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Conference probes domestic abuse

FAMILIES: Victims tell their stories at a two-day event aimed at educating caregivers.

By Brian M. Cuaron Staff Writer

LONG BEACH — Domestic violence ran in the family.

L.Y. Marlow's grandmother and mother both endured it. After seeing in childhood the effects of her dad's beatings on her mom's body, Marlow later joined the abusive cycle with her partner.

"There was silence and shame in my family that transcended from my grandmother to my mother," said Marlow on Monday, who added she too was ashamed of becoming a victim.

An audience of around 450 people — many whose professions deal with domestic violence — heard stories from victims. It was the first day of the two-day conference at the

On the Web

• For information on the conference, visit www.dvinstitute.org/healing.

Westin hotel that is aimed at educating people about how they can better assist those they serve.

The conference, titled "A Journey to Healing: Finding the Path," was organized by the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community and focused on how victims get beyond the ordeal.

"We're trying to change the dialogue a little bit," said Oliver J. Williams, executive director of the institute. "You don't have to be a survivor forever."

In Oliver's five-step process of healing, he said, the final stage involves the victim devel-

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A panel discussion Monday featured, from left, authors Lavon Morris-Grant and Brenda L. Thomas, Atum Azzahir of the Cultural Wellness Center in Minneapolis, and Shelia Hankins of a Michigan domestic violence board.

Diondra Jay Staff Photographer

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oping the capacity to let go. Also involved is the person's ability to forgive oneself.

While the institute deals particularly with domestic violence in the African American community, Oliver said, the conference offered advice for people of all colors.

"It really is for everybody that comes," he said. "Healing is not something unique within the African-American community."

The conference also gave awards to those active in assisting domestic violence victims. U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder Jr. — who addressed the audience via a pre-recorded video — was among those honored.

"Domestic violence devastates not only women and their families, but also society as a whole," he said.

Interval House, a Long Beach agency that provides crisis shelters and other services for victims, helped set up the event. It was instrumental in bringing the conference, which occurs every two years, back to the city for the second time in a row.

Carol Anne Williams, the executive director of the agency, said shelter-based programs in California were in serious crisis after the state cut funding for them, but that won't keep them from keeping their doors open.

"No matter what happens with the funding, we're going to stay," Williams said.

Today's meeting will allow participants to listen to experts on the healing process for victims of domestic violence.

There will also be workshops.

For Marlow the healing process involved coming to grips with what happened to her and forgiving herself for allowing it. Jessica Jackson, another former victim, said the process also involved forgiving her dad for what he did.

"I don't believe that healing or peace ... is possible without forgiveness," Jackson said.

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