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November 13, 2013

Can police prevent domestic violence simply by telling offenders to stop?

By John H. Tucker



Photo by Justin Cook

Late one evening in 2006, a patrol officer in High Point, N.C., was dispatched to a domestic disturbance at a small yellow house. Darin Jackson, an unemployed 40-year-old, was attempting to reclaim a set of hair clippers from his ex-girlfriend, Annjanette Lloyd. Jackson told the officer he had recently been locked up but did not explain why. He cursed at the officer, got in his car and sped away.

Six hours later, police received a call from a nearby house, where an 8-year-old boy in boxer shorts had awakened owners by ringing the doorbell.

Responding patrolmen found the boy on the porch with wounds to his head and body. Before emergency workers took him to the hospital, he told police, "Darin broke into our house and stabbed Momma."

Inside Lloyd's house, investigators discovered her lifeless body in bed, with 63 stab wounds and blunt trauma to the head. A piece of her neck was missing, and her jawbone protruded from her cheek. Police located Jackson at his mother's house. They took him to the station, where he met with Detective Jerry Thompson and confessed to the killing. He showed no remorse, flexing his chest muscles during his booking photo, Thompson noted in a report.

After running a background check, Thompson was frustrated by what he learned. Five days earlier Jackson had been arrested after punching Lloyd. The assault apparently stemmed from a fight over the television. After one night in jail, Jackson was issued a court date and released.

Thompson also learned that a social services caseworker had filed several domestic violence reports on Jackson and Lloyd during their four-month relationship. Neighbors, too, said the couple had a history of fighting. Jackson had a prior conviction for trespassing on a woman's property and an assault conviction for attacking a man with a pocketknife.

After going through surgery, Lloyd's son told Detective Thompson that Jackson entered the house through a window and hit his sleeping mother with a stick. "Stop, Darin, please stop," she yelled. The boy tried to help but could not save her.

Two years later, Jim Fealy, High Point's police chief, walked into the office of Maj. Marty Sumner, his chief of staff. A 24-year High Point veteran with a penchant for data, Sumner was Fealy's most trusted aide. Fealy, who was brought in from Austin, where he ran the security detail for then-Gov. George W. Bush, was nearing retirement age and itching for a final project. "What's next, Marty?" he asked.

Once known for its furniture factories, High Point—a city of approximately 100,000, abutting Greensboro—had become one of the most dangerous cities in North Carolina during the early 1990s. Since then, there had been a remarkable drop in violent crime thanks to community police initiatives, which attracted national attention. But a more enigmatic crime continued to befuddle the police: domestic violence. By 2008 it had become the leading call for service, with more than 5,000 disturbances reported annually. The Annjanette Lloyd murder had weighed heavily on the police department, but it was hardly unique. Between 2004 and 2008, one in every three murders in the city was domestic, making it the leading cause of homicide. Nationwide, there were at least 10,600 domestic homicides between 2000 and 2006, according to FBI data.

In May 2008, two domestic murder-suicides occurred two weeks apart in High Point, generating front-page headlines. Fealy was flummoxed. "Family violence is unfortunately something that's always going on below the surface in any community," he told the High Point Enterprise.

So when Fealy walked into his chief of staff's office several weeks later, looking for a final project, Sumner gave the only suggestion he could think of.

"It looks like DV would be the next logical step," he said. "But I'm not sure if anything can work."

Fealy dismissed the idea. "I don't want to set this department up for failure."

For decades, domestic violence was considered a private matter. In the 1960s, scholars began calling it a moral and social problem. Women's shelters emerged, and laws were enacted to allow wives to file pre-divorce protective orders. Family counselors offered mediation sessions for couples in violent relationships. Advocates cautioned that the problem threatened women of all social classes, often perpetrated by publicly innocuous men.

The law enforcement response lagged. In the 1980s, many police jurisdictions launched mandatory arrest policies. But patrol officers often had difficulty determining primary aggressors and arrested both parties in a dispute. Prosecutors regularly lacked evidence to levy charges. Long lapses between court hearings allowed couples to reconcile before hearings. Many scholars interpreted mandatory arrests as ineffective.

In 1994, Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act, providing \$1.6 billion to investigate and prosecute offenders. By then, "batterer intervention

therapies" had become popular. But after that early promise, many studies have since suggested that the effectiveness of such programs is low.

Around the same time, an innovative policing method was developing in Boston, where gang and gun violence had spiraled out of control. In 1996, police launched Operation Ceasefire, which featured a strategy called "focused deterrence," based on two presuppositions: A small number of criminals are responsible for a majority of violent crimes in any given city, and offenders react rationally when presented with options.

Rather than arresting each teenager who fired a gun, Boston police identified gang members and brought them into the station for a message: "We know who you are, and we are watching you. But we also care about you, so we are cutting you a break. Starting now, if you kill someone, we will go after your entire gang. The community is on our side." In two years the youth homicide rate dropped 63 percent.

In 1998, High Point became the second of several U.S. cities to replicate Ceasefire to combat its gang and gun violence. Now the city is using the same system—focused deterrence—to fight domestic violence. And although focused deterrence has its critics, early data indicates it's working in High Point.

"What's happening in High Point is the most exciting and effective approach in responding to domestic violence I've ever seen," said Susan Herman, former director for the National Center for Victims of Crime, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit.

The lead architect of Ceasefire was David M. Kennedy, a long-haired, self-taught criminologist writing case studies at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Under Kennedy's guidance, in 1998 High Point police established a task force with prosecutors and federal agents, supported by community members. In the case of gangs, a small number of violent leaders were detained with high bonds; midlevel offenders were summoned to the station for a deterrent message, called a "call-in." In this public, face-to-face meeting, task force members issue stern warnings and community leaders offer social-service referrals.

The following year the violent crime rate in High Point dropped 47 percent. In 2003, Chief Fealy applied the model to drug markets. Five years later, violent crime dropped another 20 percent.

Sumner, who was appointed police chief when Fealy retired in 2012, still keeps a binder of notes from an early meeting with Kennedy, which he flipped through during a recent interview in his office. The 50-year-old lawman is soft-spoken and bespectacled, with lightning-blond hair and a bachelor's degree in management and ethics. "I've got two boys, and sometimes their mother calls and says you've got to spank them when you get home," he said, using an analogy to explain focused deterrence. "Most kids would rather you whup them right now instead of waiting six hours. It's the same with the offender who knows a police officer can pick him up whenever he wants."

Following Ceasefire's success, Kennedy was commissioned by the Hewlett Foundation Family Violence Prevention Fund to write a paper addressing domestic violence in 2002. He told his patrons he had no expertise in that subject but that he would lay out an approach based on familiar logic.

Despite the common notion that domestic violence was often perpetrated by otherwise-average men, the literature Kennedy read suggested a significant majority of offenders were poor minorities with criminal histories spanning a variety of violent offenses. It was the same pattern he had seen with his gang work.

He recalled an interview with a gang member during Ceasefire.

"What starts the gang beefs?"

"Bitches."

"What do you mean, bitches?"

"Well, some girl comes over to hang with you, and she goes home, and her brother sees the bruises, and he comes after you."

It irked Kennedy that victims bore the burdens of the attack: moving out, filing restraining orders, leaving work for court hearings, calling police. "Even a simple 911 call is not so simple when someone is pointing a gun at you," Kennedy, who is now director of the Center for Crime Prevention and Control at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, told me. The

police reports he read were bereft of information. Offenders were released from jail in days. Most worrisome, there appeared to be obvious opportunities for officers to intervene before violent men killed their girlfriends. "It was as if the criminal justice response to domestic violence was trapped in 1965." (In North Carolina, in 2002, more than half of the 73 domestic homicide victims had previously filed restraining orders, according to a News & Observer report.)

Kennedy wondered if focused deterrence could be applied. He presented a paper on his ideas at a 2002 domestic violence conference at the Urban Institute in Washington. He was unprepared for the response. "I walked into an absolute buzz saw," he recalled. "I was eaten alive. The near-absolute conviction of people in the advocacy and scholarly communities was that the ideas were naïve, that victims never called the police and that domestic violence was this invisible issue in well-off, white communities. But if they were right, we ought to have been seeing dead, well-off white women. And empirically, that wasn't true."

For several years he raised his idea on lecture tours, "but not only did people say no, they were just as often passionately opposed to it," he said. Eventually he shelved the idea.

Six years later, however, he received a call from Sumner. "Domestic violence is our most pressing violent crime. We want to try your methodologies. You want in?"

"Let me pull that paper out of the filing cabinet," said Kennedy.

On Oct. 30, 2010, Steve, an 18-year-old high school graduate, attended a Halloween party in High Point with his 15-year-old girlfriend, Kate. (The names of Steve and those associated with him have been changed.) Steve grew up in New York and was a top-ranked wrestler and honor student in high school. He felt smart enough for college, but drugs and alcohol held him back, he would later tell a court-appointed psychologist. He had not tried to find a job since graduation.

As the party dispersed, Kate, seated on couch, accidentally called Steve by the wrong name. He responded by punching her repeatedly in the face and biting her. She ran outside. He chased and tackled her, then punched and bit her again. The attacks left a black eye, bruised nose, chipped tooth and bite marks. Kate applied for a protective order. In a police affidavit, she wrote, "This isn't the first time it has happened, and he claims to love hurting me. He has bitten me before and pulled my hair out."

Police arrested Steve, and a judge issued a 75-day jail sentence. It was not his first crime. A year before, his mother called police after he pinned her against the wall and squeezed her arms, neck and cheeks. He served 30 days in jail. Several months later he was arrested for hitting a 48-year-old man in the head with a power drill. (The case was dismissed.) Not long afterward, he broke into a residence and stole three TVs and a PlayStation. He accepted a plea deal and was put on probation.

When Kate received the protective order, Steve violated it by speaking to her outside a courtroom, and then violated it again by phoning her. After spending 75 days in jail, he drove by Kate's home, raised his middle finger and yelled "Steve's back, bitch"—an act that sent him to jail for another 75 days. Through mid-2011, he seemed to be traveling through a revolving courtroom door.

And yet despite continued physical abuse, Kate stayed with him, sneaking out of the house, eluding the disapproving eye of her mother. "I was in love with him," Kate told me. "He has this way with words—sweet talk—that makes you think he's sorry, that he'll never do that again, that he loves you."

Across the country in more recent years, law enforcement has made strides to curb domestic violence after decades of trial and error. Many police departments have created domestic units and collaborate with victim organizations, shelters, courts and community response teams. The New York Police Department requires its 450 domestic officers to make 70,000 annual visits to households with abuse histories, and each precinct maintains a list of homes with heightened risk. This year, 12 U.S. law enforcement agencies received grants of up to \$200,000 from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women in order to curtail domestic homicide. One recipient, the Pitt County, N.C., Sheriff's Department, where more than half of recent homicides have been domestic, has experimented with GPS bracelets for high-risk offenders.

In a Maryland program, police agencies in every county use an 11-question screening tool evaluating individual risk for victims. The "Lethality Assessment Program," which has been adopted in 31 additional states, is

based on decades of research conducted by Jacquelyn Campbell, a Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing professor and leading expert on domestic homicide.

Responding to Kennedy's suggestion that domestic violence is largely confined to low-income urban areas, Campbell cautioned that police data does not capture the totality of the problem, because affluent men don't accumulate criminal records. "If police are called to this nice suburban home and arrest this nice white guy with a job, the judge will send him to an anger management program for a month or two," said Campbell, whose research considers health data along with crime statistics. "Who's most likely to be charged? African-American men. The criminal justice system is getting better, but it still skews that way. We tend to arrest those with arrest records already, so it's self-perpetuating."

Campbell suggests that unemployment is the leading driver of domestic homicide, but other factors, including gun ownership and estrangement, transcend social class and criminal history. "For our [domestic homicide] perpetrators, 56 percent had some sort of prior arrest," she said. "So yes, it's disproportionate, but not overwhelmingly." (The prior-arrest rate varies, with some studies citing a figure closer to 80 percent.)

Attorney Barbara J. Hart, director of strategic justice initiatives at the University of Southern Maine's Muskie School of Public Service and a national leader in implementing the Violence Against Women Act, questioned Kennedy's rationale. "He's looking at piece of a pie, but he has no idea how big the piece is," she said, contending that most battered women do not report attacks. "In low-income metropolitan neighborhoods, you call the police for everything. You call them for loud noises. They're free helpers. But not everybody lives in a metro area. I live in a rural part of Maine. It would take a half hour for police to come to my house."

Hart conceded that unlike low-income victims, middle-class victims often have resources to leave the relationship. A domestic violence survivor herself, Hart cited her own plight, which occurred in the 1960s. "I did not want to subject him to the legal system," she said. "I wanted him to get away from me."

On Feb. 21, 2012, a dozen former domestic violence offenders sauntered into High Point City Hall for the first "call-in" under the police department's newest project, the "Offender-Focused Domestic Violence Initiative." Once dismissive of the idea, Chief Fealy had switched his thinking partly due to the rise in domestic homicides and partly through his observation that the city's domestic offenders resembled the chronic criminals he had been deterring since his arrival as chief. "They were the same violent people—violent inside the relationship, violent outside of it," Fealy told me.

Inside City Hall, community members filled the seats behind the offenders. Each man received a flyer displaying mug shots of other offenders recently convicted for domestic assault. One was sentenced to eight years in federal prison. Another was scheduled for deportation.

At the front of the room, more than two dozen members of the High Point Community Against Violence stood behind a microphone. They included ministers, volunteers and seven members of the motorcycle club Street Dreamz, clad in leather jackets. For 16 years, the group has convened monthly meetings with police officers, sharing information on midlevel criminals who were deterrence candidates: gang members, drug dealers and, most recently, domestic violence offenders.

The group's leader is the Rev. Jim Summey, the pastor of a Baptist church in a depressed neighborhood, who referred to the call-ins as "Come to Jesus meetings." Police commanders keep his cell number on speed dial. During the peak period of violence in High Point, he launched what he called "Summey's war" against crime. In his car, he offered rides for prostitutes and drug addicts in search of shelter. On the streets, he approached drug dealers and told them he did not approve.

Several residents believed it was risky for a middle-aged minister to be confronting young criminals. One day, he arrived at his church to discover 58 broken windows. Livid, he drafted a letter and knocked on 480 doors looking for the perpetrators. Three weeks later, he received a call from a woman who knew the vandals but would not reveal their identities. One was her family member. She told the pastor not to worry; she had summoned the perpetrators into her living room for a message: do it again, and I'll report you to police myself. The church was never touched afterward. It was "quintessential" High Point focused deterrence, Summey recalled.

Inside City Hall, the members addressed the crowd. Most stated their names and that they were "against domestic violence." Summey offered a message of friendship and transparency. "We're letting you know that this is not a secret anymore. We know what's going on." Then he said, "The victims didn't ask us to do this."

Next, a phalanx of task force members including FBI, Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms, the Drug Enforcement Agency and Crimestoppers officials took seats at the rostrum. Their message was stern. "As of tonight, our A-game is on," Fealy said.

One of the task force members was Walt Jones, a Guilford County assistant district attorney who has supervised the High Point Office for five years. Since the domestic initiative launched, Jones has sought to lengthen sentences using the felony charge of habitual misdemeanor assault. "Ten years ago if you punch a woman in the face you get zero to 150 days," Jones told me. "Now a bleeding lip can be like an armed robbery." He contended that victim testimony is no longer necessary. "If she recants and says she got the black eye from tripping over the sofa, offenders now know they can be prosecuted."

Inside City Hall, Jones glared at the men in front of him. "The status quo no longer exists," he said. "We are waiting on you to reoffend. We have the paperwork filed out; we only have to put in the name of the victim and the date."

Seated next to Jones was Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert Lang. He told the men that if the DA's office lacked evidence for probable cause, he was prepared to use undercover agents to buy drugs from them or sell guns to them, just to stop them from hitting their girlfriends. (Under federal law, offenders convicted for domestic assaults, along with individuals under protective orders, cannot possess firearms.) "You gotta keep your hands off her," Lang exclaimed. "You put your hands on her again, we're going to turn your life upside down."

In early 2012, Kate, a 17-year-old resident of High Point, received a call from her boyfriend, Steve, who had been in and out of courts and jails for violating a domestic violence protective order against her. During the course of their on-again, off-again year-and-a-half relationship, Steve, 19, repeatedly punched and bit Kate and pulled her hair. Yet on other occasions he flashed his charm, sending Kate love letters and asking his own mother to shuttle her to jail for visits.

On the phone, Steve berated Kate for gossiping about another couple. "You're a stupid bitch," Steve told her. "If I ever see you again, I swear to God I'm slapping you with my dick so hard in the face, you'll be knocked out again."

Still, Kate told herself the relationship could work. "I was devastated," she recalled. "I couldn't understand why he would do these things. I'm like, 'I've never done anything wrong.' " She could not pinpoint her reason for staying. "Was it the thrill, or the excitement?" she wondered aloud. "Maybe I thought I could help him. I don't really know, to be honest. There was nothing appealing about the relationship. I just thought, Oh I love this boy. He was my first love. I was just dumb."

During that time, Kate's parents kept baseball bats near the front and back door. On multiple occasions Kate's father went out looking for him at night. "There was a time, if I had a gun, I would have killed him and not thought twice about it," Kate's mother told me. "He had her brainwashed." Once, a judge took Kate into his chambers and told her he was personally concerned for her.

After Steve's threatening phone call, Kate and her mother traveled to the police station and met with Detective Jerry Thompson, the lead investigator for the 2006 murder of Annjanette Lloyd, who was stabbed 63 times by an ex-boyfriend with a history of abuse. The murder prompted police to more closely scrutinize domestic violence, which had escalated in High Point. Thompson explained to Kate that Steve was on his personal watch list. Afterward, Thompson filed an arrest warrant, this time for a felony charge.

Police arrested Steve at his mother's mobile home, and a judge detained him on a \$50,000 bond. But the case was dismissed. Steve had not been served with his one-year protective-order renewal, so the state decided not to prosecute the case. Kate's mother was furious. After his release from jail, Steve threw eggs at Kate's house one night, hitting the window of her sleeping 7-year-old sister, who began expressing fear that Steve would break into the house and come after her. Two weeks later Steve was arrested while attempting to steal beer from a convenience store. He pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge and served 30 days in jail.

Steve was one of several hundred suspects placed under close monitoring in a new initiative rolled out by the High Point Police Department between 2009 and 2012. The program, co-run by community members, was designed to levy severe punishments on a small number of the most violent domestic violence offenders, while offering stern warnings to the rest.

For years, the High Point police had used similar “focused deterrence” theories to lower gun and drug crimes. The approach was conceived by David M. Kennedy, a criminologist renowned for developing Boston’s Operation Ceasefire in 1996. In 2002 Kennedy published a paper applying similar logic to domestic violence, but it was criticized as short-sighted at the national domestic violence conference. Six years later, his proposal would be tested in High Point.

As Kennedy was getting panned at a domestic violence conference, at least one attendee believed his ideas had merit. Susan Herman, who for several years managed services for battered women and children at a New York victim-assistance agency, had become the director for the National Center for Victims of Crime, a Washington-based nonprofit. “Every law enforcement method had been tried, but nothing seemed to move the numbers,” recalled Herman, now a Pace University professor. “Advocates wanted funding for the same-old, same-old approaches—prevention and victims’ assistance. Nobody, except David, talked about how to stop it. It was a radical idea.

The High Point police convened a domestic violence work group, which included social workers who knew many local offenders by name. Herman attended a few meetings to offer victims’ perspective. The group met weekly for more than a year.

Police created four categories. The most violent offenders, “A-listers,” would be arrested and used as deterrent examples. “B-listers” would get a face-to-face “call-in” in front of the community. First-time offenders—“C-listers”—would receive immediate jail visits by a detective. “D-listers”—suspects not arrested—would receive hand-delivered letters. The department borrowed the tiered approach from a 1999 study in Yorkshire, England, where researchers discovered that immediately notifying offenders after domestic assaults prevented recidivism.

The B-list response, in particular, worried work group members, who knew it was risky to reveal the identities of woman-batterers to the community. Kennedy cautioned that chronic offenders react differently to police accusations than first-time offenders. “If you have a stake in conformity and you’re arrested, you care,” he told the group. “But if you’re already detached from mainstream society and you’re unemployed, getting arrested makes you mad.”

Police asked University of North Carolina–Greensboro researchers to conduct a survey to gather victim feedback. It was an intense waiting period, recalled the Rev. Jim Summey, executive director of the High Point Community Against Violence, who wondered what might happen after offenders were called out publicly. “The question became, ‘Is some chick gonna get killed the next day?’ ”

Detective Jerry Thompson is a folksy-voiced 49-year-old marathon runner who joined the High Point Police Department at age 22, recruited from his job as a park ranger. Each morning he scours the Guilford County Jail’s intake list for new domestic charges and flags them in the database accessed by patrol officers. Most days he travels to the jail to meet with newly arrested “C-Listers.” Some are defensive. Many cry. “But they never show anger, which is something I never expected,” he said. Colleagues tease him for putting C-listers through “Jerry’s School of Charm.”

“I always viewed the DV offender as the redneck drinking beer in the recliner after work, beating on his wife because his food is cold,” Thompson said. “But it’s not like that. These guys are street offenders.”

For years, he said, police viewed domestic violence as an issue for the Department of Family Services. Many officers, including him, prefer to focus on offenders, not victims. Some cop friends still laugh at his deterrence strategy. “Human beings don’t like change,” he explained. “Especially law enforcement.”

On his hard drive Thompson keeps an MP3 of a 911 call capturing a murder-suicide—a reminder of the stakes in play. Across the room, a second domestic violence detective reviews each call for service that does not result in arrest and then prepares letters to go out the next day, after a captain’s review. Since the initiative launched, police reports have adopted checkboxes for intimate partner violence. Police now take more photos, talk to more neighbors, audio-record victims’ statements and consult with the friends of victims too frightened to talk—a method called “cocooning.”

On a recent morning I accompanied Thompson on his jail assignment. Once past security, he entered a tiny cinderblock room with a metal table and wall-mounted seats. Earlier he had studied the report for a suspect arrested the previous evening. She was a 26-year-old woman with a handful of misdemeanor drug convictions on her record. Her boyfriend had made three 911 calls. During the last call she could be heard throwing a set of keys that left a cut on his face.

A woman with green nail polish and gray prison garb entered the room and sat down. She was from a neighborhood not far from where Thompson grew up.

"Hey there," said Thompson, hiking a foot on a stool. "Are you on probation?"

"No, sir, said the woman, nervously running her hands through her hair.

"So who's the guy?"

"Well as of now he's my ex-boyfriend. When I leave here I'm going to my mama's."

Thompson eased into his visit's purpose. "We recently started something called the Offender-Focused Domestic Violence Initiative. Too many guys were beatin' on women. There'd been a lot of homicides, and girls kept moving out. So we started goin' after the guys, and now some of 'em are doing eight years in prison instead of a couple months in jail."

The woman nodded.

"Now it's pretty clear what happened last night, but I'm not here to talk about that. You've been flagged in our system. Starting now, you're on our C-list. If you get arrested again you'll go to the B-list. If you go to the A-list, you'll go bye-bye."

"I didn't mean to hit him in the face."

Thompson pointed to her previous drug charges. "Are you still doing this?"

"No, sir. Heroin was my drug of choice, but I've been on methadone for a month."

"Well I hope it's workin', because I saw this picture, and then this picture." He referenced a pair of mug shots taken months apart, the more recent of which depicted her strung out and looking like a 40-year-old. "Come on, girl," said Thompson. "You're 26."

Thompson gave the woman a leaflet outlining the initiative and a number to call for help. "If y'all get in another argument and you're under a no-contact order from a judge, you'll be arrested, and your bond will be high. Stay the heck away from him. You're too old for this drama."

"Yes, sir."

Thompson left the jail and threw on a pair of sunglasses. "I go a little easier on the women," he said. "She lost her temper, but we got to nip in the bud early. We'll probably never see her again."

Earlier this fall, 18 people convened at the High Point station house for a biweekly domestic violence meeting. The group included Thompson, Summey, two assistant district attorneys, court officials and representatives from the departments of family services and social services. The meeting was led by Cpt. Tim Ellenberger, who oversees domestic violence operations.

Magistrate Judge Michael L. Kimel launched into an anecdote, explaining that one offender recently cycled through court twice, bonding out each time. After assaulting a woman a few weeks later, the judge recognized him, presented the prosecutor with a fact sheet and increased his bond to \$100,000.

"Hear hear!" said Ellenberger clapping.

High Point court officials have been briefed about the domestic initiative, and magistrate judges are encouraged to increase bonds and fast-track cases. Community members attend bond hearings. Clerks have played roles, taking mental notes of black eyes, bruises and courtroom staredowns. Inside the clerk's office, several case file envelopes are flagged with a pen: "DOMESTIC."

Two University of North Carolina–Greensboro researchers also attended the meeting. Four years ago, the police commissioned UNC to analyze thousands of police reports dating to 2000. The researchers have recoded several hundred reports and provided ongoing assessments of the domestic initiative, including survey results suggesting—surprisingly, to some—that victims supported it.

In a report last year the researchers praised the project but cited barriers to its success. Many victims felt confused and treated poorly in courtrooms. Some had dropped contact with prosecutors. Several protective orders had gone missing. Few offenders had approached community leaders for social services. And despite prosecutors' contentions that victim testimony is no longer necessary to prosecute domestic offenders, few prosecutions had occurred without victim compliance. (Most state courts give defendants the right to confront witnesses against them or otherwise bar their out-of-court testimony.)

There are differences between the domestic initiative and former gang and drug focused–deterrence programs in High Point. During domestic call–ins, offenders maintain disgusted looks on their faces, even when task force officials use humor. “They don’t mind being called gangbangers, but no one wants to be called a woman–batterer,” Chief Sumner reasoned.

Asked whether call–ins constituted public shaming, Kennedy told me it was “nearly the opposite.” He explained that “even bad guys are governed by informal norms, and this type of police response treats them as rational, responsible adults.”

But not everyone appreciates the domestic initiative. John Nieman, an assistant public defender who leads the High Point office, is a former prosecutor who helped create the Guilford County District Attorney’s Domestic Violence Unit. “The vast majority of reported domestic violence offenses are true,” he said. “But if you use pure statistics and [A–through–C] categorizations to target suspects, you sweep up the people who aren’t always the problem.”

Nieman, who supported the previous focused–deterrence initiatives in High Point, said several of his clients have been falsely accused of domestic violence by girlfriends seeking to drain their bank accounts. (Many of his clients are mentally ill and rely on their girlfriends for basic needs.)

Prosecutors, in turn, praise the initiative. A longtime fan of Kennedy’s methodology, Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert Lang called it “the future of policing” and said it curtails the felonization of youth and “made me a better person.” Asked if his office has actually used controlled drug buys just to bust domestic offenders, Lang said he has done it a “limited” number of times. “We have to make good on the promise.”

Back at the stationhouse meeting, the Rev. Summey was explaining that a B–lister had recently sought help since getting a fast–food job. “He’s a good guy, but the job isn’t quite bringing in the funds.” Then the mood turned somber.

“We all heard about what happened last weekend,” said Cpt. Ellenberger. “I hesitate to pass judgment, but this is an indication of why we do what we do.”

Five days earlier there was a homicide in neighboring Greensboro, a city nearly three times the size of High Point. A man shot and killed his estranged 62–year–old wife before turning the gun on himself. The victim had recently applied for a protective order, but two judges denied it. She was the eighth domestic homicide of 19 Greensboro murders reported through mid–September.

The Greensboro News & Record quoted a police detective following the murder–suicide. “If no one comes forward, we’ll never know,” he said. “We don’t know what goes on behind closed doors.”

This past May, one year after breaking up with Kate for good, Steve received an invitation to stay at a friend’s empty house while the friend and her parents were on vacation. Steve brought along his new girlfriend, Molly. One afternoon, a housesitter entered the residence, heard noises and called police. Steve and Molly fled, leaving their IDs inside. When police searched the house, they discovered missing an AK–47 rifle and \$1,200 worth of clothes and jewelry.

Molly was apprehended a short time later. Inside the police station, investigators noticed bruises on her body and then learned that she recently had filed a complaint in Greensboro indicating that Steve had bitten her and stolen her wallet.

A month later, Molly was arrested for breaking and entering. She showed investigators more injuries: scars, bruises and bite marks on her arm, hands and fingers, one of which had been bitten to the bone. She named Steve as her attacker.

On July 2, Steve was arrested by U.S. marshals at the home of another girlfriend. He was charged with larceny and assault on a female. During a jail phone call to a friend, Steve demanded favorable testimony. When the friend declined, Steve went "ballistic," according to a police report, telling his friend, "I'll put you in the dirt, nigger."

Steve accepted a plea deal for one felony count of habitual misdemeanor assault. On Aug. 1, one month after his arrest, a judge sentenced him to three months in State prison and a five-to-16 month probationary period with a no-contact order. "It shows the speed with which someone can be sent bye-bye under this initiative," said Thompson. "Usually it takes at least a year to go from jail to prison."

Through October, 948 domestic violence offenders in High Point have been given a deterrence message through call-ins, jail visits and hand-delivered letters. Of that group, 73 have reoffended—a 7.7 recidivism rate, which Sumner called "staggering" and "much lower" than previous gang and gun offenders. (Research suggests between 24 and 60 percent of first-time domestic offenders recidivate within two years.) The results have occurred despite only 15 arrests of A-listers, among a group of 27.

Sumner likes to cite another statistic. Between 2004 and 2008, 17 domestic homicides occurred in High Point; since then there has been one. This past February, five weeks after moving to High Point, an immigrant strangled his wife to death. "He wasn't on our radar yet," Sumner acknowledged.

Sumner cites Darin Jackson's killing of Annjanette Lloyd for provoking the department to look more closely at the issue. "If this program were in place, he never would've gotten out of jail five days beforehand."

Others caution that multiple rounds of victim-survey testing are still needed in order to claim scientific success. "It could still be that the men who receive the deterrence message go back to the women and say 'Do this again and I'll kill you,' " said Walter S. DeKeseredy, a criminologist at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology and author of several books on the abuse of women. (This past September, High Point police received a \$50,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice's Community Oriented Policing Services office to implement a two-year study of the domestic initiative and replicate it within another policing jurisdiction.)

During a recent conversation, Kennedy backtracked slightly from his contention that domestic violence is largely confined to disadvantaged neighborhoods, conceding that it happens under the radar in affluent neighborhoods. "But there is a class of victimization that is especially serious, concentrated among poor minority woman, which we do know about, because we get bodies and major assault charges," he said. "And because we know about it, we can make the decision to do something about it."

Earlier this month I met Kate and her mother for dinner at a High Point restaurant. Now 18, Kate behaves like a typical teenager, bragging about her new diet, rattling off potential college majors, sneaking texts under the table and stealing sips of her mother's soda.

A week beforehand, Steve had been released from prison. Kate and her mother were discussing if he would start harassing her again. "I'm over the whole thing now," Kate said. "I know that at the dial of a phone number he could be arrested. I don't think he'll come after me."

"We don't completely know that," said her mother. "He's not the type who gets over things easily," Turning to me, she said, "If she runs into him at a gas station, he won't not say something. Or it might just be a look. But it will be something."

"He'll be lingering," Kate agreed, "But the police'll be waiting to catch him for stupidity."

Kate does not reflect much on the past abuse, she said. Sometimes she visits her dentist to refit her front tooth, which was chipped after the Halloween party punch to the face. "It'll come loose biting into an apple."

More recently, Kate found another boyfriend, but she broke it off after what she called his emotional abuse. "You can always find someone better, but right now I'm taking a break," she said. In a playful gesture, she swirled her

wrist to the side, as if catching a wave on a surf board, and exclaimed, "I'm living the single life now!" Then she sneaked another text under the table.

This two-part story appeared in print with the headlines "We know" and "A new approach."

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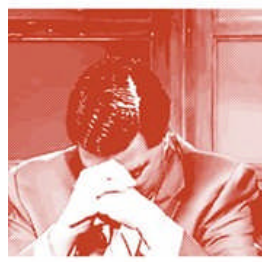
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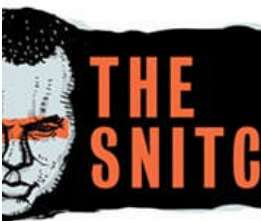
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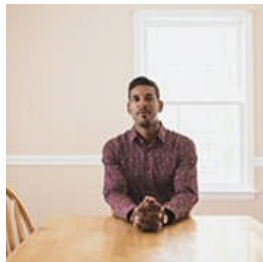
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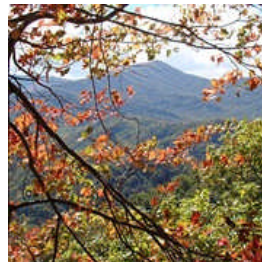
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