

WomeneWS

Women's Center of Montgomery County

Executive Director's Report



Submitted by Maria Macaluso

Celebrating a New Partnership and the Return of an Old Friend

It is my great pleasure to bring you this month news of a grant award notification that we recently received. In April, the Women's Center of Montgomery County applied for a collaborative partnership grant with the Senior Adult Activity Center, (SAAC) to serve victims of elder abuse. Our application, which is summarized briefly below, was one of four grants selected in PA for funding through the STOP/Violence Against Women Act initiatives to assist victims of underserved populations. What is perhaps most meaningful to me – in addition to the opportunity to provide critical services to senior victims of family violence – is that this marks the return of a dedicated and dear friend to the Women's Center – Linda Collins, former Executive Director of the Women's Center of Montgomery County, Laurel House and, now, current Executive Director of the Senior Adult Activity Centers, located in Norristown, Ambler and Glenside.

As a founding director for both the Women's Center of Montgomery County and Laurel House, Linda brings more than thirty years of domestic violence experience to her role at the Senior Adult Activities Center. In partnering with SAAC, which is the largest multi-service provider for senior services in our county, we believe that SAAC possesses the critical cultural competency for identifying the responses, protocols and resources we need to develop to address elder abuse and crimes against the elderly. With multiple locations, they, along with the Women's Center of Montgomery County, can offer multiple points of service for seniors to access counseling, support group and court accompaniment. Additionally, through the implementation of its Meals on Wheels Project, SAAC has a means of access to households in which elder abuse might be occurring. By training these SAAC volunteers and staff to identify and respond to elder abuse, we would be expanding access to services to hundreds of senior citizens throughout our region, helping them to overcome the limits of transportation, geography, and social isolation.

Funding from this grant, in the amount of \$25,000, will be utilized by SAAC to pursue services for victims of elder abuse which include court accompaniment, counseling, legal advocacy, and support groups. We will also include a component of outreach to other organizations who serve seniors, as well as the coordination of services with nursing homes and other senior centers in our county.

In addition to administering this grant with SAAC, the role of WCMC will be to:

- Provide court accompaniment and legal advocacy to victims of domestic violence identify and referred by SAAC.
- Assist SAAC in the creation and staffing of support groups for victims of elder abuse.
- Assist with the development / implementation / and/or enhancement of SAAC programs, services or initiatives that address the issue of elder abuse and violence against women in older life.
- Provide 48-hour mandatory counseling trainings to SAAC staff and volunteers which will extend the confidentiality privilege to those trained.
- Provide consultation on individual cases of elder abuse as necessary.
- Assist to develop awareness and understanding of elder abuse and the resources available to address it.
- Participate in law enforcement, prosecutor and victim services regional trainings
- Provide support to community members, agency representatives and older adults whose focus is to address the issue of elder abuse.

I hope that you will all join me in welcoming Linda and her staff as we launch this exciting new initiative!

Pottstown's Potpourri

"Mirror, Mirror", a play designed to educate students about the dynamics of abusive relationships, debuted on May 15th at Pottsgrove High School. While the performance of this play is certainly noteworthy, especially given the message it was delivering to the student audience, the performance of the play is not the only story to be told. In fact, it could be argued that an equally compelling story could be told about the process by which this production came into being.

How often is the buzz word "collaboration" bantered about and how often does it truly occur. By Webster's definition, collaborate means to "work jointly with others", and this past month, Pottstown saw the successful culmination of the collaborative efforts of a community. The process began with an idea that originated with the Domestic Violence subcommittee of the TriCounty Community Network (TCN). Serving on the subcommittee are individual volunteers as well as representatives from various, service agencies such as Creative Health, Family Services, Open Line, Pottstown Clusters, Laurel House, Community Housing, TCN, and, of course, the Women's Center of Montgomery County. These members pulled their resources and knowledge to keep this project moving forward and many volunteered their time to facilitate the post play discussion groups.

Naturally, a project of this magnitude required funding and, fortunately, two local foundations, Montgomery County Foundation and the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation, joined in the collaboration and provided the necessary financial support. Finally, The Pottsgrove School District joined this collaborative effort. The school administration gave their full support to the project. Mr. Kelly, the school's drama director, was invaluable in managing all the logistics of the production and the participating students provided input to the playwright, Aileen McCulloch, and performed the play as well as acted as student facilitators in the post-play discussion groups.

The end result of all this collaborating was the four performances (one for each class 9th grade– 12th grade) of the play "Mirror, Mirror". The reviews are in and it was terrific! The play, and the discussion groups that followed it, delivered the intended message about abusive/unhealthy relationships. The message was definitely heard; let's hope it will be heeded and remembered.

Kristine Wickward
Legal Advocate - Pottstown

Elkins Park Volunteer Update

Training updates: Eleven students from 7 different colleges are taking the intern counselor training course; 5 days of classes plus a day at the PFA hearings in Norristown in 2 weeks. The interns will then be ready for the different offices to supplement our hotline needs, assist with community education, and work on outreach projects. Another training session for new volunteers will be starting on June 11 in the evening at the Colmar office.

By the time you receive the newsletter, the Elkins Park office Open-Monday-evening project will hopefully be underway. The office will be open until 9pm on Mondays for walk-in counseling. There will be a rotating schedule of support group meetings at 7pm. Information on the schedule for the groups can be obtained by contacting the Elkins Park office.

June is AIDS Education Month and the 2 in-services on AIDS will be presented by guest speakers: **Monday June 9th at 1pm** and **Tuesday, June 17th at 7pm**, at the Elkins Park office.

Submitted by Deanna Linn
Director of Volunteers

Norristown Volunteer Update

IN-SERVICES:

A special thanks to Deanna for the wonderful active listening in-service she facilitated at the Norristown office this month. Volunteers enjoyed the activities and exercises at the in-service.

Our last in-service will be **June 10th, 2008** at **noon** at the Norristown. This will be our Farwell in-service, refreshments will be served. This will be our last in-service until September, hope to see you all!

LEGAL REMEDIES:

We thank Steve Rubin, Esq. former Board member and long-standing friend and supporter of the Women's Center for facilitating our May Legal Remedies workshop. The participants were greatly appreciative of his input and expertise.

The next Legal Remedies Workshop will be held on, **June 17th, 2008** from **5-7pm** in the Norristown office. The guest attorney will be Betty Lupo, Esq. The 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!

SAVE THE DATE:

The Volunteer Appreciation Brunch will be held at the William Penn Inn in Blue Bell on **September 21st, 2008**.

Jenn B.

Norristown Volunteer Coordinator

JOB ANNOUNCEMENT

Community Educator Stalking Specialist

The Women's Center of Montgomery County is seeking to fill this part-time position (*approximately 20 hours per week*) based in our Bryn Mawr or Colmar office:

Purpose: 1) to educate the college community at the twenty Montgomery County campuses about stalking as a serious crime and available community resources; 2) to develop and maintain current materials and resources to promote stalking awareness programs on campus; 3) to provide training to the college administration, faculty, students, staff and volunteers to assist them identifying signs of stalking, documenting evidence of stalking, and developing protocols to address stalking on campus; 4) to assist college administration in creating an advisory board to monitor efforts to promote safety and prevent violence against women on campus; 5) to perform other miscellaneous duties as assigned by the Executive Director.

Interested applications should contact Executive Director Maria Macaluso in our Elkins Park office by July 1, 2008.

The Women's Center of Montgomery County is an Equal Opportunity Employer
It is the policy of the Women's Center to provide program services and opportunities for volunteerism, training and employment without regard to race, creed, color, national origin, age, sex, ancestry, disability or sexual orientation.

Tarnished Knights

By Marianne T. – WCMC Volunteer

When a domestic violence victim says, “I’m going to end up dead or in jail”, she is not joking. In this country the sad truth is that domestic violence is an everyday fact of life and destroyer of lives and families in our country

Many people look for volunteer opportunities at different stages of their lives. Sometimes they are empty nester parents, young people have fewer responsibilities, or those that just want contribute their time and energy to a cause that has meaning for them.

I took a Women in Transition class 18 years ago at the Women’s Center of Montgomery County (WCMC) during a difficult time in my life. I have gained some experience in-group facilitation in the last couple of years. Having survived and enjoyed my 20 years of single parenthood, I thought that volunteering in this organization would benefit from my experience. I want to help other single mothers going through difficult times.

The WCMC does not offer these classes any longer, but was interested in starting them up again. The original and continuing mission of this organization is their work with victims of domestic violence. All of their volunteers must take a domestic violence training course before becoming an active volunteer. I looked at the training as a stepping-stone to what I really wanted to do.

A new group of volunteers to the WCMC recently finished training. A very interesting and assorted group made up this training class. Although this group was small, it included two college students, a doctor, a lawyer, a cargo pilot, a nutritionist and me, a business operations director. Our diversity generated a lot of interesting discussion and real life experience to our training. Some of the group had been victims, others knew of family or friends who were victims and they brought an important perspective to our discussions.

Statistics about the frequency of domestic violence are dramatic. Around the world, at least one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during her lifetime¹. In the United States some resources suggest that a woman is beaten an on average of every 15 seconds. The reported rate of occurrence is staggering.

The saddest part of these statistics is that this is an issue that few are aware of or want to admit could be happening to someone in our own little world. Our culture values individual privacy. Historic and cultural male domination in our society and in physical strength, often keep the extent of this tragic reality suppressed. Our lack of understanding of the perverseness and frequency of this reality contribute to its ability to continue and thrive.

Much of the women’s center training is learning about domestic violence and gaining counseling skills. Abused women are rich and poor, educated and working class, young and old, teenagers, wives, mother and grandmothers. It can occur between same gender partners, by children on parents, and even rarely men can be victims.

You may think it could never happen to anyone in your family or among your friends. But you could easily be wrong. Abuse can be both physical and mental. It often starts with demeaning comments, intimidating behavior, isolation and the ability of a man to make a women dependant on him. So much of our cultural norms are based on stereotypical romantic ideas. Many abusers were abused themselves or witnessed it as part up their childhood. This can never excuse the choice of violence against another human being.

Abusive men hold their temper and anger in public, strategize ways to keep their partner isolated, withhold or control joint money or blame his partner for situations she has no control over. They use physical or mental abuse at in a way that keeps the victim in a constant state of anxiety; they don’t know if he will be kissing them or hurting them from one moment to another. Abusers perpetuate their own need for control and power at the expense of another.

Have you ever noticed how we never see what happens to Snow White, Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty after Prince Charming has gained their trust and love? The happy, joyful romantic Disney ending for many women is soon replaced with confusion, fear and uncertainly.

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How easy is it for a woman to believe that their prince is always the good guy and that they are now going to have a fairytale life of love, romance and caring? Slowly they become the person at fault for things that go wrong. Slowly they accept responsibility for the happiness of their man at great cost to themselves. Gradually they are isolated and minor mental and physical incidents of violence and abuse increase in severity and frequency as time goes on.

Everyone has the right to feel safe. How is it possible that the man who is supposed to take care of us chooses to make life hell? Trying to find the answer to that question often keeps women in an abusive relationship longer than any outsider would think possible.

“I need some place to go. He tried to stab me – in front of the kids”, Alison told me during a recent Saturday night hotline call. “I am at a pay phone; I don’t have any money and can’t make any more calls, please help me.” My heart raced at hearing the panic in her voice. I miss-dialed the phone so many times in an effort to find her a shelter. I slowed down so that I could find the help she needed. After the call I thought, if I was panicked at the idea of her plight, how was she feeling? This kind of call makes me willing interrupt my weekend plans for a few hours to be available for any woman that needs help.

There is only one women’s shelter for domestic violence victims in Montgomery County for a population of over 775,000, and it is often full. If half of this population is women then just 1 % of that population is 3,875 people. If the shelter can help about 400 women and their children each year, how many are not able to get help when they need it? Berks, Bucks, Delaware, Chester and Philadelphia shelters are also almost always full. Our political system does not make enough effort to find ways to take care of these women and their children. Discussions with experienced WCMC staff have told of their frustration with the bureaucracy that makes getting more shelter available. This organization started as a grass roots effort by women in this county to help abused women in 1976. While it has grown and serves many residents it has not been able to keep up with population growth or the insidious growth rate of domestic violence in our country.

It is very common for abuse to start in a relationship at the beginning of pregnancy. Once a woman is in a vulnerable emotional, financial and physical state, abusive men will assert their power over the women in a violent way. Ask any mother when she has felt most vulnerable in her life and she will tell you it was when her children were young. The energy and focus loving mothers give their children is such a strong dynamic.

When a woman has children, especially young children, she feels vulnerable and least able to take care of herself and her children. Abusers know this and will often use physical threats in front of children or threaten to take away her children. Debbie repeated over and over “But he promised it would be different this time”. Why would a man slash the tires on a women car so she cannot leave? How can she work full time and not have any money? How does a woman get in this situation? There are so many questions we all could ask. But the bottom line is that it is accepted in our society that this happens and we all need to be aware and help when victims are ready to get help.

Those that prey on women know this and take advantage of that vulnerability. The need for control is strong for abusive men and is often a reflection of the lack of control they feel in their lives. They may not know how to express their own fears and vulnerability except this way. The worst offenders have been in a position of power over a woman before and it makes them feel great. They look for ways to get back that powerful feeling and will seek out women who are vulnerable and can be isolated.

In Pennsylvania each county runs its own domestic violence programs under the umbrella of a statewide coalition. Their main connection to victims are 24 hours hotlines. Each caller has a unique history and story to tell and they may be in various stages of getting help. A recent call in Montgomery County hotline was from Cathy. She has four children and she was seeking a safe place to go because her boyfriend beat her and she was scared and alone.

Cathy’s call to the hotline starting with long and nonstop sentences of her troubles “He promised me he would not hit me if I came back”; “He promised me that he would marry me”; I’m so afraid that he will take away our daughter”. When I assured her she could not lose her children if she got help, there was a level of both disbelief and hope. I told her that I knew she was a good mother, simply because she was trying to get help. It was in her voice as she tried to quiet her kids while we were on the phone, I heard someone who put her kids first. Her assertion and her determination that she would

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do any kind of work if it would keep her safe children reminded me once again how strong this bond is for women. Admitting to violence and asking for help is often hard for women but they will do it if it protects their children.

There are many different relationship and cultural dynamics that come into play in any domestic violence situation. The undercurrent of dominance and entitlement is the way many men are raised. Hotline volunteers are trained to understand that power and control are the central issues behind abusive relationships. The perpetrator is often brought up in an abusive home and taught by example that women are not to be respected. They are often very charming men that know how to persuade women that they are special. It starts with all the attention and romance that women are raised to believe are signs of love. Once a woman buys into the loving relationship, the abuser begins to translate his anxiety and fears as the fault of his partner.

In order to feel good about himself, he will work to isolate a woman from friends and family. After a while, this makes it hard for a woman to trust her own judgment. Hearing negative and demeaning comments from a husband or boyfriend constantly will affect the self-esteem of any one. When there are no positive people to view her as a valuable person and someone is controlling her life, self esteem drops and she will feel unable to make smart and healthy decisions in her life.

The pivotal role any hotline counselor fills is to be able to listen, offer resource information and most of all help the victim see her options. Active listening skills are the main counseling skill that the volunteer training focuses on. It is sometimes hard to understand that the victims are not calling so that someone can tell them what to do. They are calling because they are scared and don't know what to do about the abusive situation. The counselor's job is to help them figure it out, not to figure it out for them.

Many times, the abusive situation has been building up for a long time before a woman seeks help. Some women put up with the growing pattern of abuse because of money, children or their need to believe in the love that they once perceived as special in the relationship. The counselor's goal is to listen and ask open ended questions so that the victim has a chance to process what is happening to them. They need to see their positive behaviors in their lives and that will help them determine what steps they need to take.

Counselors are trained to know what resources are available to domestic violence victims in our communities and our legal system. Working with victims to determine their options and talk with them about making good choices in the future is something counselors do to help victims. This ability to give clarity and hope to other women is necessary for them to take back control of their lives and move out of the abusive relationship.

Legal remedies in domestic violence are very specific and sometimes very limited in their ability to stop abuse. One of the options is a Protection From Abuse Order. This can be gotten in any county court system. While the procedures may vary slightly from county to county in Pennsylvania, a PFA can be an effective way to keep an abuser away from the victim. It is a legal document that specifies that an abuser must physically stay away from and not have any kind of contact with the victim. It allows the police to arrest the abuser if they violate the terms of the PFA which restricts them from any kind of contact. It requires the abuser to vacate the shared home of the victim, no matter who owns or legally is the leaseholder of a property.

The drawback to a PFA is the victim's fear that if they take this action, the result will be worse than the remedy. When discussing PFA with a recent caller, Deirdre told me this was not an option, "he would come after me and kill me, and I can't take that chance". Some victims who get go through the system to get a PFA have trouble getting it enforced by the local police force. This can be very frustrating for victims and domestic violence counselors alike.

Another recent caller, with an oriental accent told the volunteer that she was calling for a friend that does not speak English, is being beaten. She is afraid because she is not legal and she will be arrested if she gets help. There are a few Spanish speaking hotlines in the area and the national toll free domestic violence abuse hotline we gave her has over 100 language translators to help victims.

Hotline conversations, as is all contact with domestic violence victims, are considered confidential. The Confidentiality Privilege, granted from the Protection from Abuse Act (23Pa C.S. § 6116) provides for the protection of all communication

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taking place between a domestic violence advocate and a victim. No matter the circumstance, everything talked about is confidential, as are any written materials related to those conversations.

When children are exposed to domestic violence they are at heightened risk for externalizing problems through delinquency and aggression. Of boys aged 11-20 who commit homicide, 63% kill the man who is abusing their mother.² They frequently internalize problems that lead to anxiety and depression. Millions of children in the United State between the ages of 3 and 17 are at risk of exposure to parental violence each year³

Helping abused women and their children should be of paramount importance to our society. Yet funding for services is constantly reduced or stagnant.

If you know someone who needs help, find out what resources are available in your county. Internet searches should be state and county specific. There is a Montgomery County in almost every state in the US. There is a national hotline, with language interpreters if needed, that is also a good resource. That number is 800-799-SAFE (7233)

One of my recent hotline called was from Sally. Her boyfriend accused her hitting him and got her removed from their house. At first Sally could not believe it was happening to her and is one of the many women who say “they never have asked for help before”. I had a number of follow-up calls. As she got back on her feet and reclaimed her independence and belief that she was a strong woman, I felt we had the beginning of a success story. During our last call, she told me I was her angel and was very grateful for the help she got. I thought the angel title was a little too generous of a description for me. In thinking about it, I realized that we all can be angels to someone. It may not take much except being there, listening and reminding someone of all the positive attributes they have. In a way, maybe Sally was my angel to help me realize this.

If you have time for volunteering to help domestic violence victims, advocating this issue within our government or donating money, there is a great need for your help. You could be the one that helps an individual move toward a happier and safer life. You would also be part of the solution to a problem that affects not only domestic violence victims but all of our culture and society.

(Footnotes)

¹ Heise, L., Ellsberg, M and Gottemoeller, M.
Ending Violence Against Women. Population reports, Series L., No. 11,
December 1999

² The War Against Women: Overcoming Female Abuse, 1985

³ Carlson, 1984; Silvern, 1995, Straus 1992

In Memory of Anna Fagan

It is with heartfelt sadness and love that we send condolences to our dear friend, volunteer and Board member Joyce Skobinsky, on the loss of her mother, Anna Silverman Fagan, who passed away on Sunday, June 1, 2008.

To those of us who know and cherish Joyce Skobinsky for her warmth, humor, enthusiasm and dedication, it should come as no surprise that her mother, Anna, was a wonderfully vibrant and loving, full of spunk and humor, just like her daughter.

I hope that you will all join me in offering our love, support and condolences to Joyce and her family through this difficult time.

Condolences: In Memory of Lois Cohan

I know that many of you who have been members of the Center since its early days will share my sadness in learning that Lois Cohan passed away on June 2nd. Lois joined the Women’s Center in the fall of 1986 and was a loyal member for a number of years, as well as a delightful and wonderful woman. She is survived by her husband, Bob, and three terrific sons. Lois bravely fought breast cancer for over 20 years and managed to live a full life even in the worst times in that battle. She is remembered with much fondness by many of us here at the Center, and all of our members whose lives were touched by her will miss her greatly!

Save the Date!

The Women's Center of Montgomery County invites you to join us for our Fourth Annual

"Unmask the Abuse" 5K Walkathon

Do your part to STOP domestic violence in our community and raise awareness!

Join us at Montgomery County Community College
Blue Bell Campus,
Blue Bell, PA

Saturday, October 11, 2008
10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

For more information on how to register or to work on the Special Event Planning Committee for this event, contact Maria at our Elkins Park office at 215-635-7340.

Proceeds will benefit the Women's Center of Montgomery County

**Women's Center
of Montgomery
County**

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