

Domestic protection lacking for same-sex couples

BY BRIANNE DOPART, The Herald-Sun
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DURHAM -- Carol Manion's nephew might be alive today if authorities had more experience dealing with abuse in same-sex relationships.

The Durham resident's nephew was murdered in Davie County in 2002 by his on-again, off-again partner, Manion said.

Corey David Hawkins, 22, had attempted to get a protective order against 26-year-old Rayford Clyde Hendrix in Davie County, but was told by authorities they didn't know if protective orders were valid in same-sex relationships, his aunt said.

"He had tried to get away earlier that fall, but his ex-partner was still stalking him," Manion said.

According to his aunt, Hawkins stayed with friends and family while hiding from his alleged stalker, but was eventually reported missing.

Six months later, his body was discovered in the yard of a home occupied by Hendrix, who is now serving a 30-year sentence in Brown Creek Correctional Institution near Polkton in Anson County for second-degree murder for killing Hawkins.

Manion believes her nephew's tragic death could have been avoided if more resources were available for victims of violence in gay and lesbian relationships.

Her sentiments were echoed Tuesday by April Burgess-Johnson, prevention specialist with the N.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence. The coalition helps coordinate Project Rainbow Net, an initiative to make domestic violence victim services more readily available to gays and lesbians across the state.

While members of both the gay and straight communities can obtain domestic violence protective orders against partners if the pair shares a residence, gay couples who do not live together are not entitled to the same protections, according to Chapter 50 of the N.C. General Statutes.

Aside from legal distinction, Manion believes one of the things that may have prevented her nephew from protecting himself was a lack of resources from which to seek help.

"The resources aren't there," Manion said. "I think it's harder for the male victims to talk about abuse, and even if you do talk about it and you make that one little move [to reach] out, you don't get the help -- it's not there."

One year after Hawkins' death, the coalition canvassed the 92 agencies offering services to domestic abuse victims and found on the whole that the agencies offered sub-standard services to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered individuals seeking assistance, Burgess-Johnson said.

Most shelters could not accommodate male domestic abuse victims, and many legal advocacy groups are ill-equipped to deal with the absence of laws applying to domestic partnerships.

"If you can't get married, you can't get divorced and therein lies the problem," Burgess-Johnson said.

While comprehensive statistics on the number of same-sex couples living in North Carolina do not exist, Ian Palmquist, executive director of Equality North Carolina, said 1,600 pairs of residents in the state identified themselves as same-sex couples such in the 2000 Census. Other research indicates 5 percent of the state's population identifies itself as gay or lesbian, he said.

Project Rainbow Net is working to educate victim support programs in the state about how to better accommodate gay and lesbian victims of abuse. All employees at the Durham Crisis Response Center have been trained by the coalition, Burgess-Johnson said.

For Manion, the loss of her nephew has been devastating to her and her family. "It's always with you," she said.

Links related to this article:

Resources available to victims of same-sex domestic abuse: www.projectrainbownet.org

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