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## Counsellor claims abuse by client-lover

By **SAM PAZZANO**, TORONTO SUN

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A female counsellor at a homeless shelter for drug addicts described horrendous abuse Monday at the hands of a client-lover she met on the job.

"There was no long period of time where there wasn't an incident," testified Pauline Sanders, 52, at the trial of her former live-in lover John Whelan, 43, in front of Justice David Salmers of the Superior Court of Justice. "I don't think we'd go by a month where there wasn't verbal or physical abuse."

Sanders said the unpredictable Whelan would erupt into violence at the slightest provocation, then apologize profusely and beg forgiveness. She said she sometimes feared for her life but kept giving him additional chances.

She lied to her loved ones about the real nature of her bruises to conceal the abuse.

Sanders, a counsellor at the Porter Place residence in Newmarket, which housed approximately 30 men, met Whelan while he was resident in February 2006 and "became serious in May 2006."

Crown attorney Pat Colavecchia outlined her 14-count indictment against Whelan, alleging the construction worker and addict assaulted his girlfriend from August 2006 through March 31, 2008, and unlawfully confined her in the fall of 2007.

Whelan pleaded not guilty to all 14 charges.

In her opening to the judge, Colavecchia alleged Whelan choked, punched, pulled Sanders' hair and head-butted her, blackening both eyes and bloodying her nose, in various episodes during their turbulent 2-1/2 year relationship.

Sanders was violating a code of conduct at her job, which prohibited all "sexual, social and personal relationships" between counsellors and clients."

She downplayed that Monday, saying her relationship with a former client was "frowned upon."

Defence lawyer Leora Shemesh said the defence is alleging the college-educated Sanders fabricated these allegations of abuse to cover up her ongoing relationships with men at her workplace, including acting as a surety for another addict, to protect her career.

In testimony Monday, Sanders said Whelan showed up at her work, driving one of her two cars and threatened to expose their affair to her employer.

"I felt intimidated and afraid. He said to me, 'You're not going to dump me off. Your job is ruined,'" she recalled of the confrontation.

She testified as she was driving him, she said she'd report him to police, despite the personal and professional price she might have to pay.

"I don't care what this costs me now. This is ending this intimidation," she told Justice Salmers.

The conflict ended when he tossed her cell phone and purse out of the car window, yanked on the steering wheel.

Sanders' vehicle crashed in a ditch near Upper Canada Mall in the summer of 2007.

Whelan pleaded guilty to a simple assault for that incident and received a six-month conditional sentence with house arrest.

Sanders took a sick leave after the car crash "because my supervisor felt that incident was pretty traumatizing."

The trial is expected to last two weeks.

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