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## District Attorney's office holds family violence training

By Deanna Kirk Daily Sun

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One of the biggest plagues in our society today is family violence. Each month, the list of grand jury indictments is filled with charges of family violence with airway blocked, which is also known as strangulation.

The Navarro County District Attorney's office took steps this week to provide training on detecting signs of family violence, collecting evidence of family violence, and how to make a solid case.

“The office was looking for areas we thought could use improvement as far as how we do our job,” said Navarro County District Attorney R. Lowell Thompson. “We determined family violence was one of those areas.”

Within the DA’s office, there are special prosecutor teams for various charges, such as the one regarding child abuse led by Andrew Wolf, and one for family violence led by Will Thompson, who coordinated a two-day training for this area.

“Kelsey McKay was the presenter, and we used some drug seizure money to bring her here to lead the training,” said Lowell Thompson.

McKay was a prosecutor for Travis County for 12 years, working exclusively in family violence/strangulation. Since retiring from there, she now travels across the United States to help agencies develop family violence protocols. McKay has spoken at the National Crimes against Children Conference, and the National Crimes against Women Conference. She trained the entire San Diego police force, and is now serving as an advisor on the International Association of Police Chiefs.

Day one was held Aug. 22 from 1 to 5 p.m., with 48-50 law enforcement personnel from Navarro County, Freestone County, EMS, and counselors from high schools and middle schools. The morning session on Aug. 23 was the same session, just repeated so people on other shifts could take part.

“Det. Laurie Burks from Rockwall Police Department came, because Rockwall did a similar thing two years ago,” Thompson said. “She’s their lead family violence/strangulation investigator. She had gone to McKay’s training back then, and wanted to implement some of that stuff in Rockwall ... which they did, and afterward increased their number of cases they were able to make and take to the DA’s office.”

The training was done with a new checklist being rolled out by the DA’s office. Prosecutors, all first responders, school personnel and law enforcement were refreshed on what evidence is an indication of family violence, and what to look for in strangulation cases.

“Kind of some of the impacts and value of why it is good to prosecute family violence cases,” he said. “Why the victims want to file non-prosecution documents, how to look for initial signs of abuse or strangulation. What prosecutors should look for in certain evidence and what evidence means in family violence and strangulation.”

Family violence can be either a misdemeanor or a felony, whereas family violence with strangulation is an automatic felony.

“The ones who use this airway blocked type of abuse are often the ones who end up killing a spouse or partner,” he said.

Thompson plans on having McKay return to do some more specific training with officers, first responders and school personnel, in order to really focus on trying to deal with family violence in a better way.

“At this point I plan on having a series of training to better equip my prosecutors, law enforcement and first responders when dealing with family violence,” Thompson said. “The school was very generous allowing counselors to come on short notice; there were numerous EMTs, paramedics, and command officers from Ellis County, Limestone County, Freestone County and Navarro.”

Navarro College deserves a big thanks as well for allowing the training to take place at the Bain Center, even though they already had something scheduled in Room 400 which was moved to accommodate the training.

“Debbie Talley with food service at Navarro was very good in taking care of us,” he said. “Will Thompson did coordinate this, and is going to head up the family violence prosecution team.”

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[dkirk@corsicanadailysun.com](mailto:dkirk@corsicanadailysun.com)




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