee at the former Refuge House director Claudette Cromartie said. from talking to women in shelter that House Region I director. "I don't know according to Baldwin. And this is after thrift shop, Craig-Garren found a job

> transitional housing beds were being to recover." Like other local transitional housing providers, ECHO Family Services receives referrals from Refuge House.

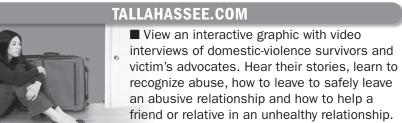
difficult, said family services program Since July 2009 through last Mongram had received 23 referrals and

Placing those referrals has proven

placed one. "The immediate need is definitely housing,"Williford said. "But the agenstaffing to meet the need."

Keeping her kids

I couldn't go to the grocery store



est priorities. Pourciau estimates that leave an abusive marriage came to lence Coordinating Council. the need for households with children her as she sat in the emergency room of a Jacksonville hospital awaiting Some barriers faced stitches for an injury that had come at the hands of her abuser (though she tic violence survivors face a variety of of capturing local data about housing told the medical staff she'd tripped on obstacles, among which are: Before leaving her post as the Ref- a skateboard). He'd struck her before, uge House executive director five but this time she asked herself what survivors who have been arrested cate leaders and help communities she wanted from her life.

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"The answer was I need to raise my tional housing designated for domes- kids," she said. "And I can't do that if I'm broken.'

This was her reason for leaving. Housing has played and continues to gain independence; to play a significant role in meeting

"If I didn't have housing for my chil-Transitional housing gave her time

With about 470 individuals served to deal with issues of bad credit and

annually in its emergency shelter, work on self-esteem through counmore than doubling its capacity since with a local health-care organization. "Transitional housing gives women

Other Big Bend transitional hous- more stable time to work themselves become a more urgent matter as it Chapter of the National Hook-Up ing options, which serve more than back," said Otte, the former Refuge appears the severity of domestic vio- of Black Women is trying to make An increased need in emergency domestic violence survivors, are often House executive director. "That's the lence is increasing. In Florida, the arrangements with local hotels to filled. According to a Big Bend Home- way it should work. We should have number of domestic violence homi- cover the cost of temporarily housing take the children, there's no option need for other services, including less Coalition 2009 survey, all 304 enough housing to give them a chance cides has increased 8.9 percent, victims.

Isolating circumstances

Region I director.

munity, there is a lack of housing as suicides. well as employment," Lloyd said. "And we are talking about those who are already reluctant to leave their community because of the distance."

The reluctance to travel to Tallahassee or Taylor County for emergency shelter is another barrier that advo- Opportunities for change cates for domestic violence survivors

Local advocates explain that domes-

■Rental discrimination against This information can be used to edufor a felony related to their domestic strategize. violence case even though they were never charged;

■ Housing denial because of a prison record when the survivor is trying met at the neighborhood level.

■Poor credit history, which in some

■ Lack of affordable housing;

and Section 8 subsidized housing.

Those who turn to public housing are often placed on a waiting list knows better than our communities this length of time, and I do think the Refuge House's transitional housing seling. It also allowed her to pursue because of the extent of the need, Tal- what the community's needs are than is limited to supporting between 30 employment. After starting as an lahassee Housing Authority executive communities?"

Deadly violence

according to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

Rural residents in Refuge House's violence homicides in 2008 were the either take her to the Refuge House service area face the greatest lack of most since 1995, when there were six. shelter in Tallahassee, or we can work services, says Lloyd, the Refuge House Gadsden County had one domestic it out so they can stay here without violence homicide from 2006 to 2008, "When you're living in a rural combut in 2009 it had two, both murder-

"The level of brutality is unlike any-situation when it is most heated." thing I've seen in my 16 years," the

must negotiate, according to Alice need exist. Some say it's a matter of other agency in the eight-county area, DuPont, the former chairwoman for reducing the shameful silence around but we are all painfully aware of the Tere Craig-Garren's decision to the Gadsden County Domestic Vio-domestic violence that holds communeed."

tant, but she thinks needs are best

"I think it's important to have coalitions, but I also think it's important cases is the result of an abuser lim- that communities pick up the baniting the survivor's access to control ner and become proactive about the issues," Lloyd said.

"Let's plan for domestic violence ■Limited access to public housing prevention in Killearn. Let's plan for prevention in Frenchtown, in the south side, or in SouthWood. Who

One example of small communities working to meet a need is occurring in Gadsden County. A group of women The need for safe housing has who are part of the Gadsden County

"If a woman calls the police department at 11 p.m. and walks out with In Leon County, the five domestic just the clothes on her back, we can them having to stay in a situation they can't handle," DuPont said. "It's a stop-gap, but it gets them out of the

With the need for safe, affordable FCADV's Carr said. "Obviously the housing rising, Lloyd says a question economic downturn coincides with must be asked and answered: "Beyond saying, 'Isn't that a shame,' we need to ask, What is it that we are going to do?" "Lloyd said. "We do what we Strategies to address the housing can with what we have just like any

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and I've spent a lot of time since then

Did I want to stay in that marriage and risk the abuse getting worse, which I believed it would? Did I want to risk my spiritual,

Or, did I want to leave and take a

chance on whatever life awaited me on my own? There are simple times, quiet times,

When I share a laugh with my I relax with a glass of wine on my couch after a long day, when my head touches the pillow at night, and I

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else behind. I called my mom, and she sent me a check for \$2,000 – no questions asked – so I could pay my first

Today, when I think about what I went through, I often think about other women, those who don't have moms who can send \$2,000 checks or who don't have jobs that enable them to support themselves and their

I also think about women like me, victims of domestic abuse who, according to outward appearances, have it "together." They sit next to

church. Those women might look at me

I know what it's like to feel helpall back – and then some.

'No one saw his ugly side but me' Most of what I endured was

emotional abuse and control. I was the stable financial provider in the

Rebeccah Cantley oversees the daily lahassee Democrat

month's rent and buy a bed.

children. you at work and on the same pew at

now and think we don't have much in

I had to ask for permission to buy a \$15 CD or otherwise deal with the

ABOUT THE WRITER Content editor

operations of the Tal-

and has been with the newspaper since December 2005. She has worked as an editor and reporter

common, but we do.

less. I know what it's like to lose hope, but I also know it is possible to get it

marriage, but I had no access to cash or the independence to make even nominal financial decisions.

If I wanted to go out to lunch with

alone and buy what we needed. He had to go, and I had to get clearance for everything I put in the cart. I soon developed a list of things

I tried to remember in an effort to avoid upsetting him, but I couldn't The things that set him off were

trivial. I kept forgetting to put the soap back in the dish when I was finished taking a shower. I left all the drawers open when I was running around in the morning, trying to get ready for work. I left the kitchen cabinets open when I was cooking.

The constant criticism was exhausting. What hurt most were the comments about my weight and the name-calling.

At one point, I lost about 15 pounds. I didn't set out to lose weight. I just stopped eating. It took too much energy. Sometimes, I wished he would

punch me. That way, I'd have proof. I'd have a mark, something to point to and justify to all our friends, who thought he was so kind and softspoken, why I was leaving. He was a master of disguise. No one saw his ugly side but me.

I tried everything to fix him, and I thought for years that I could. If I prayed enough, if I found the right counselor, if I found the right friend or the right pastor ... if, if, if. Nothing

worked. Faith had always been a part of my life, but now, God seemed silent. I had never faced anything that I couldn't make right through love,

dedication and hard work, but I could not make him right and trying to do so was killing me. I kept a journal, and today it gives me insight into my journey.

before I moved out, I wrote an entry that, when I see it now, seems like it was written by someone else. I had stopped making excuses. I

On Feb. 5, 2006, about two months

admitted to myself and to God that I had no answers and no hope. I wrote one sentence at the bottom of the "Is it possible to die from a broken heart?"

The good news is I did not die. I got out, and today, I am thankful and That word, happy, is so simple, and really, it's all I've ever wanted. Isn't

'I wanted to help him'

that what we all want? Just to be happy? I've tried to think about my journey and figure out what enabled me to leave and start building a life on my own. I still don't understand everything that happened. I know my motivations were pure. I wanted to help

him, and I honestly thought I could. There were two incidents in the marriage that became physical, and I moved out in April 2006 after the second one. The first one occurred about two years before.

At that time, I went to my parents' house for a week. My family members never pressured me, but I knew they wanted me to leave. Each time I went back, I knew

they were disappointed, but the trial

runs I took at leaving were important because they made me stronger. Two conversations helped me make the decision to move out. One was with my boss, and the other was a

conversation with a friend from col-

As I said before, faith had always

been a part of my life, but now, I felt trapped by it.

'It's OK to leave' My work life and personal life were complete contradictions, and I fought to keep the two separate. Despite the fact I was living with abuse at home, I was, by the grace of God, able to excel

in my career. Toward the end of the marriage, I began to see that I couldn't keep up the charade. I knew, eventually, the abuse would take everything from me even the career I loved. I came clean to my boss when I had

to ask for a day off to move out of my apartment. I was done hiding. My boss, who is still my boss now, Executive Editor Bob Gabordi, also is a person of faith. I told him what I was facing and that I had prayed and

prayed and prayed about the abuse in

my marriage and that I was honestly frustrated with God. I was doing all I could, so why wouldn't He just fix this? Bob's advice was that God, although all-powerful, doesn't use a magic wand. He wasn't going to wave his hand and fix my husband because

he, like everyone else, had free will. The only thing I could fix was me. The second conversation was with a friend, who is now a pastor. I had talked to numerous pastors. All were quick to say that, no, abuse was not God's plan for marriage, but no one could advise me on what to do when

the abuse wouldn't stop. My friend was the first leader in the church who said "It's OK to leave. For your own safety, you need to

'There's no looking back' When I moved out, I still gave it one more try. Regardless of my hus-

mitment I took seriously. I couldn't walk away until I knew I had given 110 percent. I tried counseling one more time on my own and with my ex-husband. I realized that my constant excuses for him and my dogged determination to

band's actions, marriage was a com-

fix him only enabled his behavior. I gave him a list of things that had to happen before I would come home. The list, which I still have, included things such as "absolutely no namecalling, don't make me account for every penny I spend, understand that

That was in April, and by the end of August, I saw no improvement. I

I need time with my family."

made my decision. My counselor once told me that it can take years for a woman to leave, but once she truly decides, there's no looking back. That is how it has been

'I made the right choice'

The first apartment I had on my own was a small one-bedroom unit that I shared with my very large and very hyper dog Hershey. I would lie in bed and stare at the

stark white, bare walls. They seemed lonely and disorienting, but a shift in my thinking occurred somewhere along the way. Those were my walls. I could put whatever I wanted on them. If I wanted to paint them hot pink, I could do it. My divorce was final in April 2007,

figuring out what *I* enjoy, what *I* like, who *I* am when no one is telling me what to do. For me, the decision to leave came down to one of what I wanted to risk.

physical and mental wellbeing, my career even?

in every day when I know I made the right choice friends on a girls' night-out, when

peace in my heart, I know. ■ Contact Content Editor Rebeccah Cantley

close my eyes, thanking God for the

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