

NEWS FROM STEPS

We've had many changes this first full year. We were given several foundation grants, and have expanded our staff. We moved from a cramped, dark space to a larger, brightly lighted space in the same building. We were given donations of new office furniture, and a computer. These additions make our work easier, and make us feel valued.

STEPS can also report movement in the public consciousness. Sr. Mary and Myrna Santiago went to the First National Conference: Battered Women and Justice in St. Louis, MO. Sr. Andrea went to a Violence in the Family Conference in Philadelphia, PA. Each of these conferences was offered to a different constituency concerned with the violence families can experience, but both conferences attempted to rally the support available, and let others know what has been helpful, where it is available, and to further clarify the still unmet needs, the still accepted norms that blame women.

The Battered Womens Criminal Defense Back-Up Center at New York University Law School has been offering us continued support and help with our court appearances. Their concern and creative work has been of immeasurable help over this past year. We cannot thank them enough for their efforts.

Members of our staff, some of our clients, and members of our Advisory Board have spoken at meetings of community groups, women in prison or jail, colleges and training programs, police and criminal justice groups. If you give us some advance notice, we may be able to send a speaker or do a workshop for your group.

We've had a lot of cases that were spectacular, and received much media publicity, we've also had the kind of success in some instances that never were noticed by the media. We are pleased with our efforts, and are glad to see the growing interest and concern for battered women defendants.

Battered Women in the Public Eye

Two reports of concern have recently come to our attention about abused children and battered women.

The EXCHANGE, August, 1988, offers a long article "Protecting Abused Children, Supporting Battered Women." The author discusses the role of Child Protective Services in identifying the originators of abuse on children. The author calls attention to the fact that often a woman who is abused cannot protect her children or herself from an abusing father. In fact, she is often criminalized or at least charged with neglect if the children are abused by their father, even if she is also abused and dares not intervene, or perhaps due to being battered is not able to intervene in a battering situation. She risks having her children placed in foster care, because she is unable to protect them, while she is also endangered by the husband and father who is abusive. The suggestion is made that courts make a more dedicated effort to remove batterers, rather than children and their mothers. Our attention is again called to the fact that where possible, women are victimized, women are blamed even when they are victims. It is suggested that when social workers, police or courts are investigating reports of child abuse that an effort be made to find out if the mother is also abused, rather than blame her for not protecting the children from abuse. Networking between child protective agencies and battered women's programs would certainly reveal many of these connections and also lead to more successful treatment of the women and children involved. Rather than force women to flee with their children even when they have no place to go, efforts could be made to remove the abusing father, making the home a sanctuary for the mother and children, thus making any social services rendered more effective.

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National Conference on Justice and Battered Women

Rev. Marie M. Fortune was a Luncheon speaker at the First National Conference on Justice and Battered Women in St. Louis, MO. in May, 1988. It is with real regret that we cannot reproduce the entire speech. What she has to say needs to be heard by everybody. Following are a few of her remarks, taken out of context, but important as they stand:

"What happens when there is no justice for the abused woman, no support for her protection, no one to stop the abuser? In the absence of justice for an abused woman, she may choose to use physical force to defend herself against an attacker; she chooses her life over his. The number of women defendants who have assaulted or killed an abuser are simply an indictment of the failure of the community (not just the legal system) to have made justice for them"

Rev. Fortune discussed "justice" what it is, and how it fails women. "Justice is not a word we use comfortably. It is a word which seems to have lost meaning and so we seldom use it. The word has always referred to what is fair, right, deserved. Perhaps our hope of achieving what is fair, right, and deserved for those who have historically been denied has waned and in our cynicism we no longer even envision justice as a possibility. Or we have passed responsibility for justice-making directly to the "justice" system. If it does not happen there (and it frequently does not), it will not happen at all. Yet we long for justice. In our anger at what we see that is being done to women, in our own experiences of violence, in our frustration in working with a victim who wants to "forgive and forget", in our despair in working with a woman of color who is unwilling to use the legal system because it has never protected her before, in our feelings of powerlessness when we see batterers go from one abusive relationship to the next -- in all of these situations, we long for justice. But it is a longing unfulfilled, a vision which we have come to accept as impossible.

"The imperative to do justice from a feminist perspective is based on five assumptions:

1. embodiment is a crucial fact of our existence and requires that we take violations of bodily integrity seriously. i.e, what happens to our bodies is important
2. relationship between and among persons is a primary value
3. persons can and should act in the face of injustice rather than remain passive (moral agency)
4. we must begin with the lived experience of women
5. we must take the side of the powerless and victimized, the battered woman.

"This mandate propels us into the chaos of injustice and violation as we seek order, justice, and healing.

"So what does this mean to an abuse victim? It means that the truth of her abuse is important both because it violates her bodily integrity and because it shatters any relationship with her offender in past or the future. It means that she *and* we can act in response to her abuse. It means that whatever we do begins with her experience and that our job is to take her side and stand by her throughout the process of justice making. The goal of justice-making is the restoration of right-relationship, whether between her and her community, her family, or between her and her offender...

"Most of us here do what we do out of our longing for justice. In describing justice-making today, I will not be telling anything that you don't already know. We are making justice inside and outside the legal and criminal justice systems because our intuitions about justice have been right. I want to describe ethically what we already know. . .

"Now, what is required? What are the particulars of doing justice? What does it look like to restore right relation?

1. **Truth-telling:** the silence which surrounds the violence is broken. Truth telling is not merely a rendering of the facts; it is giving voice to a reality.
2. But truth told must also be truth heard. Hearing the truth means acknowledging the violence that has occurred. This *acknowledgement* needs to be spoken, simply and clearly: "You have been harmed by this person. It was not your fault. This is wrong and should never have happened. We regret that it happened to you." This acknowledgement can come from a friend, a pastor, the legal system, etc. But it needs to come from somewhere.
3. **Compassion** is the willingness to "suffer with" combined with efforts to alleviate the suffering. Rather than trying to minimize, explain away, or avoid the suffering of another, we should be present with them.
4. **Protecting the vulnerable from further abuse** means that we do whatever is necessary to protect the victim and others from further harm. This may mean restraint of an offender prior to and after conviction or it may mean helping a battered woman change her identity and move to another state.
5. **Accountability** is the confrontation with offender, the one responsible for the violence which hopefully results in confession or acknowledgement by him of his responsibility. Willard Gaylin argues that: "...those of us who transgress have a right to *receive* punishment; if we are not punished adequately for our crimes, we are being treated as less than persons.... As a tribute and tes-

tament to [the aggressor's] freedom, we must dignify him by making him pay for the evil actions he commits. We show our respect by making him accountable." (Gaylin, *The Killing of Bonnie Garland*, p. 336)

6. *Restitution*, making payment for damage done by violence, is a concrete means of renewing right-relation. Not only does material restitution help pay for actual expenses incurred as a result of the victimization, it is highly symbolic. It is a tangible sign of an attempt to restore that which was lost due to an assault.
7. *Vindication* for victims is the substance of justice and mercy. Vindication refers not to vengeance and retaliation but to the exoneration and justification of those harmed. The obsolete definition of vindication is "to set free"; hence to be vindicated is to be set free from the bondage of victimization.

"The reality is that there are some major blocks to justice-making in our society -- as we all know. One of the primary blocks to justice for all women is the serious distortion of our experience as it appears in the media.

"In my naivete, I used to believe that police and courts and judges were supposed to protect the powerless -- in this case, the battered woman and her children. Imagine my surprise...when I began to understand patriarchy, I began to understand why our reality is so distorted, why the system was never intended to protect us.

"So the bottom line is that we can and must struggle to change the system in order to lessen the damage it does to women. But as long as we live in the patriarchy, the justice we make will only be approximate. Approximate justice is well worth our efforts because it lessens our suffering. But it will never be all we deserve."

God "holds out for us a vision of a justice that is life-giving, that enables restoration, that creates the possibility of reconciliation and renewal of right-relation. This is the justice that we must demand from our churches and synagogues, from our legal system, from our families and friends.

"Is such justice possible?..."

"We make it possible when we make safe places for women to tell the truth.

We make it possible when we hear and acknowledge her truth. We make it possible when we stand with her in compassion as her advocate.

We make it possible when we protect the vulnerable from further abuse.

We make it possible when we call abusers to account for their actions.

We make it possible when we require restitution be made to a battered woman.

We make it possible when we vindicate a battered woman speedily -- revolving the shame which society has laid upon her.

"We make it possible because, to paraphrase Andrea Dworkin: 'In our hearts, we are mourners for all of those who have not survived. In our souls we are warriors for those who are as she was then. In our lives, we are both celebrant and proof of women's capacity and will to survive, to become, to act, to change self and society. And each year, we are stronger, and there are more of us.'"

Marie Fortune is the Director of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence in Seattle Washington. She has published several books on the topic.*****

Other speakers and workshops at the conference discussed "Intervention to Empower Battered Women and their Children," "Perpetrators of Domestic Violence: The Men," "The Impact of Family Violence on Children," "An Overview of Battered Women in Prison and Alternatives to Incarceration," "How to involve the Community in a Mandate for Change."

As you can see, this was a conference that covered most of the issues we are concerned about. Suggestions for action were implicit in the definitions of the problem, in most instances. As we well know, actions are required of the whole society, not just workers in the movement to prevent battering of women. A second conference will be held in November, 1989. For further information contact Louise Bauschard, Women's Self-Help Center, 2838 Olive St., St. Louis, MO 63103.

Attention

The first publication of its kind! **ADULTS MOLESTED AS CHILDREN: A SURVIVAL MANUAL FOR WOMEN & MEN**, by Euan Bear and Peter T. Dimock, written by survivors for survivors, this 76-page manual is for adults who are beginning to remember and deal with the sexual abuse inflicted on them in childhood. In simple, straightforward language, author Euan Bear explores the experience of abuse and the process of coming to terms with that experience in everyday life. She and consultant Peter T. Dimock share the perception that the effects of sexual abuse on women and men are similar, though they may be expressed differently because of gender-based socialization.

The manual endorses no single strategy for coping now but suggests several steps that have been helpful to other survivors. It explains some of the issues to the important people in their lives and to those professionals whose work brings them into contact with adult survivors. Most of all, it reminds survivors that this process is theirs, that their lives belong to them, and that they have the power to change the world, beginning with themselves. \$12.95, including postage and handling. From: Safer Society Press, RR1, Box 24-B, Orwell, VT 05760-9756. If multiple copies are needed, write and ask for price list.

Report Available...

STEPS staff members, Sr. Mary and Diane Ballard, participated in a day-long meeting of a New York coalition of battered women's advocates whose report, which we also participated in publishing, reveals an exploration of the relationship of some kinds of child abuse and woman abuse to each other, and suggest that service providers, police, the courts and shelters seek information from the victims about the abuse of both the woman and children. They too, reached the conclusion that more networking be done between child protection agencies and battered women's programs to focus on the abuser and eliminate him from the home, rather than making the woman and children homeless, strangers in an ugly situation. The report published by this coalition is available from the STEPS office.

Continued

The recommendations are excellent and helpful to all working with families.

Both these reports reflect more awareness of the relationship between abuse of children and abuse of women. Too often women are considered failures if they do not protect their children from their abuser who also abuses the children. In fact, the mothers are often penalized for failing to protect the children, even when they are too terrified or too battered themselves to be able to place themselves between the abuser and the child. Whether the abuse is physical, psychological or sexual, if the father has the social permission to be "boss" in his home/castle, and the mother is required to be responsible for the well-being of the family even though society disempowers her in this role, the result is that the woman is both the victim and the accused.

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TAKING STEPS

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