

Anna's Story

Anna Alvarez could never have imagined that she would be inspiring others with her story of success. Just two years ago, at the age of 28, Anna appeared in court as a victim of domestic assault and battery. It was then that Anna made the life-altering decision to walk the road of a survivor and succeed. However like many victims of domestic violence, Anna's journey began long before the incident in question. Though she had finally found the strength to tell the truth, the violence Anna spoke of in court was nothing new – she and the defendant had a history involving violence, with Anna as the victim of a silent, recurring cycle of abuse.

Assistant District Attorney Melissa Tafe speaks to the barriers that often victims face. “There are challenges which are unique to each region. For example, in New Bedford, lower educational backgrounds, low income, and having less of a family or social support system can make the transition more difficult,” adding that the housing process also takes time and that few ‘quick solutions’ are available. When asked what changed for her, Anna says, “I knew I was worth more.” In the past, Anna says she feared the court process and worse, possible retaliation from her abuser. Eventually, she says, “I just snapped out of it. I was thinking of my kids. I had to show them that you don't have to stay stuck in it.”

In the coming months after appearing in court, Anna was overwhelmed. Despite a sense of relief, she says she still felt lost and wondered if she was doing the right thing. She worried about maintaining her residency and staying acquainted with shared friends. She often felt afraid and says, “I was always looking behind my back, thinking, is something going to happen to me? To my kids? I was in constant fear.” Then, to add to her frustrations, a house fire forced her to leave her home. “Some days, I was ready to quit,” says Anna, who says her children and her family provided the root of her strength.

In the legal realm, however, Anna developed a unique relationship with Assistant District Attorney Tafe. “At first I didn't want to talk to her. I was embarrassed,” she says. However Anna says her fears quickly vanished as Tafe walked her through the steps and helped her to understand the process. “She made me feel comfortable, like I could open up to her. I felt I could tell her the truth, instead of hiding it and saying everything was okay... She was awesome, just an awesome person to talk to.”

In the face of adversity, Anna has somehow found the resolve to move forward. She enrolled in the Salter School to become a medical assistant, has since graduated from her academics, and is now fulfilling an externship. In addition, Anna is determined to help others. By sharing her story, she says “I have friends that have gone through the same thing. I've inspired them to move on too. It's a chain reaction.” Eventually, she aspires to obtain a degree in Human Services and has hopes of launching a unique inpatient program for both male and female victims of domestic violence.

Just as Anna once felt, the majority of victims of domestic violence remain trapped. From her experience serving victims, Assistant District Attorney Tafe knows this all too well and applauds Anna for her strength. “Anna is someone who has every excuse to fail or to stay in the cycle. Despite this, she has decided to move on and succeed and be an advocate for women involved in domestic violence.” For Anna, moving forward is the only sensible approach. “No one can take away your goals and what you want to achieve in life,” she says, “I'm proud of myself... I can actually say that.” Tafe adds that she too, is proud. Success stories like Anna's bring meaning to her work. “Anyone working with domestic violence knows that it is frustrating, but it's stories like Anna's that make the job worthwhile.”