

The WATCH Chronicle

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WATCH is a court monitoring and judicial policy non-profit located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. WATCH works to make the justice system more responsive to crimes of violence against women and children, focusing on greater safety for victims of violence and greater accountability for violent offenders.



WATCH FEATURE

Q & A: Minneapolis Deputy Police Chief Kris Arneson



Minneapolis Deputy Police Chief Kris Arneson received a Sheila Wellstone Gold WATCH award in 2011.

Back in her days as a Minneapolis street cop, **Kris Arneson** never relished the domestic violence calls.

“They’re dangerous, and a lot of times, when you get there the victim, for a number of reasons, turns on the officer,” she said. “Those are the calls you go back to time and time again.”

Arneson, now the department’s Deputy Chief of Investigations, has turned that distaste into a passion for helping victims. In 2007, as Inspector of the Fifth Precinct, she helped launch a pilot program that improved on-the-scene investigations of misdemeanor domestic assault. After the program was shown to significantly boost both arrest and conviction rates, it eventually went city-wide. In 2011, Arneson was awarded the Sheila Wellstone Gold WATCH award for promoting safety for battered women as a member of the Hennepin County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team and the Family Violence Coordinating Council.

More recently, Arneson has turned her sights to a related issue—juvenile sex trafficking, a problem she called “really huge, and worldwide.” Recently, she sat down to talk about the links between domestic violence and sex trafficking and their tangled connections to poverty, self-esteem, family dysfunction and the quest for power and control.

Q: When did your focus on domestic violence shift to trafficking?

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Deputy Chief Kris Arneson

“Sixty percent of our runaways in Minneapolis are girls, so 60 percent of our runaways could be victims of trafficking.”

A: Three years ago, I was promoted to deputy chief in the patrol division, and I happened to run into Sgt. Grant Snyder, our resident expert on juvenile trafficking. I asked him: “What are you doing?” He briefed me, and I said, “I’d like to know more about it.” He later came into my office and told me what he was doing, and I was hooked. It was fascinating.

[Sex trafficking] is underground. We know it exists, but if we don’t know what to look for, we don’t know what we’re seeing. We haven’t known until recently how big an issue it is.

The other thing for me is ... this was almost a natural bridge over to the victim world. My focus for a long time has been to make the police department more accessible to victims. We have advocates in domestic violence who work with the sergeants who investigate. They bring a special knowledge that we can’t bring. We want to do that with trafficking.

Q: How would those advocates work with the victims?

A: One thing our advocates do is sit down with the victim and create a safety plan so that when she’s ready to escape she has a plan in place. More times than not, there’s animals, kids involved. There could be money issues. ...

Our juvenile trafficking victims typically start as runaways. Sixty percent of our runaways in Minneapolis are girls, so 60 percent of our runaways could be victims of trafficking. Once you run away from home, statistics show you’re homeless in two days. You need a place to stay. Many of these young girls are vulnerable anyway. Some of them have mental health or cognitive issues. Some have already been abused. If there’s one thing I know about predators, they can pick up on a victim in a second. Then [the predators] start working on them.

But that is why my absenting [runaway] sergeants and juvenile trafficking sergeants work together. There’s a bridge there.

Once they identify a girl who’s been trafficked, it takes months for these young girls to admit what’s going on. During that time, [the sergeants] are connecting resources to the girl, and building trust. That’s what they really need—to get the girl to disclose what’s going on and to give up her trafficker. Because it’s very scary. Think of it: This man has control over you, you might have been beaten, emotionally abused, kept in a house, kept in a closet. ... if you tell the police what’s going on, you’re scared the guy will come back, hurt you, kill you.

“These guys pick up girls at school, at libraries, at bus stops. So I think we could work on girls’ self-esteem and ask: Who’s paying attention to these young girls?”

So go back to domestic violence and trying to leave the relationship, and you don’t have money of your own, and maybe your family isn’t here, so maybe all these things play into the psyche of why you don’t leave.

Q: What are the biggest misconceptions out there over who’s being trafficked and how it happens?

A: Well, it can happen to anyone. It does happen to girls in the suburbs. [But] if you look at where girls are being trafficked in Minneapolis, much of the area is in poor neighborhoods. That kind of fits your stereotype, but it’s about more than poverty. It’s more about their vulnerability. Do they have mental health issues? Are there two parents in the family? These guys pick up girls at school, at libraries, at bus stops. So I think we could work on girls’ self-esteem and ask: Who’s paying attention to these young girls? If mom is working, are other people involved? Building relationships is so important.

Q: Somebody once asked: Should trafficking drugs lead to higher penalties than trafficking kids? Should that be examined, the penalties involved?

A: We can’t arrest our way out of this crime. There’s such tremendous money in it that men will always take the chance. ... That’s why I go back to education, to working with these girls early on, the self-esteem and mentorship. If girls have a vision of something else in their life, they won’t step off into the sex trafficking world so readily.

IN THE NEWS

Police body cameras are latest tool against domestic violence

Body cameras worn by police officers are being touted as a “potent new tool” in hard-to-prove domestic violence cases.

In her April 26 article “[Police body cameras are newest tool against domestic violence](#),” *Star Tribune* reporter Shannon Prather details how footage from the cameras worn by police in cities like Columbia Heights and Burnsville are being increasingly used in court.

Although the footage can help solidify domestic assault charges, Minnesota lawmakers are trying to balance crime-fighting with both police accountability and protecting privacy.

[Read the article.](#)

- What is the prosecutory value of video from body cameras?
- How many police departments in Minnesota have body cameras?
- What is the ACLU’s position on police use of body cameras?

Find the answers to these questions. [Read the article.](#)

Proposed strip club causes firestorm of controversy

A new, [three-story strip club opening in downtown Minneapolis](#) is causing concern among human rights advocates. The Spearmint Rhino Gentleman’s Club, which opened on April 16, has two formal stages, a bar, a VIP section and private rooms in the basement. Operated by a California-based company with a global reach, the club is branded as an “upscale adult entertainment destination.”

But in an April 9 [editorial](#), Lee Roper-Baker, president and CEO of the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota, asks how a city priding itself on civic engagement and working to end racial and gender gaps can permit “at best, the objectification of women—and perhaps much, much worse—as part of its business community?”

Roper writes: “I am not the morality police. This is about laws and policies that continue to sanction and profit from violence against women.”

[Read the editorial.](#)

- How supportive are Minnesotans of laws and investments to protect and provide services to sex-trafficked girls?
- What vulnerabilities, according to law enforcement authorities, make strip clubs a pipeline for prostitution?

Find the answers to these questions. [Read the editorial.](#)

Program aims to end silence among battered Latino women

A program at the University of Minnesota is trying to empower Latino women to feel safe enough to leave abusive relationships.

In an April 2 story, WCCO reporter Ali Lucia looks at "[Breaking the Silence](#)," a mentor program begun three years ago at Community-University Health Care.

Lucia interviews Minnesota residents Teresa Llanas-Villareal, a social worker who witnessed her father abuse her mother growing up, and Mely Herrera, a graduate of the program who recently escaped her abusive husband and helped send him to jail.

"Now I can help other women move forward and give them the services they need to do so," Herrera says of the program.

Learn more about the program [here](#).

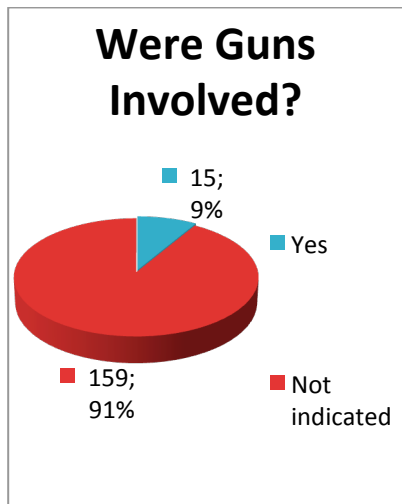
- What percentage of Latin-American women have experienced domestic violence in the past year?
 - 1 in 20
 - 1 in 15
 - 1 in 12
- What is the biggest barrier for Latino women who want to leave abusive relationships?
- How many people has "Breaking the Silence" touched since its inception in 2011?

Learn the answers to these questions. [Read the article](#).

COURT MONITORING BULLETIN

News of WATCH's court monitoring activities

By the Numbers: Guns and Safety: Jan. 14 – April 1, 2015



Of 171 domestic-violence cases, monitors reported that at least 15 involved handguns.

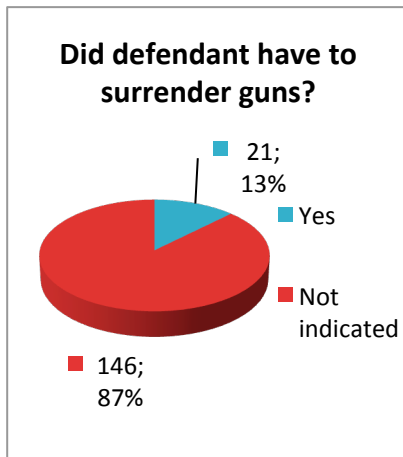
In August 2014, Minnesota enacted a law broadening handgun restrictions for domestic abusers. While the state already had banned convicted domestic abusers and stalkers from owning handguns, the new law expands those restrictions to include rifles and any other firearms. It also prohibits anyone subject to a temporary protective order from having a firearm, allowing for those weapons to be surrendered to a friend or relative while the order is in effect.

WATCH has asked courtroom monitors tracking domestic abuse cases to document safety issues inside the court and out. They track the involvement of guns, along with their surrender and what, if any conditions were imposed.

Of 171 domestic-violence cases, monitors reported that at least 15, or nearly 9 percent, involved guns. Interestingly, a slightly higher number of cases—21—required the defendant to surrender a gun or guns as part of the case. In six of those 21 cases, specific arrangements were made for the firearms' surrender.

In cases in which firearms were involved, monitors noted:

- “[firearm] was kept in a guarded box at the corner of the courtroom.”
- “Part of the sentencing of the defendant was to not own any guns or have them in his home.”
- “Defendant was imprisoned as a result of his firearm possession.”



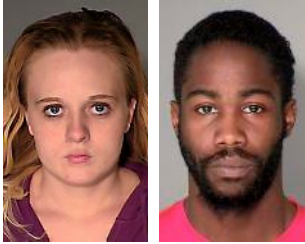
- “Judge explained that victim cannot have guns but didn't ask if he had any. Defendant asked what qualifies as an explosive, which made judge uneasy. Judge said Defendant's attorney and probation could help him understand the definition of explosive.”
- “As part of the sentence, she could not own or transport guns.”
- “The defendant had already had to give up possession as he is a felon and could not have a gun.”
- “[The defendant] was in possession of a pistol, required to surrender the weapon, he had two prior charges for the same offense. Bail set extremely high.
- “Defendant cannot have access to firearms or be around anyone who has firearms. Must be careful who she is around.”
- “Two years without gun rights.”

Fifty-six percent of domestic violence homicides in the state last year were committed with firearms.

(Source: MN Coalition for Battered Women)

According to domestic abuse advocates, gun restrictions are about protecting the lives of victims. In its 2014 Femicide Report, the Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women reported that nine of 16—or 56 percent—of domestic violence homicides in the state last year were committed with firearms, and that “while the percentage of domestic violence homicides using firearms fluctuates from year to year, murder with firearms is the most frequent weapon of choice.”

SEX TRAFFICKING UPDATE



Amanda
Larscheid

Justin
Banks

(Photos courtesy of Ramsey
County Attorney's office)

The investigation began more than a year ago, following a public complaint of prostitution in a St. Paul neighborhood.

FOCUS: Trafficking Probe Widened

A juvenile sex-trafficking case WATCH has followed for the past year widened in April when two men were charged with paying for sex with a minor.

On April 13, Steven Robert Kjelstad, 53, of Ellsworth, Wis., and Michael M. Jordan, 42, of White Bear Lake, were each charged in Ramsey County District Court with engaging in prostitution with a minor.

According to Ramsey County attorney John Choi, it is relatively rare in Minnesota to arrest and charge men who have paid for sex with trafficked victims. In comments to the *Star Tribune*, he said that Kjelstad and Jordan are only the second and third men charged with paying for sex with a trafficked victim in his four-year tenure as county attorney. "We've just become better at investigating and identifying the situations, and bringing these individuals to justice," Choi told the newspaper.

According to authorities, the charges stem from a probe into a sex trafficking ring run by Amanda Larscheid, 21, and two co-defendants, Justin Banks, 26, and Santangalo Tart, 24. The ring allegedly involved several females, including at least one minor—a 17-year-old runaway.

All three have pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting solicitation of a minor to perform prostitution. Tart was sentenced April 3 to nearly 14 years in prison, and Larscheid was sentenced April 13 to five years in prison. (Both were sentenced by Ramsey County District Judge Leonardo Castro.)

Banks was scheduled to be sentenced on May 11.

The investigation began more than a year ago, following a public complaint of prostitution in a St. Paul neighborhood. The 2014 arrests of Larscheid, Banks and Tart led authorities to Jordan and Kjelstad.

"Buying children for sex will not be tolerated in our community," Choi told reporters after the charges were filed against the alleged "johns." "We wouldn't have this problem if it weren't for men who think it's okay to buy children for sex as if they were ordering pizza."

The criminal complaint alleges that police found Jordan and Kjelstad's cellphone numbers in a cellphone belonging to Larscheid.

According to criminal complaints, Kjelstad and Jordan regularly paid for sex with Amanda Larscheid. Larscheid introduced the men to an underage girl, a 17-year-old runaway, and they paid to have sex with the minor, the complaint alleged.

According to news reports, the complaint alleges that police found Jordan's and Kjelstad's cellphone numbers in a cellphone belonging to Larscheid. Jordan, labeled "Tree Guy" in the phone's contact list, bought sex multiple times in two St. Paul homes, and inside his company truck, which advertised a tree service.

Kjelstad paid for sex at Larscheid's St. Paul apartments and in various locations around western Wisconsin, according to the complaint.

Spring Celebration Held

WATCH celebrated its past year of work on behalf of victims' rights on April 30, at Highpoint Center for Printmaking. Attendees included founder Susan Lenfestey, Ramsey County Attorney John Choi, WATCH board members and dozens of WATCH supporters.

In remarks to those in attendance, WATCH executive director Amy Walsh Kern recapped what she called an "incredibly successful and productive year," which included expanding courtroom monitoring to Ramsey County, infrastructure changes, overhauled volunteer training and a revamped web site. She said she expects roughly 5,000 hearings in Ramsey and Hennepin Counties to be monitored in the coming year.

A Twin Cities woman then shared her family's experience of domestic abuse. She described her family's unwanted exposure in the media, and how she looked on helplessly as her child's abuser was released on bail and allowed to travel to Colorado on vacation despite confessing to the crime. Following two delays, the defendant was sentenced on Dec. 23 to 12 years in prison.

Despite "being tossed and turned around in the system," the speaker said, "there was always someone with a red clipboard. Do you know how good it felt to have someone there?"

She added that she has resources that others don't. "I can drive to court. I speak English. I have supportive friends," she said. "I can't imagine what it would be like to be someone without resources—the despair they must feel has got to be unreal.

"That red clipboard is someone there, saying, 'We're here, and you matter.'



WATCH Executive Director Amy Walsh Kern (left) greets attendees



Ramsey County Attorney John Choi