

Women's Center of Montgomery County

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Executive Director's Report



Submitted by Maria Macaluso

Reporting on Our Emergency Legal Advocacy Work in 2007: Building Bridges to Safety for Victims of Family Violence

As many of you know some of our most meaningful and critical work occurs on our hotline each day, as people in crisis take those first steps toward getting help, reaching out to be heard and to explore their options to affect positive change in their lives. With more than 10,000 hotline calls coming through our counseling lines each year, we know that these contacts are an essential part of the process of ending an abusive relationship, identifying the resources needed to take those next steps, and finding the validation and support needed for the healing to begin. As a director, I know that it may take a caller more than seven contacts before they actually find the conviction and resources necessary to leave. I also know that our success on the hotline cannot be measured by whether the caller leaves the abuser or files for a protection order or makes any number of changes necessary to end the cycle of violence, but rather our success lies in the fact that every time an individual in crisis calls our hotline, they reach a caring, skilled and committed counselor who is there to listen and to offer informed counsel and assistance.

Yet as rewarding and essential as these contacts are, for many of our counselors we end those calls wanting to know if we have made *the* difference, if this was the call that will lead the caller to safety. Sometimes we never know; we just know that we were there for them and that we helped, in that moment and in that life.

By contrast, our work in legal advocacy frequently yields much more 'measurable' success in the form of quantifiable outcomes such as the number of protection from abuse orders filed, victims assisted through early intervention via police referral, and court accompaniment in criminal proceedings filed against the abuser. It is in these areas where our Legal Advocacy Project is doing some amazing and cutting edge work. Our legal advocates were among the first in the state to provide assistance with "bedside PFA's", temporary protection orders issued to hospitalized victims to keep their abuser away. For many years, our advocates were unique in that they are not only welcome in the courtroom (many judges in other counties *still* do not allow legal advocates in their courtrooms), but our judges respect our advocates and make direct referrals, from the bench to petitioners, encouraging them to seek the services of our advocates in affecting a resolution. Our presence in the courthouse - assisting people in completing the paperwork for their PFA, providing court accompaniment during the hearing, informing people about their right to victim compensation claims, and counseling the victim and their family members - is a source of great pride and accomplishment for the Women's Center.

Similarly, our collaborations with police departments throughout our county over the years have created a referral system that brings services to domestic violence victims immediately following police intervention. Under the Rights and Services Act, police officers are required to inform victims, with written notification, of the services that exist to assist them. In our county, we have taken this requirement one step further through the creation of a system known as the 'police permission slip project'. The Permission Slip Program was designed as an early intervention into domestic violence cases. It was implemented by the Women's Center more than fifteen years ago with the support of the District Attorney's office. Rather than wait until the

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domestic violence victim calls the Women's Center for help, the Women's Center, upon notification from the police officer, can make a call to the individual to provide information and support without breaching confidentiality protections. It was developed as a preventive measure; to prevent further acts of abuses AND to prevent the police officer from having to return repeatedly to the same house. Through cooperation with the Women's Center, the police officer is able to offer proactive support to domestic violence victims in crisis. This model has been so successful that it has been replicated by other programs and other systems that work with victims of crime.

Through all of these efforts, our Legal Advocacy Project has continued to grow and thrive as an integral resource for domestic violence victims seeking legal remedies. In 2007, of the 1,459 Protection from Abuse petitions filed in Montgomery County, our legal advocates provided court accompaniment and legal advocacy assistance to 1,110 – 76% - of those individuals. Additionally, we provided court accompaniment to 305 individuals in district court, criminal contempt and preliminary hearings.

The success of our police trainings and collaborations can also be seen in the increased number of permission slip referrals we receive each year. In 2007, we received 1028 direct police referrals through the permission slip program, which does not include the calls we received through our hotlines from victims who were given our number by the police. 42 of our county's 50 police departments made at least one referral to our program in the past year.

As we conclude 2007 I think that it is important that we acknowledge and thank all of the members of our Legal Advocacy Project – the staff and volunteers who work tirelessly and skillfully in the pursuit of justice for victims of family violence, forging new collaborations to better serve victims and innovative champions of victims' rights. You are all to be commended and applauded for your amazing work! Thank you for your dedication, your creativity, your resourcefulness, and your commitment to always improving our services and our response to victims of domestic violence!

Pottstown's Potpourri

February 4 through February 8, 2008 has been designated as National Teen Dating Awareness and Prevention Week. This was accomplished when Senate Resolution 388 was passed on December 17, 2007. This resolution calls for all interested groups to observe the week with "appropriate programs and activities that promote awareness and prevention of the crime of teen dating violence in their communities." The Pottstown community is very fortunate to have just such an initiative beginning to be developed for its teen population and their parents.

The TriCounty Community Network (TCN) Domestic Violence Committee, based in Pottstown, is in the process of developing a play focusing on safe dating and healthy relationships.

This committee is comprised of community members and representatives of various organizations committed to educating our communities about domestic violence. In a collaborative effort, the members of the committee, including Janine Kelly and Kristine Wickward of the Women's Center, are working to develop a curriculum to be utilized in conjunction with the play by those schools that host the play.

The first performance of the play will be held at Pottsgrove High School. Students from Pottsgrove High School, under the direction of Todd Kelly, teacher and drama club director, have been working with professional playwright, Aileen McCullough, and the TCN Domestic Violence Committee to write the play. While the play is not quite ready to be performed during National Teen Dating Awareness and Prevention Week, it will be ready by April 2008 (prom time), at which time there will be a need for many facilitators for post play discussion groups at the high school. Please consider volunteering your time and sharing your knowledge by acting as one of these facilitators when the time comes!

Kristine Wickward
Legal Advocate - Pottstown

Save the Date!
Sunday, April 13, 2008
11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Join Us for an Afternoon of Fun and Conversation!

Hopefully by now you have all received your invitations to this year's spring fundraising brunch, but just in case you haven't, we encourage to check out our website at www.wcmontco.org and click on the link to *Brunch 2008* to download a copy of the invitation and RSVP card so that you can join us for what promises to be an afternoon of lively debate, entertaining conversations and lots of fun and goodwill, all in the interest of benefitting victims of domestic violence!

This year's event will again be a champagne brunch and silent auction at the Meadowlands Country Club on Sunday, April 13, 2008 2007 at 11:00 a.m., but unlike prior years, we've planned some new twists and new surprises. Our silent auction, for example, will include a wonderful collection of artwork by local artists, including Sam Maitin. The Carol Schwartz Gallery has also generously agreed to provide an exhibit of jewelry for sale, with a portion of the proceeds donated to the Center.

In addition to the opportunity to recognize State Representative Josh Shapiro for his wonderful legislative and advocacy work on behalf of domestic violence victims, our brunch will also include a dynamic and informative discussion with brothers Chris Matthews, host of "The Chris Matthews Show" and "Hardball With Chris Matthews" and Jim Matthews, Chairman of our Montgomery County Board of Commissioners, moderated by emcee, Larry Kane. To that end, we will be providing guests with the opportunity to submit questions in writing to our presenters during the brunch, so we encourage you to come prepared to be engaged!

Early responses have been pouring in, so we encourage you to act now to reserve your space for a fun and festive afternoon!

**Martin Luther King Day of Service:
Recognizing the Efforts of the Highland Elementary School**

This year, in honor of Martin Luther King's Day of Caring, I had the great pleasure of participating in an event coordinated by the Highland Elementary School in Abington Township. Led by their fifth grade teacher, LaVonda Willis, I spent the morning of January 21st in a bustling cafeteria, with more than one hundred elementary school students and many of their parents as they gathered and packaged a wonderful collection of personal care items and toys to give as gifts to children affected by domestic violence. It was truly one of the most heartwarming, organized, efficient and enthusiastic events that I have ever had the joy of witnessing as this group of young children came together with a simple unifying objective: finding a way to give comfort and care to other children in crisis. With a goal of creating packages that would fill the immediate needs of families in flight due to domestic violence, while also providing the children with a reassuring toy or game to distract them through the ordeal of court and conflict, the children gave up their day off from school to join together in service to their community. It was a most inspirational and uplifting morning, and on behalf of all of us here at the Women's Center, I would like to thank the children, the school, and the parents for reminding me how wonderful it is to have the support, love and caring of the community and what difference we all can make when we come together in the spirit of service and community giving!

The Women's Center of Montgomery County
Please make us your highest priority
United Way Donor Option
Number 00433

Editor's Note: 100% of the PCADV funded domestic violence programs in PA participated in this survey, including the Women's Center of Montgomery County

**New Report Shows Large Demand for Domestic Violence Services
and Short Supply of Resources to Meet Victims' Needs**
*Cuts to core VAWA programs and VOCA threaten advocates' abilities
to meet demand for services*

(January 30, 2008) *Washington, DC* – In a single day, domestic violence programs served more than 53,000 adults and children in the United States. However, a significant number of requests – more than 7,700 — went unmet because domestic violence agencies lacked the funding and staff to meet the demand. This data comes from the release of the National Network to End Domestic Violence's second *National Census of Domestic Violence Services* (NCDVS).

Approximately 61% of unmet requests were for emergency shelter and transitional housing. With recent cuts to critical programs funded by the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), domestic violence advocates worry about their ability to respond to all requests for help.

“Domestic violence programs are already struggling to meet the huge demand for shelter and advocacy services,” said Sue Else, President of the National Network to End Domestic Violence. “Because of cuts in the 2008 federal budget, domestic violence programs will have even fewer resources to offer victims. When programs don't have adequate funding to operate, victims are left with no choice but to return to their abusers.”

The Fiscal Year 2008 federal budget:

- slashes \$35 million from the VOCA Fund, a key funding source which serves over 3 million crime victims each year;
- cuts \$2.1 million from the Legal Assistance to Victims program; and
- applies a 1.74% rescission to Labor Health and Human Services funding, creating a devastating \$2.2 million cut to the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act.

“The more resources available to victims, the better chance they have to escape the violence,” added Else. “We hope this data, and the stories behind the numbers, inspire the President and Congress in creating a 2009 federal budget that includes adequate funding for domestic violence services.”

The NCDVS collected a national, unduplicated count of adults and children who received life-saving services from domestic violence programs on September 25, 2007. During the 24-hour survey period 53,203 adults and children received domestic violence services, including:

- more than 16,000 Americans who sought refuge in emergency shelters;
- over 8,600 who lived in transitional housing facilities; and
- nearly 28,000 who received non-residential services such as counseling, legal advocacy and children's support groups.

In addition, more than 20,000 calls were answered by local, state and national crisis hotlines on September 25th, amounting to more than 14 calls a minute.

Programs also invested a significant amount of time raising community awareness about domestic violence. During the survey period, domestic violence programs reached almost 30,000 Americans through more than 1,500 public awareness programs about domestic violence, available resources, and how individuals can prevent the violence.

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All of these life-saving services were provided despite almost 70% of domestic violence programs operating with less than 20 paid staff.

“We face an overwhelming problem in our community around domestic violence,” said a participating program in Nevada. “Our shelters are over run, our counselors have an eight-week waiting list, and we have no room or funds to hire more staff.”

The NCDVS is the most recent data documenting the number of individuals served by domestic violence programs. More than 1,300 (69%) domestic violence programs from across the country participated in the census, giving advocates and researchers a glimpse into the number of individuals seeking services, the types of services requested and the number of service requests that went unmet due to a lack of resources. Participating programs logged an unduplicated count of adults and children requesting and accessing their services between 8 a.m. EDT on September 25, 2007 and 7:59 a.m. EDT on September 26, 2007. In addition to providing a national snapshot, the NCDVS report also includes state-level data.

The National Census of Domestic Violence Services is available online at <http://www.nnedv.org/census>.

Media Advisory

**Congressman Sestak to Host Religious Antiviolence Summit
Summit will focus on how interfaith groups can lead the charge against violence**

Drexel Hill, PA – Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-7) will host a Religious Antiviolence Summit on Thursday, February 21, 2008 at Collenbrook United Church in Drexel Hill from 6 to 9 p.m. The event, which is open to the public free of charge, will take place in the Fellowship Hall of the church, which is located at 5290 Township Line Road in Drexel Hill.

“I fully recognize that violence and crime know no boundaries,” Congressman Sestak said. “In Delaware County alone, there has been a 30% rise in the number of criminal cases. We need the full force of our citizens, community organizations, religious leaders and elected officials as we seek pragmatic solutions to violence and its causes. Our communities have been working to address this violence but we can and we must do more. This summit will address problems ranging from gun crime and school violence to issues centered on religious and ethnic intolerance.

The event will feature panel discussions by local experts, law enforcement officers, religious leaders and elected officials who will discuss the role of violence in our community and how various interfaith and community organizations can partner with elected officials to reduce it.

For more information, please contact Jaclyn at Congressman’s Sestak’s District Office at 610-892-8623.

Benefit the Women’s Center When You Shop On-Line!

The Women’s Center of Montgomery County will earn a percentage of each purchase you make at participating vendors if you link to their site through the Women’s Center website at www.wcmontco.org. Just log onto the Women’s Center website and click on ‘shopping links’ before you place your order. You must access the merchant’s site through the Women’s Center shopping link on our home page for the Center to receive credit!

www.wcmontco.org

Fact Sheet: Domestic Violence and Young Children

The Numbers:

- Between 3.3 and 10 million children are at risk of witnessing domestic violence each year in the U.S.
- As many as 90 percent of children from violent homes witness the parental abuse.
- In families where domestic violence is present, child abuse and neglect is 15 times more likely than in other families. Children are abused in 1/3 to 1/2 of families where woman abuse occurs.
- The risk of sexual abuse is 6.51 times greater for girls whose fathers batter their mothers than for other girls.
- 75 percent of boys who witness domestic violence have been found to have demonstrable behavioral problems.

The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children:

- Children who witness domestic violence display various emotional, physical, and behavioral disturbances. Their problems are similar to those of physically abused children.
- Witnessing parental abuse produces feelings of anger, fear, guilt, shame, confusion, and helplessness. When the community fails to offer protection and support, children also feel undervalued and worthless.
- Children may express these emotions as withdrawal, low self-esteem, nightmares, regressive behavior, or aggression against peers, family members, and property.
- Child witnesses of domestic violence often suffer physical problems, such as bed wetting, insomnia, colds, and diarrhea.
- Children often suffer developmental delays in verbal, cognitive, and motor abilities when they live in homes with domestic violence. Learning disabilities are common.

Domestic violence disrupts children's lives.

- School performance may suffer if the child is distracted or tries to remain at home to protect the mother.
- Children's living arrangements are often disrupted when a parent is fleeing the abuser. Moving to unfamiliar surroundings can add to the stress.
- Children and their mothers may suffer financially when they flee the abusive parent.
- Child witnesses are at risk of getting hurt when they are trying to stop the violence or are accidentally caught in the midst of it.

Abuse by or of a caretaker affects children's core beliefs about themselves, those in authority, relationships with others, and assumptions about the world.

- Children older than five or six tend to identify with the aggressor and lose respect for the victim. They learn to equate anger with violence and believe that violence is justified.
- There is evidence that child witnesses of domestic violence carry violent and violent-tolerant roles into their own intimate relationships. Domination is viewed as the appropriate role for men and subordination the role for women.

Prevention and Intervention

- Provide a highly structured and predictable environment for children. Routines help children know what to expect.
- Give children permission to tell their stories. It helps children to be able to talk about their feelings with adults they trust.
- Teach alternatives to violence. Help children learn conflict resolution skills and non-violent ways of playing.
- Give parents help and support. Serve as a resource to parents about domestic violence services for mother, father and children.
- Model nurturing in interactions with children. Model respectful and non-violent resolution of conflicts.
- Involve the entire community to make it clear that violent behavior is not acceptable.
- Support public policies that promote the safety of battered women and their children. *continued on Page 7*

Norristown Volunteer Update

IN-SERVICES:

Special thanks to Constable Pius Nark, our guest speaker at our January 15th in-service in Norristown, we learned valuable information about the constables and their services.

Our next in-service will be Tuesday, February 12th, 2008 from 1-3 at the Norristown office. This will be an Advocates Issues in-service, we will discuss updates and information about the Children and Youth system and child welfare system.

Our March in-service will Tuesday, March 11th, 2008 from 12-3 at the Norristown office, our guest speaker will be from the American Red Cross. We will have a free Disaster Preparedness Training, and as a result you will be credentialed to help during a large-scale disaster if needed on a voluntary basis. You will also be eligible to take further free trainings such as CPR, First Aid and more. (see flyer enclosed). All are welcome, let me know if you plan to attend.

LEGAL REMEDIES:

The next Legal Remedies Workshop will be held on February 19, 2008 from 5-7pm in the Norristown office. The guest attorney will be James Flood and discussion will be open to civil and family law. The information sessions are held at our Norristown office at 18 West Airy Street, 4th floor. Please call 610-279-7474 to register to attend. Also, please refer a family member or friend to this valuable program!

The March Legal Remedies Workshop will be held on March 18, 2008 from 5-7pm in the Norristown office. The guest attorney will be Lori Shemtob and discussion will be open to civil and family law.

Jenn B.

Norristown Volunteer Coordinator

Attention Book Lovers!

For an evening of stimulating discussions and good fellowship, join us on the third Wednesday of the month at 7:30.

December will find us reviewing "Attack" by Yasmine Khadron. Call Sunny at 215-576-6215 for further information. Hope to see you!!!

Book Club Calendar:

March "Charity Girl" by Michael Lowenthal

April "Suite Francaise" by Irene Memirovsky

May "Brooklyn Follies" by Paul Auster

June "On Chesil Beach" by Ian McEwan

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Caring for children who witness domestic violence affects caregivers.

- Caring for traumatized children is stressful and exhausting for caregivers.
- Caregivers may suffer from burnout and "compassion fatigue," an emotional strain that comes from working with traumatized individuals.
- Caregivers may take on the symptoms of the children with whom they work, such as despair, isolation, anger, sadness, and horror. Difficulty sleeping, eating, or concentrating may occur.

Attention to their own needs can help them act in the best interest of the children in their care.

- Fellow caregivers can be a great source of support. Confidential sharing with peers who understand the emotional strain and burnout can be revitalizing.
- Clinical supervision can provide a place to share concerns, review cases and strategize with a knowledgeable clinician who can offer both emotional support and concrete feedback about casework. Time spent with a skilled supervisor ensures a higher quality of services to families and also contributes to job satisfaction.
- Balancing physical and emotional health needs can help caregivers work more effectively with traumatized children. Getting plenty of rest, eating well, exercising, and engaging in self-nurturing activities such as quilting, reading, gardening, or hiking is beneficial.

**Welcome to the Women's Center of Montgomery County Thrift Shop
Your Mother's Closet is
"The Boutique" Place to Be to Volunteer and Shop
For Bargains, Treasures and Fun Times**

For those of you who have yet to visit us in our little corner of Jenkintown, we invite you to our wonderful shop on West Avenue. Our thrift shop/boutique is filled with treasures and surprises, decorated with style and flair, and staffed by a group of dedicated and creative volunteers who care about each other and their loyal customers.

We appreciate and thank all of you who have brought us your donations. We would also invite you to come and join the thrift shop experience of fun and camaraderie by volunteering for a day or even half a day. Come share in the fun as we sort through an exotic array of clothes, jewelry and housewares. Join the laughter and pleasure that can only come with volunteering for a good cause with good people committed to helping others!

If you are interested in volunteering, please stop by the thrift shop at 703 West Avenue in Jenkintown or give us a call at 215-885-0620.

**Women's Center
of Montgomery
County**

Elkins Park Office

215-635-7344

Thrift Shop: 215-885-0620

FAX: 215-635-7347

Norristown Office

610-279-1548

FAX: 610-279-7740

Pottstown Office

610-970-7363

FAX: 610-970-0705

Lansdale Office

215-853-8060

FAX: 215-853-8065

Bryn Mawr Office

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