

Friends, families gather to honor homicide victims on national day

Nina Culver/SR

The friends and families of homicide victims gathered for a vigil Thursday evening, passing a box of tissues around the room as they spoke one by one, choking back tears.

The Spokane County Prosecutor's Office unit that assists victims and witnesses has held the vigil every year on the National Day of Remembrance for Murder Victims since 2007. There have been 158 homicides, including vehicular homicides, in Spokane County since the start of 2007.

"Homicide is the worst crime that can be done to somebody," said unit manager Annette Ingham. "We need to honor the victims, honor the families."

Four comfort therapy dogs from HOPE Animal-Assisted Crisis Response were at the event and people entering the County's Public Works building for the vigil bent down to pet their heads. Donated shoes lined the stairwell inside the building, with each pair of shoes representing a murder victim. The shoes will be on display outside the building on Friday and then will be donated to charity.

"They'll never fill them up again," Ingham said of the empty pairs of shoes. "These people are gone."

Toni Schmidt's daughter, Kimberly Schmidt, was murdered by boyfriend Daniel Arteaga in 2012. She's been coming to the annual vigils ever since.

"It's pretty much devastated us," she said of the killing. "This helps us, to know that there's others that feel as we do."

It's difficult to sit and hear the stories of others, but it's a shared pain that offers comfort at the same time, Schmidt said.

"Some people never get justice, but we did," she said.

Spokane County Deputy Prosecuting Attorney Jack Driscoll said he often thinks of the people who died when he drives by the location where they were killed.

"Each of those losses ripples out into the world and ripples out for years and years," he said. "All these lives mattered."

Donna Heinen spoke of her 19-year-old son, Dylan, who was accidentally shot and killed by his friend, Jeremy McVicker, in 2013. She said attending church has helped her cope. "I have already forgiven Jeremy," she said, though she acknowledged that forgiving is difficult.

“I will see my son,” she said. “I know it every day.”

Her husband, Dennis Heinen, encouraged the families in the room to reach out to others suffering a similar loss. The first year was the worst for him, he said.

“I think I cried more in that first year than in my whole life,” he said.