

Domestic violence shakes Johnston County

BY SARAH NAGEM - STAFF WRITER

SMITHFIELD -- Four people, two of them children, have been killed during the past three weeks in Johnston County. Accused in their deaths are people who were supposed to care for them.

An estimated 70 people gathered Thursday at the courthouse in Smithfield to honor these victims and speak out against domestic violence.

"It's going to take a communitywide response," said Keri Christensen, executive director of Harbor Inc., which provides aid to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in Johnston.

On July 1, Elizabeth Holmes Reyes was shot and killed in the Brogden community near Smithfield. Her stepfather, Ben Croft, was injured. Her estranged husband, Aldolfo Reyes Maldonado, 45, has been charged with first-degree murder and attempted first-degree murder.

On July 13, Devinee Maier House, 42, and her son, Dakota Johnson, 14, were found dead in their home near Clayton. Investigators believe William Fulton House, 50, shot his wife and stepson before fatally shooting himself.

And on Monday, Teghan Allyssa Skiba, 4, died at UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill, where she was being treated for severe head injuries and bruises, cuts and human bite marks all over her body. Jonathan Douglas Richardson, 21, is accused of sexually abusing and killing Teghan. The child was left in his care by his girlfriend, Helen Reyes, who was at



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Evelyn Sanders of Benson, center, and Vertna DeVine of Smithfield, right, sing 'Jesus Loves Me' during a candlelight vigil Thursday at the Johnston County courthouse in Smithfield. An estimated 70 people came to the vigil. Community leaders urged victims to get help.

Army Reserves training in another state. Richardson, who was living on his grandparents' property in the Brogden community, told medical personnel July 16 that the girl had fallen out of bed.

'Survival mode'

Community leaders at Thursday's vigil encouraged everyone to speak up when they know someone is in a dangerous situation. Often, they said, victims feel trapped because they depend on their abuser for money.

Joli Barnette, 41, of the Corinth-Holders community in northern Johnston said she was in an abusive marriage for nine years before she filed a protective order against her husband in 2004, got help from Harbor and eventually got a divorce.

"I was in survival mode every single day. ... I was so overwhelmed

with fear, I just couldn't fathom how I was going to get out of it," she said.

Her husband violated the protective order, Barnette said. But she finally moved on. She encourages victims to take the first step and not worry about what might come next.

Bob Moore, 66, of the Smithfield area stopped at the vigil on his way home from work. He has granddaughters about Teghan's age, and the girl's death touched him.

"I think it hit me harder than anything has in a long time," he said. "How do you do that to a 4-year-old?"
