

Women's Center of Montgomery County

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Executive Director's Report



Domestic Violence Services Provided by the Women's Center First Six Months Fiscal Year 7/1/07 to 12/31/07

Number of Domestic Violence Victims Served: (Excludes Abington Medical Advocacy Project)

Number of New Victims & Significant Others	1,907
Number of Continuing Victim	638
Total Victims Served	2,542

Counseling Hours (excludes Abington Medical Advocacy Project services)

Telephone Counseling:	2,727 contacts	771 hours
In-person Counseling:	1,564 contacts	1,532.75 hours
Group Contacts:	121 contacts	214 hours
Total Counseling Hours	4,412 contacts	2,517.75 hours

Legacy Advocacy and Court Accompaniment:

Victims Receiving In-person Legal Advocacy Services	950 unduplicated victims
Court accompaniment services	514 unduplicated victims

Community Education Programs:

Number of programs to community groups	36
Number of persons reached through community groups	2,134
Number of programs to schools	22
Number of persons reached in schools	1,218

New Programs Developed and Funded:

- Stalking Intervention on College Campuses – Two-year program funded by PCCD
- Collaborative Project with Victims Services Center & Abington Police Department to provide coordinated services for victims of domestic violence and their children
- Information Systems Technology Upgrades – funded by a foundation grant and the PCCD



The Women's Center of Montgomery County Moves to Its New Home in Colmar: *Anticipated Opening: March 2008*

As we have announced in the past, the Women's Center will be opening a new office to meet the growing demand for both services and volunteer opportunities in the North Penn region. While we will still maintain our crisis office in the Central Montgomery Medical Center, we are very pleased to be tenants in a new collaborative environment: a facility in Colmar that will also be home to the North Penn Community Health Foundation, Children's Aid, Family Services, and the North Penn YMCA, to name a few of our fellow occupants. As this picture shows, this facility is nearing completion, with occupancy anticipated by March 2008.

Save the Date!

Sunday, April 13, 2008

11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

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

'Brunch With the Boys'

A conversation with Chris and Jim Matthews

Moderated by Larry Kane

With a special community service award presented to

Representative Joshua Shapiro

For his Outstanding Advocacy on Behalf of Victims of Domestic Violence

Join us for our Silent Auction and Brunch

Meadowlands Country Club

Blue Bell, PA

Join us for a lively discussion with brothers Chris Matthews, host of "The Chris Matthews Show" and "Hardball With Chris Matthews" and Jim Matthews, Montgomery County Commissioner and President of Keegan Mortgage Corp.

Elkins Park Volunteer Update

Submitted by Deanna Linn

With the end of 2007, I especially want to thank the hotline counselors who have helped make the Elkins Park office and evening and weekend hotlines succeed this year. In 2007, 74 counselors provided hotline hours either in Elkins Park, Lansdale, Bryn Mawr or at home. And of these, 35 counselors received their training either in 2006 or 2007. I welcome these new counselors with their enthusiasm and I gratefully acknowledge the years of service the "experienced" counselors provide. Although not everyone is a fan of email and technology, my job is so much easier when I email a request for weekend coverage or a "SOS – coverage emergency" and the multiple responses I rapidly receive is incredibly appreciated.

The December Holiday Party (inservice) was well attended and I think we had fun as well had a learning experience. On January 16, Wednesday, in the evening, 7pm, we will have a guest speaker to discuss issues of G/L/B/T relationships and domestic violence. I hope to see you here. No daytime inservice is scheduled in January.

I will be starting 3 domestic violence counselor training sessions in January. Thursday day and Thursday evening at the Elkins Park Office (both starting Jan. 24) and one at Rosemont College on Tuesday evenings, starting Jan 22. If you have friends who are interested, please contact me.

Thank you for 2007 and we will all work together to make 2008 equally successful in providing services for those in need of our services.

Norristown Volunteer Update

IN-SERVICES

Our annual December holiday party was fun for all. Thank you to all of the volunteers and staff who brought their favorite recipes, everything was delicious!

Our next in-service will be Tuesday, January 15th, 2008 from 1-3pm in the Norristown office. Our guest speaker will be Constable Pius Nark. Pius will talk about his services in helping victims of domestic violence.

LEGAL REMEDIES

The next Legal Remedies Workshop will be held on January 15, 2008 from 5-7pm in the Norristown office. The guest attorney will be Lawrence Pauker 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!

Happy New Year to all!

Jenn B.

Norristown Volunteer Coordinator

PCCD AWARDS GRANT TO PREVENT STALKING, PROMOTE AWARENESS ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

HARRISBURG – The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency today announced a grant award to help colleges and universities in Montgomery County develop policies and procedures that prevent stalking and generate awareness of the crime.

The \$28,000 award to the Women’s Center of Montgomery County will fund strategies tailored to meet the unique needs of each campus, including establishing volunteer counseling services, developing internal adjudication processes, and training law enforcement, resident advisors, faculty and staff.

“For many reasons, stalking on college campuses can be an underreported crime. We hope this funding will address these problems by educating and empowering students to take action to protect themselves,” said PCCD Chairman Walter M. Phillips Jr. “Additionally, we hope this grant will help to develop a model program that could be used by other colleges and universities in Pennsylvania.”

Since 2004, with the support of Governor Edward G. Rendell, the commission has awarded \$ 141.4 million in victim’s services funding throughout Pennsylvania.

The newest grant was awarded as part of PCCD’s effort to promote innovative initiatives addressing victim’s issues and services. It will be administered by PCCD’s Office of Victims’ Services, which provides support – including the Victims Compensation Assistance Program and education programs – to victim service professionals and the public.

As the state’s justice planning agency, PCCD is dedicated to preventing and reducing crime in Pennsylvania and responding to the needs of victims. PCCD collaborates with the Governor’s office, state, local and federal elected officials, juvenile and criminal justice agencies, victim service agencies, community-based organizations, non-profits, schools and others to achieve these goals.

Funding Update from the PA Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Funding Update: Thursday, December 20, 2007

Victory and Defeat: VAWA Programs Increased by \$17.3 Million; VOCA Funds Cut by \$35 Million

The Situation:

The House and the Senate have completed the Omnibus Appropriations Bill and have sent it to the President, who is expected to sign it into law. Overall, VAWA (Violence Against Women) programs administered by the Department of Justice have seen a \$17.3 million increase!

While there were clear successes for VAWA programs in the Omnibus Appropriations Bill, we are 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!

What You Can Do:

Although we cannot change the outcome of the VOCA cut right now, we need to channel our energy productively to make sure that VOCA is restored next year.

We need your voice! Look for these strategic activities in January:

- Document the impact: We will be sending around a survey to local domestic violence programs to tell us how the VOCA cut impacts your programs and victims in your area. The survey results will be used as evidence as we fight for VOCA increases.
- Call-in: We will be organizing a call-in day for folks to discuss the impact of the VOCA cut and discuss how we can move forward in the future.
- Write a letter: We will draft a letter that you can modify and send to your Members of Congress about the importance of VOCA funding.
- Talk to candidates: We will supply you with talking points and questions for the presidential candidates. As they move through the primaries, they need to know that VOCA is a significant issue for the American public.

Thank you for being ready to act in these strategic ways to ensure a stable future for VOCA!

Exciting Upgrades to Our Information Systems

Thanks to the support of a local foundation and the PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency, the Women's Center has secured funding in the amount of \$37,000 to completely upgrade all of the computers in our offices, along with significant improvements to our data management systems, hardware, software and security firewalls. In addition to these enhancements, the Center will be installing servers in four of our offices that will allow information to be shared more effectively and professionally between offices. Finally, these grants will enable us to create and host our own email server, providing more secure and efficient communications both internal and externally.

In a time when funding resources are shrinking, these information systems improvements help us to continue to operate economically while still expanding the resources and services we can provide across the county!

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS WITH PFA ORDERS ARE PROTECTED AGAINST UTILITY TERMINATIONS

In 2004, a new law (now called Chapter 14) was passed to make it easier for utility companies to terminate utility service to customers who are behind in paying their utility bills. Chapter 14 also allows utility companies to charge higher deposits, and it requires customers to try to resolve payment concerns directly with the utility company before they can arrange a payment arrangement with the Public Utility Company.

Chapter 14 makes customers who have PFAs exempt from its changes. Specifically, Section 1417 of the law states, “This chapter shall not apply to victims under a protection from abuse order as provided by 23 PA.C.S. Ch. 61 (relating to protection from abuse).”

This means that utility customers with PFAs have certain rights, including:

- The utility company cannot shut off gas or electric service during the winter months (December through March)
- Special payment arrangements for deposits or late bills may be made;
- Utility service cannot be shut off on a Friday;
- Customers with PFAs cannot be held responsible for a bill in someone else’s name;
- Utility companies must give at least 48 hours notice prior to termination.

It is critical that domestic violence advocates inform customers with PFAs of these rights and advocate for them with the utility companies. The Public Utility Commission has not yet issued guiding regulations telling utility companies how they are to implement the PFA exemption. With no regulations, it is up to customers and their advocates to make sure utility companies are complying with the exemption.

If the utility company of Commission requires a PFA, customers may have to provide a copy of it. **No other information beyond the PFA should be required or provided**, as there is no guarantee of confidential treatment. Chapter 14 says nothing about what type of PFA qualifies for the exception, so emergency, temporary, and final PFA Orders should all be accepted.

The PFA exception in Chapter 14 says nothing about *when* the PFA Order was obtained or in effect (was it issued while the customer was receiving utility service on the account that is now late, or when the termination notice was issued, or after the customer moved out and tried to reconnect service?). **Advocates should try to get the utility company or Commission to accept any PFA Order wither currently in effect, or in effect during the time utility service was received, or during any billing dispute.**

If there is any problem, customers should **call the Public Utility Commission’s Termination Hotline at 1-800-692-7380 right away** instead of trying to work it out with the utility company. Once the Commission is notified that the situation involves a customer with a PFA, the Commission will accept the case and assign an investigator to work out a resolution. The Commission’s involvement puts a stay on any pending termination; **while the case is being investigated by the Commission, utility service cannot be terminated.**

Although utility companies are not required by Chapter 14 to provide protections for victims of domestic violence who are not “under a protection from abuse order,” *nor are utility companies prevented from choosing to provide broader protections.* Advocates should **try to persuade the utility company to interpret the law as broadly as possible**, such as allowing alternative documentation of abuse like the victim affidavit used in the Address Confidentiality Program.

Payment assistance may be available through a Customer Assistance Program (CAP) or LIHEAP Crisis Grant.

HOUSE BILL 235: ACCELERATED EVICTION

House Bill 235 would amend the PA Landlord Tenant Act to speed up the eviction process. The Landlord Tenant Act sets forth the law and process to be followed in resolving disputes between landlords and tenants, such as non-payment of rent or breach of a lease. The existing law provides that once landlords win an eviction case, they can obtain a writ of possession to lock tenants out of the premises 21 days after judgment. This allows tenants three (3) weeks to find a new place to live, pack and move out or be locked out of the premises.

House Bill 235 would drastically reduce the post-judgment period from 21 to just 11 days – giving vulnerable tenants who are already financially struggling only 11 days to find a new place to live and garner the money to pay for the many up-front costs of moving. Moreover, HB 235 would eliminate the appeals period, thereby removing tenants’ option to challenge a wrongful eviction prior to being forced out of their homes.

The eviction process was already expedited in 1995 and represents a negotiated balance between the rights of landlords and renters. HB 235 would radically skew that balance in favor of property owners and against the nearly 30% of Pennsylvania households who rent their homes and are already straining to make ends meet. Through the eviction process, these vulnerable renters are frequently unrepresented by legal counsel, unaware of their legal options or defenses, and at extreme risk of homelessness and its evitable consequences.

Housing is a critical link to breaking free of abuse. For domestic violence victims seeking to leave abusive relationships, finding safe and affordable housing is essential to their ability to break free of abusive relationships. Without adequate housing for themselves and their children, battered women may view remaining in or returning to an abusive relationship as their only viable option for survival. Because domestic violence victims are acutely vulnerable to unfair eviction and consequent homelessness, they would be particularly harmed by accelerating the eviction process as HB 235 aims to do.

The Position of the PA Coalition Against Domestic Violence:

PCADV opposes HB 235 because accelerating the eviction process will:

- Compound battered women’s financial dependence on abusers by creating yet another obstacle to obtaining and maintaining housing of their own;
- Expedite the process of victims and their children becoming homeless without adequate protections against unlawful lockouts;
- Result in increased homelessness and its inevitable safety risks; and
- Jeopardize the safety and autonomy of battered and low-income women.

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

If You're Not Volunteering to Work at the Women's Center Thrift Shop...

You are **MISSING** fun, camaraderie, and bargains! We are small but mighty!!

At Your Mother's Closet, the Women's Center of Montgomery County Thrift Shop, located at 703 West Avenue in Jenkintown, our merchandise is very high quality because we keep only the finest donations that we get, the best of the best! In recent months we have sold designs by Donna Karan, Anne Klein, Ellen Tracy, Ferragamo and Cole Haan – and we have gained new friends and committed customers through each of these sales! Our donors bring us clothes from Italy, Spain and France and our customers flock to the store to share in the fun of sorting through these treasures.

Beyond the fantastic bargains to be found, friends are made each day as volunteers work together to great an atmosphere that is warm, welcoming and fun for those who work *and* shop there!

Come see for yourself! Volunteer at the Women's Center Thrift Shop in Jenkintown!

Bloomingdales Sponsors Fundraising Effort to Benefit Women's Center of Montgomery County

For the third consecutive year, Bloomingdale's has selected the Women's Center of Montgomery County as the beneficiary of their "It's All in the Jeans" campaign. Over a three-day period in November, Friday through Sunday, November 16th – 18th, Bloomingdale's King of Prussia and Willow Grove and Y.E.S. Contemporary Sportswear conducted a promotion inviting customers to bring in a pair of gently-worn, recently laundered jeans to be donated to the Women's Center of Montgomery County. The donor then received a 15% off savings toward their next regularly-priced denim purchase in Y.E.S.

The result of this campaign is a large shipment of jeans donated to our thrift shop, both for resale to the public and as a source of free clothing to clients in need of emergency wardrobe replacement as a result of their crisis relocation. The revenue generated by this donation helps us to underwrite the cost of critical needs for the families we serve, including emergency lock changes and transportation to and from the court house for Protection from Abuse Orders.

We are extremely grateful to our friends at Bloomingdale's for their corporate commitment to supporting non-profits and the community with visionary campaigns that raise both funding and awareness for and about our mission! And a special note of thanks to Public Relations Manager Sarah Rodowicz for her extra-special efforts to promote this campaign, which include her personal delivery of the donations to our thrift shop and her creative work in getting the word! Thank you to Bloomingdale's and to Sarah for setting a standard of excellence in corporate giving and community involvement!

Women's Advocacy Project Staff and Volunteers in Norristown and Pottstown Working to Make the Holidays Special for the Families



I would like to commend and thank the volunteers and staff in our Norristown and Pottstown offices for their efforts to create a special holiday season for the many families they serve.

Yet again this year, the Norristown office, led by Program Director Denise Flynn, coordinated a campaign for donated gifts, distributed to families in crisis in the Norristown region. This photo shows just a small sampling of the outpouring of generosity from the community! No less impressive, though, was the generous donation of time by volunteers and staff in the weekend just prior to Christmas, as they met with families to distribute the gifts just in time for Christmas. Thanks to all of you who worked together to benefit others!

Equally heartwarming was the holiday Open House hosted in December by our Pottstown staff members Kristine and Nikki. Although confidentiality prevents us from sharing those pictures with our members, the radiant faces and camaraderie so evident among the program participants who attended were truly inspirational! Congratulations on a great job to Nikki and Kristine!

Bloomington's Donates Jeans to our Thrift Shop



Pictured left to right: Mary Dixon (customer); Joan Simon; Norma Jarrett (volunteers); Sarah Rodowicz (Bloomington's)

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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