

WomeneWS

Women's Center of Montgomery County

Executive Director's Report



Submitted by Maria Macaluso

In celebration of Women's History month, I would like to begin my article by recognizing the wonderful accomplishments of the amazing women who empower our membership with their energy, dedication and skill. In the ten years that I have been with the Center, I am still awestruck and inspired by the individuals who are drawn to our organization, who give so much of themselves and care, with such a selfless and nurturing spirit, for the Center and the people we serve. All of you, including the growing number of visionary and committed men who have joined our cause to empower women, do so much on a daily basis to change the lives and future for women living in crisis and need that when I think of Women's History month, I can think of no better champions to celebrate than you! Thank you all for reminding me throughout the year of what we can achieve when we work together to change our world for the better!

In addition to Women's History Month, March also brings us another reason to celebrate. The Women's Center of Montgomery County has been selected as the recipient of a commendation award, which includes a \$2,500 donation, from GlaxoSmithKline, in recognition of our domestic violence and medical advocacy work. I will be attending the reception later this month, along with our Board President, Beth Brinly. I know I speak for both of us when I say that there is no greater feeling of pride than knowing that we stand there representing all of you and all that you have done in the name of community service at its finest! Thank you, again, for making the Women's Center of Montgomery County an organization recognized for the excellence and quality services which you provide!

I also want to take this opportunity to remind you about two upcoming events at which we hope you will join us. The first, of course, is our upcoming Champagne Brunch on April 13th at the Meadowlands Country Club. This year's program – "The Inside Story" – promises a lively dialogue between brothers Chris Matthews, host of "The Chris Matthews Show" and "Hardball With Chris Matthews", and our Chairman of the Montgomery County Commissioners, Jim Matthews. Larry Kane, our emcee and moderator will also be helping to present an award honoring State Representative Joshua Shapiro for his wonderful advocacy work in Harrisburg and in our community to promote the interests of domestic violence victims. And, as if the promise of lively conversation and good food were not enough, we are putting together a most tempting array of silent auction displays that will be complemented with jewelry provided by the Carol Schwartz Gallery. Invitations for this event went out last month, but if you need another, please check out our website at www.wcmontco.org under the Brunch 2008 tab to obtain a copy. We hope to see you at the brunch!

Finally, in the not so distant future, we are also planning our fourth annual Domestic Violence Awareness Walkathon. We have selected Saturday, October 11th for this year's event, again at Montgomery County Community College in Blue Bell. Our committee is already hard at work planning to make this year's event even more successful and fun than last year's, which raised \$14,000. Our goal this year – in light of imminent funding cuts from a variety of public sources – is \$25,000, so we could use your help in planning and executing our walkathon! If you are interested in working with the planning committee or you have ideas and suggestions for sponsorships, please contact me at the Elkins Park Office.

Pottstown's Potpourri

Money, or the lack of it, is a very real issue that needs to be addressed when working with victims of domestic violence. Even when some level of income is obtained, many times the ability to manage it can be difficult and overwhelming, especially if participation in managing household finances had been prohibited in the abusive relationship. So, it was very exciting to learn of a program that offered monetary assistance and budget mentoring for eligible women in the Pottstown community.

The Soroptimist International of Pottstown is endeavoring to enhance the life skills for women who head their households by providing money each month, for a six month period, to selected recipients for approved expenses. During this same period of time, the recipients will be mentored on how to budget and manage their money by one of the professional women who volunteer in this service organization. At the conclusion of the six month period, a review is made and, if further assistance is deemed necessary, an extension may be granted.

The Pottstown Office of the Women's Center assisted two clients, who met the eligibility requirements for the Soroptimist program, to complete and submit their applications. After undergoing the application review process and the interviews, both applicants from the Women's Center were selected as two of the three participants in this wonderful program, which will begin this month! We are very grateful to the Soroptimist International of Pottstown for offering such a beneficial program for the women in our community.

Kristine Wickward
Legal Advocate - Pottstown

TO WCMC STAFF AND MEMBERSHIP

Once again it is that time of year when we are in search of prospective nominees for Board candidacy. If you or someone you know would consider serving our Center at this level, please feel free to discuss with one of us on the Committee or a current staff member. We are at present seeking persons with expertise/interest in the areas of finance, development and/or strategic planning.

Please remember this is YOUR board and its composition and service reflects your interests and concerns. Your input is of great value to those of us currently on Board as we, like you, are volunteers with the common goal of serving Women in Crises at any and all levels.

We appreciate and honor each of you for all that you do. We look forward to hearing from you.

WCMC BOARD NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Lillian Sulliman, Chairman
Beth Rubin
Beth Brinly

Attention Book Lovers!

For an evening of stimulating discussions and good fellowship, join us on the third Wednesday of the month at 7:30. Call Sunny at 215-576-6215 for further information. Hope to see you!!!

Book Club Calendar:

April	"Suite Francaise" by Irene Memirovsky
May	"Brooklyn Follies" by Paul Auster
June	"On Chesil Beach" by Ian McEwan

The following legislative overview was provided by the PCADV

House Bill 59 & Senate Bill 269

PA State Legislation to Increase Revenue for Domestic Violence Services

The PA Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) is seeking legislative support for additional revenue sources to address the critical shortage of funding for domestic violence services across the Commonwealth.

House Bill 59 and Senate Bill 269 will increase the surcharge on marriage license fees for domestic violence services from the current \$10 to \$35, and will add a new \$25 fee on divorce filings. While these are only small surcharges at the user level, cumulatively they will generate nearly \$3 million more each year for life-saving services and programs for victims.

Domestic violence programs provide a vital public service to this Commonwealth. On a single day, 2,535 Pennsylvanians received services, 892 hotline calls were answered, and 1,546 people received training on domestic violence, all provided by the 61 domestic violence programs across Pennsylvania. All services are free, confidential, and available to all who need them.

While programs' operating costs have risen dramatically, state and federal funding have gone up only 1.43% since 2001. Stagnant funding has forced programs to eliminate staff positions and critical programming, such as community education and children's advocacy. Programs are struggling to keep their doors open. *The need for increased revenue is dire.* This legislation provides funding for services that are a lifeline for families in crisis.

Marriage License Surcharge:

Since Act 222 was passed in 1990, Pennsylvania has had a \$10 surcharge on marriage licenses to support the provision of domestic violence services. A fee of \$10 also is collected for the Children's Trust Fund. These are in addition to the base marriage license fees, which vary from county to county; the average range of fees is currently between \$30 and \$40. Act 222 funds raised by the existing \$10 surcharge total around \$733,000 each year. Based on the number of licenses issued annually, PCADV anticipates the \$25 increase will raise about \$1.8 million annually. To date, 28 other states have similar fees in place.

Divorce Filing Fee:

Pennsylvania currently has a \$.50 state tax on divorce filings plus \$10 for the Children's Trust Fund and \$10 for the Judicial Computer System Augmentation/Access for Justice Accounts. As with marriage license fees, divorce filing costs vary from county to county; the average range of divorce filing fees is currently between \$60 and \$120. Based on the number of divorces filed in Pennsylvania each year, the new fee will raise about \$1 million annually in revenue for domestic violence service providers. To date, eight other states have similar fees.

Why Support HB59/SB269?

In addition to the terror and trauma experienced by victims of domestic violence and their loved ones, the economic costs of domestic violence to all sectors, public and private alike, are enormous. The small surcharges imposed by House Bill 59 and Senate Bill 269 are miniscule in comparison. Even at the individual user level, these fees are insignificant relative to the range of related costs consumers pay willingly. This legislation is a reasoned mechanism of raising necessary revenue for a critical public service that prevents further expense and tragedy.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAWS AND TEENS A REPORT FROM BREAK THE CYCLE

Teens and young adults are among the most likely to experience abuse in a relationship. Many state domestic violence laws, however, do not protect those who need it the most. Below is a summary, compiled by the national organization Break the Cycle, of how state civil domestic violence restraining order laws address some of the circumstances teen victims face.

STATE-BY-STATE REPORT CARD EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

As the leading voice for teens on the issue of dating violence, Break the Cycle advocates for policy and legislative changes to better protect the rights and promote the health of teens nationwide. Engaging, educating and empowering youth through prevention and intervention programs, Break the Cycle helps young people identify and build safe, healthy relationships. One in three teens will experience some form of abuse in a dating relationship. Teens who suffer from abusive relationships exhibit increased rates of substance abuse, high-risk sexual behaviors, eating disorders and suicidality. Teen victims are substantially more likely than classmates to bring weapons to school and three times as likely to be involved in a physical fight.

Sadly, teens face overwhelming obstacles to getting help such as limited access to basic securities like money, shelter and transportation. Exacerbating the barriers for teens are the widespread statutory restrictions that exist because so few states recognize teens as victims of domestic abuse. In fact, teens experience abuse at extremely high rates and young women between the ages of 16 and 24 exhibit the highest rates of abuse—above any other age group.

To call attention to this critical situation, Break the Cycle set out to assess the climate of each state's civil domestic violence restraining order laws and their impact on teens seeking protection from abusive relationships. Initially, the aim of the research was to compile an up-to-date single location of this state-by-state information for teens and those who care about them. However, after the preliminary research was completed, Break the Cycle identified a series of common trends (both negative and positive) that called for further analysis. The factors were then grouped into larger categories, which were placed in order from most adverse to most protective. Point values (ranging from -5 to +5) were assigned to each category depending on whether the statute language was helpful or harmful in the protection of minors.

Only three states received A's—California, Oklahoma, and New Hampshire. Fifteen states failed, with twelve of those states receiving an automatic failure.

Each state has different requirements for getting a civil domestic violence protection order. ***Because it makes protective orders reasonably accessible to teens, Pennsylvania's grade was a B.***

Break the Cycle hopes these grades will spur action among state legislatures throughout the country and activism among our nation's youth. It is essential that dating violence and the needs of minor victims be specifically addressed within state domestic violence statutes. Lawmakers have a responsibility to address this issue and to propose legislation that will ensure the protection of all victims of domestic violence—regardless of their age.

For more information or a full copy of the report, visit www.breakthecycle.org.



Save the Date

Crime Victims Rights Rally

Monday, April 14, 2008

11AM

Capitol Rotunda
Harrisburg

For more information contact Mary Walsh
(717) 571-5292 or maryw@copcvo.org

A Thoughtful Idea

Have you ever thought about throwing a fundraiser? Have you ever had a home show for Pampered Chef, Silpata Jewelry, or PartyLite Candles? Have you ever thought about holding a home show and a having a fundraiser for the Women's Center of Montgomery County? Carolyn Baumgardner from Willow Grove did. On January 12 2008, my mother, Carolyn Baumgardner, hosted a PartyLite Candle Party and helped raised two hundred and forty dollars for the Women's Center, with assistance from PartyLite Candle consultant, Linda Kindermann, who donated her time and her total profit from the party to support domestic violence advocacy. PartyLite Candles are excellent candles, made in the USA, and the #1 selling candle internationally. If you want more information about PartyLite Candles call Linda Kindermann at (215) 794-5256. Thanks again mom and Linda and to all the women who attended the party. Your generosity and support is outstanding!

With looming budget and funding cuts threatening our organization, maybe this could be an additional way to raise money and raise awareness of domestic violence AND the critical role we play in it. Many sales consultants are willing to do fundraisers so whether it is PartyLite or Pampered Chef or some other home show consider getting together with some friends, eat, drink and shop in the comfort of your own home! What could be an easier way to have fun and raise money for the Women's Center of Montgomery County?

Niki Stansbury

Volunteer Coordinator- Pottstown

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



Federal Budget Announcement from the NNEDV

**Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)
in the Fiscal Year 2008 Federal Budget:
VAWA PROGRAMS INCREASED BY \$17.3 MILLION,
VOCA FUND CUT BY \$35 MILLION**

FISCAL YEAR 2008 OVERVIEW

THE DETAIL:

Overall, VAWA programs administered by the Department of Justice have seen a \$17.3 million increase in the FY 2008 budget!

While there were clear successes for VAWA programs in the Omnibus Appropriations Bill, we were shocked and upset to learn that the Victim of Crime Act Fund (VOCA) has been cut by \$35 million and that other core VAWA program received cuts. The President's budget called for the elimination of the VOCA Fund but we fought hard to maintain it and even to raise the VOCA cap throughout the appropriation's process. Though many Members of Congress supported *increases* to the VOCA cap, the pressure from the President to cut funding was just too strong.

The fact that we were able to save the VOCA fund from complete elimination is a direct result of your calls. We celebrate that victory but know that this cut is unacceptable and we need to act!

SUCCESS – VAWA INCREASES!

Many essential VAWA programs received increases, including an \$8.8 million increase for *STOP Grants*, a \$2.6 million increase for *Transitional Housing* and a \$1.6 million increase for *Services for Rural Victims*! New and vital programs have been funded, including \$2.8 million for *Services for Children Exposed to Domestic Violence*, \$2.8 million for *Services for Teens*, \$2.8 million for *Engaging Men and Youth in Prevention*, and \$9.4 million for the *Sexual Assault Services Program*!

We know that Congress worked for these increases under extreme pressure to make cuts. This is a huge victory for us! Your calls about VAWA funding are surely the reason behind these increases!

Additionally, many core social safety net programs, upon which victims rely, won increases in this appropriations bill, including heat assistance (LIHEAP), WIC, and Community Health Centers.

CUTS TO VAWA PROGRAMS

Although VAWA programs received an overall increase, some programs were cut. There was a \$2.1 million cut to *Legal Assistance for Victims* and a \$3.2 million cut to *Grants to Encourage Arrest*. Labor Health and Human Services programs like the Family Violence Prevention Services Act (FVPSA), the National Domestic Violence Hotline, and Rape Prevention and Education received no funding increases or cuts, leaving them the same as last year. Each year, however, all programs have a small percent taken off their overall budget, called a rescission. This year the rescission is at 1.747% which essentially cuts funding to these programs. FVPSA will now be funded at \$122.6 million (a \$2.1 million cut) and the National Domestic Violence Hotline will be funded at \$2.9 million (a \$52,000 cut).

CUTS TO THE VOCA FUND

A 6% cut to all Department of Justice programs meant that the VOCA Fund cap was reduced by \$35 million. A separate administrative assessment of 5.5% could further reduce the cap by an additional, devastating \$30 to \$40 million.

**Informational Update from the PA Commission on Crime & Delinquency:
*What you need to know before hiring a Constable***

It has come to our attention that some constables may not be following proper procedure when escorting domestic violence victims to their home to get their belongings. As a victim advocate, it is imperative that victims are provided with accurate and complete information. Here are some things you should know when talking to a victim about the role of the constable:

Does the constable have a court order?

Ask to see it. The constable must obtain a court order from the individual that issued the temporary PFA, who is most likely a Magisterial District Judge. If the Constable does not have a court order then he/she does not have any legal authority to escort the victim to his/her home. Constables must be certified by PCCD to do any domestic violence related work under a court order.

Can a Constable make an arrest based on probable cause?

No. Section 2711 authorizes probable cause based arrests by a police officer without warrant in specific misdemeanor situations. The constable has not been granted the authority to arrest under the conditions set forth in P.C.S. Title 18, §2711. A constable does not meet the definition of a police officer.

**Advocacy Committee ‘Re-Forming’ and ‘Reforming’ at the Women’s Center
The Public Policy Action Committee is Revisited**

As I am sure you can tell from the growing frequency of articles and media alerts in our newsletter each month that highlight funding cuts, legislative actions and the need for systems advocacy work, a number of our volunteers have asked if we could re-convened the Public Policy Action Committee which previously existed at the Women’s Center. The purpose of this committee was to educate members about legislation and issues in our community and, where necessary to mobilize our members to respond when action was required.

In our former days, much of the committee’s work took the form of articles in our newsletter, letters to the editor of local newspapers, and outreach to our state and federal representatives for informational purposes. With technology becoming so integral to our work, in the interests of speed and economy, this committee – should there be sufficient interest in moving forward among our volunteers – would create an email communication tree which would keep members informed about funding cut issues and legislative reform.

We are currently trying to determine the level of interest among our volunteers in re-activating this committee, so please contact us at the Elkins Park office if this is something in which you would like to become involved!

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

Thrift Shop News

SALE OF THE SEASON! FABULOUS FINDS

(it's *still* winter!)

And...we need more volunteers to share the fun!

The thrift shop is located at 703 West Avenue in Jenkintown.

Please contact the Elkins Park office at 215-635-7340 if you are interested in volunteering!

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

610-525-1427

FAX: 610-525-1429

www.wcmontco.org

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