

Mother of sexually-abused children uses experience to write book

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LINCOLN — Three years ago, a 5-year-old boy told his parents he was being sexually abused by his 9-year-old stepbrother.

This abuse is all too common, but it is rarely discussed or not nearly enough.

"People should be talking about this more than they do," said Pamela Shaper, director of Substance Abuse Prevention Task Force for the town of Lincoln. "It's hard for people to come forward and say I'm a victim."

The task force hosted a lecture at the Lincoln Public Library Tuesday night, where Claire Silva, who recently wrote a book, "A Child's Heart Speaks: Surviving Sexual Abuse," which discusses how her two children became the victims of sexual abuse in her own home.

"In 2003, my 5-year-old son disclosed he was being sexually abused by my step-son," said Silva.

At first, Silva couldn't believe this was happening.

"This was a kid everyone liked — everyone trusted him," she said.

It wasn't too soon after that Silva's youngest son told her when he was only 3-years-old that he was also being sexually abused by his stepbrother.

Silva immediately began losing trust in people. She knew she had to talk to someone. She found there was also another task that he ahead of her.

She traveled across the country to speak with other survivors, seven men and seven women, and "through the



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Author Claire Silva, right, discusses aspects of her book, "A Child's Heart Speaks: Surviving Sexual Abuse," at the Lincoln Public Library Tuesday night.

process I started writing," said Silva.

She figured, "If I spoke with an adult survivor, that would help me as a parent."

After speaking to the 14 victims, she found that 11 of them were sexually abused by men and three by women. Most of them, she found, were also victimized by more than one perpetrator.

By her own circumstance and by listening to the stories of other victims, Silva found it difficult to trust anyone.

"In the beginning, I kind of looked at everyone as everyone is a perpetrator," she said. "It affects every aspect of a survivor's life" and the people closest to the victim.

But Silva found solace in writing her book, "A Child's Heart Speaks: Surviving Sexual Abuse." The book provides information on sexual abuse: how to recognize a predator, the warning signs and how to deal with the process.

Silva found through her research that 58 percent of these types of cases are not reported and that 39 million Americans are survivors of childhood sexual abuse. She also found that 1 in 4 girls were sexually abused before the age of 18 and for boys it's 1 in 6.

"For me sexual abuse is deliberate, it's planned," she said.

Some of the warning signs

of a juvenile perpetrator, her step-son, include: excessive need to be near younger children, touching of younger children (head, shoulders, back), stealing behavior, does not show signs of bonding to other people — no strong relationships or wanting to sleep with younger children. Some of these signs are also prevalent in adult perpetrators.

Silva found that her step-son manipulated her sons by finding out what each of them feared and using those fears as a tool to sexually abuse them.

"He watched my kids and waited to see what they were afraid of," she said.

It has been three years since Silva became aware of the

abuse and since then, her step-son has been removed from her household. However, she said it hasn't been easy working with the services that Rhode Island provides in these situations. She said she hopes there

will be more discussion on this topic in the future.

For more information on how to obtain a copy of Silva's book, contact the task forces of Lincoln and Cumberland at 333-8426.