Domestic violence workers’ complaints shed light on issues

For eight years, Debra Lefeld lived in a domestic violence shelter in Ocala to help people like her. When Lefeld eventually left her relationship, she got a job as a relief worker with the Dade Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Center.

Lefeld said she enjoyed performing duties others wouldn’t do, like taking victims to court dates and filling out forms for them.

“I’d be the first to say that the job description, the funding, the lack of funding, it’s not only just for it,” she said.

Lefeld’s position was completely funded by what is called a “VUCA grant” – a Federal Victims of Crime Act, administered by the Florida Attorney General’s office. And if she had to perform duties outside of her job description, the funding got pulled.

It was the first of many grievances Lefeld had against the shelter.

“I feel like I was not treated fairly, and I was asked to do things that were against the board,” Lefeld said.

Lefeld and her former staff members from the Domestic Violence Center submitted complaints to the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, creating a pattern of mistreatment and harassment.

The Coalition is working to address the concerns of workers like Lefeld.

“Domestic violence workers are often seen as expendable,” said Gloriana Cervantes, executive director of the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

The Coalition is calling for better training and support for workers like Lefeld.

“Workers need to feel safe and supported in their jobs,” Cervantes said.

The Coalition is working with the Florida Attorney General’s office to ensure that workers like Lefeld are treated fairly and with respect.
FAIRCHILD TROPICAL BOTANIC GARDEN

GALA IN THE GARDEN

MIDNIGHT GARDEN

Fairchild’s 29th annual Gala in the Garden was held on February 1, at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden’s lakeside marquee, which allowed for gorgeous panoramic views of the Garden under the moonlit sky. Guests dined and danced the night away under a Midnight Garden, this year’s Gala theme. The ceiling was decorated in pink orchids and monstera leaves hung over the dance floor. Proceeds from the Fairchild Gala support the Garden’s science education, conservation science, and horticultural programs.
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