

LDS lawyers ban together to help prevent domestic violence

By Cecily Markland

Even the name—The Never Again Foundation—underscores this non-profit organization's firm stand and adamant message about domestic violence, sexual assault and elder abuse.

The message—that such abuse must stop and that victims deserve to be compensated and to heal—is strongly and uniquely delivered by attorneys Keith Perkins and S. Kent Phelps.

“We provide free legal representation and education in the State of Arizona for women, children, and senior citizens who were victims of domestic violence, sexual assault or elder abuse in civil law suits against their abusers,” states the organization's Web site.

Oftentimes an abuser is criminally charged, but The Never Again Foundation files civil suits, giving victims a chance to be awarded restitution in the form of monetary settlements from their abuser, explains Brother Perkins, who is a member of the Desert Wells Ward in the Queen Creek Stake.

“It's a concept called ‘therapeutic jurisprudence,’” he explains. “We wield the sword of justice in defense of truth and virtue. We use the laws to help people obtain hope, justice and healing.”

And, they do it *pro bono*, not charging their clients for legal advice or representation, and not taking a portion of the settlement.

Brother Perkins started the foundation because of positive lessons he learned from his own father.

“Because I had the dad I had, I had the greatest gift we can have in our lives, to know Heavenly Father loves us. I know that and I can't stand that a man of any caliber can take that away from a child. If a father can do that to a child it makes it difficult for a child to believe in or have faith in a loving Heavenly



Through their Chandler-based company, The Never Again Foundation, attorneys S. Kent Phelps (l) and Keith Perkins (r) provide free legal aid to women, children and seniors who have suffered domestic abuse.

The Never Again Foundation has also been instrumental in getting legislators to enact some of the first laws in the nation to help victims of these crimes and has done a great deal to educate other lawyers and supporters of victims' rights as Brother Perkins has been asked to present workshops and keynote addresses across the country.

Their efforts have caught the attention and are gaining support of other lawyers, legislators and community leaders, particularly LDS leaders, including Senator Karen Johnson (R, Az); Representative Sylvia Laughter; Beverly Campbell; Clate Mask, Jr., and Kevin Fine, past president of Arizona Trial Lawyers; and Phill Westbrook, vice mayor of Chandler; as well as Kathy Pullins, assistant dean of BYU Law School and Susan Griffeth, BYU professor of law.

Father. That is a gift no one should take from a child," he says.

Brother Perkins left his job as a partner in a law firm to start the non-profit organization in 2001, and was later joined by Brother Phelps of the Ellsworth Ward in the Skyline Stake.

"He's a warm-hearted human being. It's been a perfect fit," says Brother Perkins. "He heard about the work I was doing and took a half-salary pay cut to come work with me."

The Never Again Foundation is the first of its kind in the nation. Currently, it is based only in Arizona, but has plans to rapidly expand, adding additional services here and opening locations in other states, as funds become available.

"We can only do what we do because of the grants and donations we have received. And, we need more help to grow and just stay afloat," says Brother Perkins. He and Brother Phelps want to start an endowment that will give the foundation security and provide funds to expand. Their goal is to raise \$500,000 before September.

To date, the organization has won civil judgments totaling more than \$50 million and has collected more than \$1 million for the victims.

"We have the largest judgment in Arizona history," Brother Perkins says.

He says, through these suits, "Individuals are able to hold their abuser personally accountable. They may not ever be able to collect a dime of the award, but they finally have the law point the finger at the bad guy and say, 'I know who you are and will not tolerate it anymore.' It is so powerfully healing for victims."

"Never Again Foundation gives an opportunity for the victim to finally get to tell her story in court, with her attorney, to tell her story and what she's gone through," says Susan Griffith.

"In a sense, what these cases deal with is personal injury within a family; and, until now, there have been so few cases, that they would fit in one treatise, one book," she says. "What Keith [Perkins] has been able to do is change the way in which personal injury cases can be used to protect victims of these crimes."

"There are not very many attorneys willing to tread in untamed waters like this," she adds.

Phil Westbrook, chairman of the Maricopa Association of Governments Regional Domestic Violence Council, says the organization fills a critical void.

"The Never Again Foundation is something that should be in every state in our country," he says.

While Brother Perkins says there is much to be done, both in terms of raising money and in the number of people who need the services provided, through it all, he considers himself a winner.

"I get to do the work I know I'm supposed to be doing. I feel I am a blessed man."

To inquire about services provided or to learn how to help, visit the Web site at www.neveragainfoundation.org or contact Keith Perkins by e-mail at keith@neveragainfoundation.org or by calling (480) 539-9111.