

WomeneWS

Women's Center of Montgomery County

Executive Director's Notes



Submitted by Maria Macaluso

It is with a mixture of sadness and pride that I announce an upcoming event to be hosted by the Women's Center of Montgomery County. As you may remember, I reported some time ago that the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV), Susan Kelly-Dreiss, is retiring after more than thirty years as the leader of our state coalition. PCADV was the first state domestic violence coalition established in this country, and the Women's Center of Montgomery County, along with Susan, were among its original founding members.

With Susan's scheduled departure in October 2008, this transition is a wonderful opportunity to pause and celebrate the historical events over the past thirty years that have led to increased awareness and the creation of domestic violence victims' rights. I am proud to say that Pennsylvania is widely recognized as one of the leaders in providing services and programs that promote the interest of domestic violence victims. For example, the Women's Center of Montgomery County, with funding from PCADV, developed one of the first three medical advocacy projects in the state and the nation in 1993. Our Abington MAP Project still serves today as a successful prototype for programs across the country seeking to integrate domestic violence services into a hospital setting.

As Susan prepares to leave her role as Executive Director, many of my fellow PCADV Board members have joined in a request that we capture, on video and in the minds of our staff and volunteers, the amazing history of the domestic violence movement in our state and the highlights of Susan's leadership over the past thirty years. Susan has graciously agreed to visit the various regions throughout the state to provide a brief historical overview and to share her vision for the future of our work.

The Women's Center of Montgomery County is therefore pleased to announce that we will be hosting this presentation for our staff, volunteers and our partners from the Eastern PA PCADV region. This event will be held at Curtis Hall in Cheltenham on **August 7th** from **10:00 am to 12:30 p.m.** Please note that you must RSVP to the Elkins Park office at 215-635-7340 if you are interested in attending, as space may be limited.

Although we are saddened to say good-bye to Susan – whose vision, energy, poise, skill, professionalism and commitment have truly defined so much of our work – I am grateful that we will have this opportunity to say farewell to a friend and to celebrate our history!

The following fact sheet was supplied by the PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) Office of Victims' Services

Safety Planning

What exactly is "Safety Planning?" It is defined by the PCCD/OVS Program Standards as "A detailed program of action created by the victim and the comprehensive victim services program staff for the purpose of improving the victim's safety." The Standards also indicate that the DV program must have defined procedures for safety planning as part of our crisis response protocol, using the following framework:

If the victim is in danger, a safety plan addressing the immediate situation shall be developed utilizing strategies for achieving physical safety. Those strategies may include alternative housing including shelter, alternative contact plans, no contact, where appropriate the referral to a domestic violence or sexual assault program, obtaining a protection from abuse order or other safety strategies.

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Pottstown's Potpourri

Every year, Non-Profits face this time of year with a great deal of anxiety, anticipation, fear, and hope. We have endeavored, in recent months, to prove ourselves by tabulating the number of clients served, measuring project outcomes, and demonstrating community impact. Statistics, demographics, evaluation summaries, and outcome reports are just a few of the terms that become integral parts of our vocabulary. When we are entrenched in this process of seeking the funds that our so necessary for us to succeed in our mission, it is not surprising that we tend to evaluate our success in the aggregate rather than the individual. However, it is important to remember that each individual success contributes to the aggregate.

With this thought in mind, it seemed an appropriate time to share with everyone some excerpts from notes and letters received this past year from clients of our office. Their words reflect most clearly, the impact of the efforts of all the staff and volunteers at the Women's Center. Here are some true measures of our success:

"Thank you for all your time and words of encouragement."

"You have given me so much strength, hope and determination through my ordeal. Thank you, thank you, thank you for all that you've done, all that you do and all that you will continue to do for me."

"God bless you. You are my angel and a complete blessing to me."

"...a beautiful gift given by wonderfully caring people and I hope it continues in the future so that others may experience a joyous blessing in their time of need as I have. Thank you again & bless you."

What are the measures and values of our success?

Evaluation Summaries - \$\$\$

Outcome Reports - \$\$\$

Words of Thanks and Blessings from Clients - **PRICELESS!**

Kristine Wickward Legal Advocate - Pottstown

Notes From the Elkins Park Office

Submitted by Deanna Linn

Reminder – Janine's in-services on *Stalking on College Campuses* are cancelled for July and rescheduled for August. The new dates for August are: Wednesday, August 13th at 1 p.m. and Thursday, August 21st at 7 p.m.

The Monday night groups are moving along:

July 7 is *Raising Girls in Today's World*;

July 14 *Parents of Adult Children*;

July 21 *Transitional Life Issues*; and

July 28 *Emotional Abuse* (psycho-educational group).

All Groups meet at 7pm at the Elkins Park office. The office is also open for walk-in peer counseling until 9 p.m.

One of the very positive aspects of this summer are our college interns from Temple, Arcadia, Haverford, Ursinus, Johns Hopkins, Vassar, and Rosemont. They are helping on the hotline in the offices, doing community outreach, and working on Walk-a-thon planning.

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Providing options for victims is a valuable service. But as we all know, it is crucial to rely on the victim and their sense of safety. In most cases, they know how the offender will react and the likely outcome of their actions. It is important to keep in mind that a "one-size-fits-all" safety plan that works for all victims does not exist. While a particular safety plan strategy may increase safety for the majority of victims, it may actually increase the danger for a victim in a particular situation. It is important to remember that every situation is different and each safety plan should be created for the present circumstances only. You may have to constantly revise a safety plan as conditions change. This fact sheet is intended only as an overview. We hope it stimulates you to conduct further research into this ever-changing, yet incredibly important, area.

General Suggestions

Make copies of keys and important documents and give them to a relative, close friend, etc. Anything relevant to the victim or his/her children should be copied, such as a protection from abuse (PFA) order, birth certificate, drivers license, will, insurance papers, prescriptions, social security card, check book, bank statements, credit cards, medical records, welfare card, marriage license, etc.

Include a blank check with your emergency travel bag. If your emergency bag is discovered, it can be called a “tornado,” “hurricane” or “fire” emergency bag.

Consider possible escape plans in advance. Think about which doors, window elevators, stairwells, fire escapes, etc. you might use. Purchase rope ladders to flee from the second floor. Consider fleeing on a bus, train, taxi, etc. Always have a back-up plan just in case something goes wrong with the original plan. If possible, rehearse your escape plan.

Don’t ignore your workplace. Advise anyone who answers the phone to ensure proper screening occurs. Provide a picture of the offender to anyone who controls building access, such as a receptionist. Ask for an escort (security or co-workers) when going to/from your car to/from your home.

Alert the school to ensure the offender is not allowed to pick up your children.

Vary daily schedules and driving routes to avoid patterns.

Back your car into the driveway with at least half a tank of gas. Keep the drivers door unlocked while the others are locked.

Arrange a signal with a trusted neighbor. For example, if the porch light is on, call the police.

Safety plan with your children, including identifying a safe place for your children to go for help. Have a code word you can use to let them know to leave the house or get help. Ensure they know not to try and defend you from the offender during a crime.

For victims of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking who have moved to a location unknown to the offender, register with the Address Confidentiality Program (ACP) to have your mail forwarded to you from a substitute address. For details, go to www.paacp.state.pa.us.

If fleeing from the offender, let your friends and family know you are safe, but try not to give them information about where you are going. Intentionally or not, they may give clues about your whereabouts to the offender.

Try to avoid wearing anything around your neck (jewelry, ties, scarves, etc.) that could be used to strangle you.

Create a false trail by calling hotels, schools, real estate agents, etc. in a place many hours away from where you are fleeing to.

Carry a small combination whistle and flashlight keychain.

Important Technological Considerations

Any cell phone will call 911. The Federal Communications Commission mandates all cellular carriers to put all 911 calls through, even for phones with no or an expired monthly service contract. So even if you have a phone with no service, carry it with you as it will still call 911.

Ensure that an unknown cell phone is not in your car. Offenders are using phones to track victims through a GPS (Global Positioning System) installed in the phone. The offender will call the phone silently to get the GPS signal and know exactly where you are.

Be aware that a GPS can be installed without a cell phone. What looks like a small black box on the underside of your car may actually be a GPS. As the technology advances, GPS’s are becoming cheaper and smaller. In the near future, a “pen” inserted into a purse may actually be a GPS. Also be aware that your wireless laptop may function as a GPS by an offender with computer knowledge. To search your car or belongings for a GPS device, enlist the assistance of a law enforcement officer or a mechanic.

Similarly, an offender may install computer monitoring system (Spyware or Tracking) on your computer. These systems will track every keystroke you or take a picture of the computer screen every few seconds. At a minimum make sure extensive Anti-Spyware is installed in your computer and have it scan your computer each time before using it. Since no “Anti-Spyware” system is perfect and new tracking systems are developed constantly, try and avoid using your personal computer in relation to your safety plan. Alternatively, use a computer the offender does not have access to, such as a computer at the library, to do relocation and safety research.

Even without a tracking system installed, an offender can easily see what websites were visited by looking at a computer’s Web visit history. This could reveal a search for a new location, a new job, a new apartment, etc. Fortunately, it is relatively easy and fast to erase your history after each computer session.

Likewise, make sure that your call history on your cell phone is constantly deleted. In addition, be aware that many cell phone bills list each call that was made on the phone with the exact date and time.

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Offenders are also using small cameras to monitor victims. Hidden in smoke detectors, lamps or a pin-sized hole in a wall, these high resolution wireless cameras can even be activated remotely. Ask victims to check their homes or have law enforcement search for small holes or unidentifiable wiring.

As an advocate, you may be thinking what can I do to help? Keep yourself informed constantly about new technology so that you can effectively safety plan with victims. Offenders rely on the victim not knowing about such technology. Education is the key. By informing victims in your safety planning of their existence, victims can keep on the lookout. Victims can then look for patterns in the information the offender knows. This may alert you as to what type of system the offender is using or where the camera/GPS is located. Once you have determined how the offender is getting information, turn the technology against them. For example, if you learn a Spyware program is installed in your computer, you could create a false trail by doing "research" on locations you are not fleeing to, apartments in a town far away from where you are going, want ads in another location, etc. The bottom line is you need to keep up-to-date on technology.

Many crimes, like identity theft, drug labs, internet scams, child pornography, etc. dramatically rose after offenders learned how to commit them through misusing technology. Fortunately, these crimes fell once the public learned about these techniques and how to protect themselves. Adapting and changing your safety planning with technological changes to better serve victims of crime is a continuing process and one of the most important services you can provide to a victim.

What do domestic violence and AIDS have in common? More than you might think.

Submitted Alison O'Donnell

As June was AIDS Education Month, two women from Philadelphia Fight came to the Elkins Park office of the Women's Center of Montgomery County to increase awareness and provide information and resources about HIV/AIDS.

The presentation served to stimulate discussion on how people infected with HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome), experience similar difficulties as victims of domestic violence. Both are typically autonomous individuals who are vulnerable because of their situation. They often face stigma, feel isolated from friends and family, and may lack resources, financial and otherwise.

Also, both domestic violence and AIDS occur often in the context of an intimate relationship. As a result, the situations involve sensitive issues. When a person is diagnosed with HIV, health providers often discuss the need of that patient to disclose this information to current and past partners. This serves the purpose of making individuals who may have been exposed to HIV aware of opportunities for testing and prevention counseling and reducing risky behavior.¹

While many people reveal their HIV status to their partners because they believe their partners have a right to know, some people are afraid to disclose for a number of reasons. They may fear abandonment, rejection, a loss of intimacy, and/or a loss of privacy.² For women, the fear of physical, emotional, sexual, and financial abuse tends to be more prevalent, which is validated by the fact that they are more likely to be beaten and killed by intimate partners, family, and friends after disclosure.³

Others fears may include loss of employment, insurance, medical services, and child custody.⁴ Diagnosis of HIV is more often associated with shame, and women tend to be blamed for acquiring and spreading HIV, even if it is clear that they are not at fault. Women are often defined by their relationship to others, such as partners and children, rather than individually, and they may be seen as transmitters of disease, rather than victims. Women may also be at greater risk of experiencing loss of support, which may be problematic if financial support of a partner is necessary, especially with children.³

In cases where abuse is already present in a relationship, disclosure may only make the situation worse. According to an article in *Maternal and Child Health Journal*,

“Intimate partner violence is known to be an escalating cycle of events associated with power and control in the relationship, so it is quite possible that abuse associated with disclosure occurs not out of instant anger in reaction to the news, but rather some time later either in the context of an ongoing or new cycle of violence.” (Burke, 113).⁵

Some women do not have the power to negotiate condom use because of power dynamics in their relationships and may be beaten or killed for admitting to being HIV-positive. For women who claim to be monogamous and have only had relations with one partner, the woman still may be blamed for infecting the partner and notification may come across as an accusation that their partner has been unfaithful. This may put women in particularly vulnerable situations, especially if abuse or financial dependence is also an issue.²

Health care providers need to understand the risks and benefits of disclosure and obtain an overall picture of the situation before they suggest that a patient disclose. Domestic violence screening needs to be performed consistently, especially before disclosure, directly after disclosure, and at follow-up visits as well. Providers need to understand when disclosure is not appropriate, as in the case where abuse is suspected or confirmed, and notification could potentially harm the patient.⁶

Prenatal screening for HIV and domestic violence is also important to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV and ensure the safety of the mother, especially as domestic violence may begin or escalate during pregnancy.⁶

When a patient wants to notify a partner and does not know how they will react (i.e. they fear for their safety), planning a disclosure in a safe, neutral space (such as a doctor's office) is an option that the individual may want to consider.² Safety planning may be especially important for those considering discussing their HIV status with their partners.

Domestic violence and AIDS are both epidemics in the United States, hidden by stigma and perpetuated by sexism, racism, ageism, classism, homophobia, intolerance, and ignorance. Education and awareness at all levels, from schools to the workplace, are needed to confront these damaging attitudes and help individuals affected by these issues. Resources are available for both people infected and affected by HIV and victims of domestic violence, but it is ultimately up to the individuals themselves to take the first step.

ADVOCATES' ISSUES by Denise Flynn, Women's Advocacy Project Director

"STOLEN LIVES"

So many victims of domestic violence start out in their lives trusting the people they are close with, those around them, wanting to aspire to better successes in their lives, wanting the success in working and personal relationships. They meet someone who fits into that "dream" we all have who will make our lives better or will help us get to that place. Sometimes it starts out so innocently, for others the change is swift and apparent, but change occurs.

For those who are fortunate to have family, mates, partners, and spouses who fit nicely into the view we are trying to achieve in life, who honors and respects, nurtures, grooms and loves, will never know or experience the piece I am going to relate here.

For those who are unfortunate to have their lives stolen by those who were entrusted to love, nurture, groom and respect them, the journey to recovery is long and hard. Some never recover completely with posttraumatic stress disorder, emotional and mental turmoil, physical scars and disabilities and other maladies from the horrific lives left from the abusers' destruction. The abuser steals dreams, hope, faith, trust, vision, voice, wisdom, understanding, coherence, joy, happiness, opportunities, possibilities, ego and self-esteem; LIFE.

Stolen lives – persons, intelligent and capable, having had stable lives, their own businesses, good jobs, successfully managing home, work and family, now can't even function or think beyond the next moment, can't make good decisions, living on prescription or street drugs and/or alcohol to cope with the shock and trauma rent through their lives, doing things they never imagined themselves doing. The verbal, emotional, and psychological damage looks like scenes from the Fear.Com movies (horror films).

Yet we who are not in this horror movie or have not had the misfortunate to have our lives rent or stolen, asks the silliest question I've heard in my lifetime – "Why does she stay, why don't she just leave?" Silly to me because I know the answer.

Leaving could mean death for her, her children, her parents and/or all that is near and dear to her. Leaving could mean having to seek options that are not easily assessable – shelter, housing, alternative income, legal recourse that could work against her rather than for her. Staying could mean she, her children and family get to see another day, live another day, no matter what that day brings.

What happens to the abuser? Sadly, he gets to steal someone else's life, lie, hurt, threaten, and sometimes even kill someone else. When and how does it stop – how can YOU help stop someone else from having their life stolen? Tell someone about the services available to them, like the services the Women's Center of Montgomery County provides; participate in community initiatives that stop the violence in our communities; volunteer to help those services continue; support fundraising and other efforts being done to keep the doors open and services going strong. Something as simple as being a listening, non-judgmental ear offering positive and constructive feedback and options can make a world of difference and help restore a life that was stolen.

Attention Volunteer Counselors and Advocates

Additions to PCADV Data Collection Requirements Effective July, 1, 2008

As the Coalition faces the difficult task of maintaining and increasing funding for domestic violence programs across the state, one of the best tools they have for telling the real story about our work rests in the data that you - our counselors and advocates - provide to us through your intake forms and your communications with staff. What we have come to realize, however, is that our current intake forms only tell a small part of the story. For the complete picture, we need to begin capturing more information that we can then share with PCADV to support their efforts and to broaden the understanding of our state and federal legislators as they allocate funds and assess the impact of our services.

In an effort to collect this critical and enlightening data, PCADV has revised and expanded the monthly reporting requirements for our program. We all believe that these changes will present a more comprehensive picture of the work that you are all doing here at the Center on a daily basis.

Before highlighting the new information we will be collecting, I want to take a moment to remind all of our counselors – but particularly those of you who take your shifts at home – that it is absolutely imperative that you turn in your intake forms to your Volunteer Coordinator or our Director of Volunteers, Deanna Linn, as soon as possible following your shift. The information from these calls – no more how sparse or incomplete – helps us in so many ways. The volume, origin and location of calls help us direct and allocate resources, both internally within the center and in the community. This information also helps us to identify the unmet needs of the individuals we serve. Additionally, this information is used by our funders in the allocation of funds to the various programs across the state. Neglecting to submit the forms to the office results to an under-reporting of our services which, sadly, results in a redistribution of the funding and resources that are critical to the center and the community we serve.

I would therefore ask all of our counselors and advocates to take every step possible to make sure that you are reporting calls to your staff supervisor. Intake forms are available via email or mail if you need them.

In addition to the information that we have been collecting and compiling for a number of years, effective July 1, 2008, PCADV is asking us to add the following to our monthly reports:

of Crisis/Hotline calls in addition to the DV Calls that generate an intake form: these are the calls we receive that relate to an individual or family in need of some kind of service. We need to be counting all calls, including repeat callers and calls from third parties. This does not include business calls to the offices, donations, general information about the Center and its programs, requests for community education workshops, or calls from the media. Over the next two months, your volunteer coordinator will be conducting trainings to help you understand which calls are relevant and how you should be reporting on these calls.

Unmet Requests for Shelter for Victims of Domestic Violence: We have all received those hotline calls in during which the caller tells us they have tried everywhere and there is no domestic violence shelter available. Beginning in July, we will begin tracking that information so that we can substantiate the need for increased shelter.

Service Outcome Data: Approximately 14 months ago, we developed surveys to be given to victims with whom we have recurring, in-person contact (such as peer counseling, support groups). Beginning in July, we will be reporting to PCADV on the following information:

1. The number of surveys distributed
2. The number of surveys completed and returned to us.
3. The number of domestic violence victims who respond that they have:
 - a. Increased awareness about strategies for enhancing their safety;
 - b. Increased knowledge of available community resources.

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This information will be collected and reported on a monthly basis. In addition, we will be asked to submit responses to the following inquiries on an annual basis:

1. Share a story about a client, service or community initiative.
2. Describe efforts in meeting the needs of under-served populations (due to ethnic, racial, cultural, language, diversity or geographic isolation). Describe any on-going challenges.
3. Describe significant prevention and outreach activities that have occurred in the past year.

Your support and input is a critical part of our ability to provide this information to PCADV. On behalf of the entire staff, I would like to thank you for giving this request your attention and support!

*STATEMENT BY SUE ELSE, PRESIDENT OF THE
NATIONAL NETWORK TO END DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:*

REASONABLE GUN RESTRICTIONS ARE NECESSARY TO PROTECT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

(June 26, 2008) Washington, DC — The National Network to End Domestic Violence is disappointed in the Supreme Court's decision in *District of Columbia v. Heller*. Guns pose a very grave threat to domestic violence victims, and communities must be able to implement the necessary tools to keep victims safe.

Domestic violence accounts for over one-third of all reported violent crimes in 18 states and the District of Columbia. Domestic violence claims the lives of three women each day and guns are undeniably the weapon of choice in these homicides. Studies show that from 1980 to 2000, 60% to 70% of abusers who killed their female partners used guns to do so. Simply having a gun in the house makes an abused woman seven times more likely than other women to be killed.

The mere presence of a gun, whether it is fired or not, has long-term, devastating effects on domestic violence victims. An abuser will often use the gun to terrorize the victim – pointing it at the victim, threatening to harm others or even commit suicide. Such threats lead to a constant state of fear and post-traumatic stress. Justice Breyer's dissent pays specific attention to the deadly role guns play in domestic violence.

Although it makes it harder for legislatures to protect victims of domestic violence, the Court's opinion does not strike down existing, effective restrictions that keep guns out of the hands of batterers. There is a well-established federal framework for regulating gun possession and such laws are precisely the sort of lawful regulatory measure referred to by the Court. For example, the federal Domestic Violence Offender Gun Ban prohibits anyone convicted of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence or subject a protective order from purchasing or possessing a gun. Similar gun restrictions at the federal, state and local level have been instrumental in protecting thousands of domestic violence victims. Domestic violence convictions and restraining orders are the second most common reasons for the denial of hand gun applications. Statistics collected by the Department of Justice and analyzed by the Congressional Research Service estimate that the Lautenberg Amendment had blocked over 150,000 attempted gun purchases by people convicted of domestic violence crimes.

The National Network to End Domestic Violence will work with the District of Columbia and other states to ensure their firearms prohibitions meet the standards of the Court while keeping guns out of the hands of batterers.

For more information, please visit www.nnedv.org

Condolences: In Memory of Rose Katz

On behalf of her friends here at the Center, I would like to extend our condolences to the family of volunteer Rose Katz, who passed away on July 7, 2008. Although her illness kept her away in recent years, Rose brought an energy, wit and humor to her counseling work here at the Center. She was a gracious and elegant woman whose hearty laughter would fill our offices and lighten the spirits of those with whom she worked. Her memory is one that brings a smile as I recall a friend whose warmth and sincerity will truly be missed.

**Changing the Way We Communicate:
Join the Women's Center as We Beta-Test Our Email Edition of the Newsletter!**

Over the past ten years, I received so many supportive and kind comments from our members telling me how much they enjoy our monthly newsletter. I know for our direct service volunteers especially and our founding members who remain a part of our family, the newsletter is a great way to keep people connected and informed about upcoming events and news about friends here at the Center. It is also a wonderful tool for sharing information about techniques, current trends and resources with our counselors to support their work with victims of domestic violence. I am very proud to say that we have continued our uninterrupted tradition of sending you a monthly newsletter that, hopefully, helps you feel connected to the Women's Center.

While I know that many of our members prefer to receive the printed version of their newsletter in the mail each month, there is also a growing number of people who contact us to see if they can receive their copy via e-mail. I am happy to say at this time that we are launching a testing project to distribute the newsletter via email to those individuals who request this option. Please note that we will not be eliminating the printed version, but we do want to accommodate the requests from those people who prefer the option of an email version.

We hope to have this project phased in by late fall, but we do need people to participate in the testing phase of the mass email distribution over the next few months. If you would like to participate in this optional testing phase and begin receiving your newsletter via email, beginning in September, please contact me at mmacaluso@dca.net with your email information.

Please remember that we will continue to provide print copies via the mail throughout this testing period. Once the testing period is completed, members will have the option of receiving their newsletter by regular post office mail or email.

**Women's Center
of Montgomery
County**

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Thrift Shop: 215-885-0620

FAX: 215-635-7347

Norristown Office

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Pottstown Office

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