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THE NATION

Hairstylists enlist in battle against abuse

Maine beauty professionals and students are trained to use their role as confidante to help save clients from domestic violence.

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Times Staff Writer

BANGOR, MAINE — The new customer slipped into Janie B. Good's hair salon cautiously, as if worried that someone might see her. She was only in her 30s, but fear had etched tight lines in her face. With a nervous edge, she told Good: Don't cut off too much. He doesn't like my hair short.

It's your hair, Good started to tell the young woman whose tresses draped down over her shoulders. But as the client had leaned back for a shampoo, Good spotted bruises on her neck. Easing her fingers across the woman's scalp, Good felt bumps that could only have come from being struck.

"Honey," Good recalls saying, "we need to talk."

One reason that Good, 59, became a hairdresser was that she figured it offered a window into human dynamics. Now she is one of nearly 300 Maine stylists and beauty students trained to recognize signs of domestic abuse and to serve as resources for victims.

As part of a broad strategy to reduce the state's domestic violence rate, Maine public officials have identified hairdressers as new allies, using salons as a staging area. These beauty professionals have been recruited not as enforcement agents, but as informed listeners who can suggest options to their clients — if they are ready to hear them.

Each year, more than half the homicides in this sparsely populated state are traced to domestic abuse. Abuse victims often balk at going to the police because they fear that authorities will not act, or that their abusers will hear that they were reported and seek retribution. Hairdressers are seen as potentially safe confidantes.

Authorities say there is no way to quantify the results of this evolving approach. But in Maine, officials say, more and more women who call domestic violence hotlines begin by saying, "I heard about this from my hairdresser."

Hairstylists like Good place decals on their work-station mirrors and hand out nail files printed with the number of a domestic violence hotline. Along with photos of hair and makeup, they hang posters listing warning signs of domestic abuse.

"I can't tell you how seriously I take this," Good said.

Rolling a perm at Absolute Style in Rockland, on the Maine coast, Rocki Camber said: "It is kind of an eye-opener, like, 'Wow, that could be me.' Sitting right here in my chair, I've had people say, 'I'm not an abused woman, I'm not beaten.'"

Then, Camber said, "They look at the criteria — like is their partner too suspicious? Are they not allowed to wear this type of

Verbal
Isolation
Controlling
Mental/Emotional
Sexual



Photographs by HERB SWANSON For The Times

CUTTING OUT VIOLENCE: Amanda Cost, a representative from a domestic abuse shelter, leads a seminar in Bangor, Maine, to train beauty professionals and students to recognize signs of abuse in clients and how to help.



LESSONS FOR LIFE: Chelsie Chapman participates in a seminar at a cosmetology school. Dozens of training sessions have taken place since Maine's curriculum for salon professionals was unveiled in May.

outfit or that kind of hairstyle? "Just by hanging up that poster, people identify with things that they wouldn't have thought of as abuse."

Maine's strategy is modeled on an effort in Alabama that won fast support from law enforcement specialists across the

country. Trolling for new ways to reduce domestic violence, two Birmingham charities came up with the idea of enlisting hairdressers. The approach was received so well locally that a board member of one of the sponsoring groups decided to fund a broader domestic-violence curriculum

for stylists.

Dianne Mooney, founder of a home decor direct sales company called Southern Living at Home, joined with the National Cosmetology Assn. and Clairrol Professional to form the Salons Against Domestic Abuse Fund and to launch a program called

Cut It Out. Attorneys general around the country picked up on the plan, mindful of national statistics that show that at least one in three women — and a far smaller proportion of men — will experience domestic abuse.

Clients who entrust their appearance to a beauty professional often develop a comfortable, long-lasting relationship. Hairdressers have frequent physical contact with their customers. They see their clients regularly — sometimes once a week — and work on a first-name basis. The good ones know when to keep their counsel: What is shared in the salon stays in the salon.

In turn, the hairdresser can supply basic information like the name and phone number of the nearest shelter.

"We operate with an unusual bridge of trust," said Good, who works out of her home on Southport Island. "We have a direct kind of intimacy. We learn about their lives, and we form a relationship."

Maine Atty. Gen. Steven Rowe was worried about the domestic violence rate when he heard about the plan to use hairstylists.

"The key here is not being judgmental but supportive," Rowe said. "These salon profes-

sionals are saying, 'Here is some information,' not: 'You should leave that jerk.'"

In cooperation with the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, Rowe and his staff spent a year tailoring the salon-professional curriculum to fit the needs of the state. Dozens of training sessions have taken place since the curriculum for salon professionals was unveiled in May. Some of the state's 13 cosmetology schools are considering mandating these seminars on domestic abuse.

One recent morning, about 35 students filed into the largest lecture hall at Pierre's School of Cosmetology here. Many wore the bright-blue robes that identified them as beauticians-in-training.

Even as a rainstorm raged outside, every student in this all-female class displayed a neatly arranged coiffure. They took their seats among framed posters identifying the motor points of the head, or the bones and nerves of the face. Plastic hand casts displaying dazzling fingernail designs lay idly on counter-tops.

The students looked up to see two representatives from a Bangor domestic abuse shelter. When Margo Batsie and Amanda Cost asked how many students had experience with domestic violence, more than half of them raised their hands.

As hairdressers, these students might see highly specific indications of abuse, the seminar leaders said. A client's cellphone might ring repeatedly — and always, it is her husband or boyfriend at the other end, wanting control through constant contact. When Batsie mentioned a case where a woman said her abuser called her 75 times in a day, one of the cosmetology students nodded in chilling recognition of her own experience, not that of a client.

"That's exactly what it was like," said Bethany Mageau, 27. "He called and called and called. He never hit me, but there was always that worry — what was coming next."

And then there are the bumps, bruises and raw scalp sections where clumps of hair may have been pulled from the roots. The client always has excuses, Batsie said: She fell down the stairs, or banged her head on a cupboard.

"This is all information to add to your toolbox," Batsie said.

Veteran hairdresser Good said domestic abuse education should be required for stylists and students.

"With the training, it makes it safe for you to approach a client," she said. "We don't have to cure these people. We have to be able to let them know where to go for help."

Sometimes the chain of support goes further still. At 2 o'clock one morning, Good found the young woman with the bruises and bumps shivering on her doorstep with her two young children. Good drove them to a shelter, hoping that, maybe, three lives had been salvaged.

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