

The logo for iCare Case Study is located at the top center of the page. It features the word "iCare" in a white, sans-serif font with a small blue dot above the "i". Below "iCare" is the word "Case Study" in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. The entire logo is set against a solid purple rectangular background.

iCare™ Case Study

There's an unpleasant truth that many communities across the country would rather sweep under the rug and avoid talking about: Domestic Violence is on the rise.

Certainly that was the case for the residents of Greene County, Missouri, which had more Domestic Violence incidents per capita than anywhere in the state.

Fortunately, not everyone in the community wanted to stay silent and look the other way. It was the directors of Harmony House, a domestic violence shelter in Springfield, Missouri, who created a program called iCare™ as a way to sound the alarm about the rise of Domestic Violence in their community.

Founded some 42 years ago, Harmony House is the largest shelter in the state with 168 beds. Sadly, Harmony House is the temporary home for an average of 145 women, men and children on any given day. The shelter offers an impressive range of services—from meals to access to counselors and life-skills coaches—which are available on a 90-day basis to victims of Domestic Violence. But there is also a focus on the larger cause of building awareness about how to help eliminate Domestic Violence incidents in the first place.

The statistics are sobering:

- Nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the U.S—including one out of every three women and one out of every seven men. This equates to more than 10 million women and men annually.
- Every 9 seconds, a U.S. woman is assaulted or beaten. Domestic Violence is the leading cause of injury for women—more than car accidents, muggings and rapes combined.
- Domestic Violence victims lose nearly eight million days of paid work per year in the US alone—the equivalent of 32,000 FT jobs.
- Three-quarters of Domestic Violence victims face harassment from intimate partners while they're at work, while 96% of those victims say they have problems at work as a result of that abuse, including a high rate of absenteeism.
- Studies suggest that up to 10 million children witness some form of Domestic Violence every year.

Given the high stakes involved, the folks at Harmony House wondered how they could get the message out about Domestic Violence and gain the community's support. There were already a host of annual fundraisers and volunteer events to compete with. How could they do something different that could grab people's attention and truly make an impact?

The idea for iCare™ came from a Harmony House volunteer who suggested that citizens could wear a black eye-patch for a day to grab people's attention and get them talking about the ugly truths of Domestic Violence.

While that suggestion seemed perhaps too edgy and in your face to some, Lisa Farmer, the Executive Director of Harmony House, and Esther Munch, the Development Director, decided that was exactly what was needed to wake people up to the threat of Domestic Violence. So they decided to formalize the eye-patch idea into a fund-raising program that would directly connect the program to local businesses in the community.

"We wanted to make sure people understood that this was more than just a fundraising effort," says Farmer. "Our primary goal is to get the community talking about Domestic Violence and to save lives. We want to let people know what warning signs to watch for and where they can go if they need help."

Harmony House launched the iCare™ program in 2015.

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That first event was a tremendous success as the 200 businesses who signed up raised \$58,000 while helping create a renewed awareness about Harmony House and its mission. The event also received a tremendous amount of local media coverage, which also helped build awareness of both the program and the prevalence of Domestic Violence in the community.

But the iCare™ momentum didn't stop there. The following year, in 2016, 350 businesses participated and raised \$153,000. Then, in 2017, the numbers continued to go up, as 421 businesses signed up—as did the City of Springfield and other pillars of the community—and helped raise more than \$240,000.

Just as importantly, the program has also created a growing number of ambassadors and advocates for Harmony House inside the community—which includes a growing number of individuals who have been asking how they can contribute to the cause. “We have more and more people around the city who aren't afraid to talk about the threat of Domestic Violence,” says Jackie Langdon, the Marketing and Communications Director for Harmony House. “We've helped create an awareness about the issue that lingers all year round.”

Case in point: Consider the impact that participating in the iCare™ event had on this young participant from Ozarks Technical College (OTC):

Each day, someone shared their personal experiences. Some of them had been served by Harmony House as children when they escaped their home in the middle of the night. Some of them had been residents themselves, either at Harmony House or at a domestic violence shelter in another city. Countless students, faculty and staff shared their concerns for loved ones who have not made the decision to leave their abusers—yet. Many of them spoke of wanting to volunteer, to serve, or to just do more. On Friday, it touched my heart to see so many friends, colleagues and students with well-placed black eye stickers. As we sat up the table Friday morning, an OTC employee stopped by to make sure that I saw her with her sticker on. She had sheltered at Harmony House a few years earlier. She absolutely, undoubtedly, credited Harmony House with saving her life. And she shamelessly nudged many of her coworkers to, "Get over there and give them your dollar!"

A woman who had passed the table earlier in the week stopped, dug out a few dollars, picked up her sticker, sighed, and wept. She apologized for being overcome with emotion because it had taken her by surprise. She said that she never expected to fall apart like that, but a wave of memories flooded over her. She had escaped a violent relationship years ago and she expressed shame for what her daughters had been subjected to during that period of time. She talked about how they had grown into strong, independent women—and we reinforced for her that she had been one amazing role model of strength for them. My very last volunteer of the day shared that, for her, this issue was very, very personal. I didn't press her for details about her personal experience, but she shared that what she endured is the reason why she is back in school at OTC, getting her pre-requisite courses completed so that she can finish a social work degree at Missouri State.

Thanks to inspiring testimonials like that combined with the incredible success of the program inspired Farmer and Munch to begin thinking about how iCare™ might also be able to make an impact beyond their community. Perhaps iCare™, they wondered, could actually be scaled up to help tackle Domestic Violence awareness at a national level. “Because we have seen such a dramatic increase in the number of participating businesses and fundraising each year we thought this might be something that other shelters could participate in,” says Munch. “People in our community are actually shocked because they didn't realize that this wasn't a national program already.”

“Our goal is to package up the ideas and experience we have learned over three years of having such phenomenal success in raising awareness about Domestic Violence and help show other programs in other communities how they can do it as well,” says Farmer. “We'll also be here to give them support along the way.”