



TAKING STEPS

Volume 4, Number 1

PUBLISHED BY STEPS TO END FAMILY VIOLENCE
a family project of Edwin Gould Services for Children

Winter, 1990

News From STEPS

During the past year STEPS To End Family Violence has worked hard and accomplished much in our efforts to work with battered women defendants and afterwards as they begin their healing. These are women who have been abused, and have now been arrested for charges that relate to their abuse; they have fought back against their abuser, or they have child abuse charges, although they did not abuse the child. Their abuser abused them and the child. However, they are held responsible as the mother. We provide Court Advocacy and intervention as well as services for the families. Our small staff has worked hard with the women, and recently with some of the children. We have worked comprehensively with 91 women and their children providing court advocacy to these women and we made 387 court appearances with our clients. During the year we conducted over 852 counseling sessions. This does not include the informal counseling that occurs with a lengthy phone conversation, or during an entire day spent in Court. Our clients were acquitted, had their charges dismissed or were placed on Probation. Those who received sentences were given less time because of our advocacy. Besides our very busy Court Advocates, a volunteer Court Advocate has assisted our staff. First she received extensive training with our staff, then she accompanied clients and a staff member to Court. Now she advocates, reporting her experiences and follow-up with the staff. Other individuals concerned about the treatment of battered women within the criminal justice system came to Court disposition dates as well as trial dates. This has not only given visible support to our clients, but also has helped the Court to understand that the public is concerned and interested in these cases.

Weekly Support Groups have always been an integral part of our program. During this year we increased the number of our support groups. We added a parenting and domestic violence support group. At the same time that the parenting group meets, the children also meet for a therapeutic play group. For those children who are too young for the therapeutic play group, a wonderful volunteer contributes her time each week to care for these youngsters. While we can see a dramatic change in the therapeutic play group youngsters, we also see good changes in the younger ones. There are very few, if any, places and ways for children to work out the violence they witnessed or experienced. STEPS is providing one of those opportunities.

Late Spring we had a large new group of women ready to begin attending one of our Support Groups. We felt this might be detrimental to the members who have been attending for some time, as new women begin the process. So we initiated an eight week "New Beginnings" Group which combines education about family violence as well as being a support group. This experience has been a good one, and we are conducting another one now, plus we will conduct several such groups during the coming year so that new clients will have this opportunity for orientation before beginning one of our "regular" groups.

Education and Prevention are important goals for STEPS. During the past year staff have added to their already busy schedule and conducted 64 workshops or presentations on domestic violence prevention and intervention. These educational forums have assisted 1,651 individuals learn more about family violence and the resources that are available. Regular workshops occur in the prisons. Others are with criminal justice groups and agencies; the remainder are social service agencies and community groups.

continued

During the past year we were able to raise bail funds for two individuals. The first one, M.A. is still awaiting disposition of her case. Her trial has just begun. The second one, L.W., was released shortly before her trial. She was able to take care of several personal matters, particularly regarding the care of her retarded brother. She worked with her lawyer preparing for her trial. She testified at her trial, as did Dr. Julie Blackman, a Social Psychologist who has worked extensively with battered women defendants. We were saddened that the jury chose not to consider what our client nor Dr. Blackman said about her prior abuse. She was convicted. We continue to work with her on her appeal. She has been most grateful for our efforts, and says that even with the results, she is glad she went to trial, because she believes strongly that she was trying to defend herself.

Networking with other groups has been an important aspect of our work at STEPS. During the year we have been active participants with all of the relevant groups working in domestic violence and criminal justice. This is in addition to the agencies and groups that we work with to assist our individual clients. Foundations, many individuals, a fundraising event and a legislative grant have funded STEPS during this year. In our last issue, we reported on our Third Annual Awards Party, and in this issue we include a review of Dr. Blackman's book, mentioned then.

Honest, we will tell you about Plea Bargaining in an issue soon.

IMPORTANT NUMBERS

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINES

NEW YORK:

In English: 1-800-942 6906

In Spanish: 1-800-942-6908

National:

1-800-333-SAFE

CAN YOU HELP?

At times all a battered woman needs to help prepare her case adequately is to be released on bail. At times this is difficult for her family. Would you be willing to provide a partial bail amount when needed? It would mean that you might not receive your money back for a year, but you would receive it back as soon as her trial was completed. Staff at STEPS would evaluate the client before asking you. We would like to develop a list of interested individuals that we could call on when needed. We can give you additional details, and answer any questions you may have. Please let us know.

Name _____

Telephone (____) _____

Address _____

State _____ Zip _____

Amount I can give: \$500.____ \$300__ Other____

We've told you about it before, but good things should be repeated.

**National Clearinghouse for the
Defense of Battered Women
125 South 9th St. Suite 302
Philadelphia, PA 19107
215-351-0010**

Besides the wonderful work of the National Clearinghouse, they have a great project called the National Advocate Network which is attempting to increase the resource sharing, and lessen the isolation of all of us who do this work. The first set of Working Papers of this National Advocate Network (for individuals and agencies who work with battered women before trial and after incarceration) is valuable. Send for them. The price is \$10. The next set of Working Papers should be ready by January, 1991. The topic will be: Support Groups for Incarcerated Battered Women.

Feedback on this publication is requested. New material for another issue will be welcome. Try to give some experience of your organization or people you have worked with, news, etc. Also, they are printing a "NO COMMENT" column. If you have an example of a truly outrageous bit of news, send it along. Here are two examples from the Working Papers: 1) An example of inadequate sentencing was the Kansas judge who suspended the fine of a convicted abuser and ordered him to go out and buy his wife a box of candy. 2) "You can't execute your spouses," said a judge when he sentenced a battered woman, who had defended herself, to 15 years. "The very simple answer would have been to turn around and walk out the door."

If you would like to join the National Advocate Network, send for their packet of information. The dues are \$20 for individuals, \$35 or more for organizations, and if you make an additional contribution it will help pay for subscriptions for women in prison (who receive it free).

book review

INTIMATE VIOLENCE

by Dr. Julie Blackman

We don't really question some of our social assumptions. We 'know' that a conclusion is true, that under the circumstances what the consequences will be. Until, of course, it happens to us.

One of the particular points Dr. Blackman makes in her book is the absence of empathy we experience when we hear or read of an incident of domestic violence, rape or child abuse. In her explorations of the way domestic violence is experienced by the woman being beaten, and the jury, or the public, she carefully records the inability of outsiders to know and understand the plight of the victim. The customary question "Why didn't she leave?" has many answers, among them the fact that she loves him, or that she has no place to go, and, if the relationship has been going on for a long time, her sense of self, her perception of the options available to her are crippled or non-existent.

Dr. Blackman explores the social conditions that prevail, now, and before the middle 1970's. Her vignette of the women's movement gives us an opportunity to remember how few options have been available to women over the course of history. We are reminded that women have only now been afforded a certain kind of personhood that allows us to expect to be treated like human beings. (She reminds us that the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was founded before the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children!)

This is a scholarly study. The bibliography alone might be worth the price of the book. Her appendices, which include a copy of a questionnaire she initiated, the information it produced, and her survey of other studies make this a valuable book. It is not an easy read, but it is written in plain English, and does not require a degree to be understandable. It certainly will open your eyes, and make your view of the world more empathetic. It did mine.
Ruth Imbesi

A PLEA TO OUR FRIENDS
or

WILL YOU HELP US
CONTINUE OUR WORK?

Our efforts to inform the public about the difficulties of battered women and to spread the good word about help when and where it is available make us proud to publish this newsletter. However, it costs. It takes time, money, and sometimes, talent. We wish we didn't have to worry about mundane, grubby considerations like money, but since we do, **can you help?** We are getting support from some foundations, but you know they don't keep it up, assuming that our public will help us survive. We have also had a small legislative grant, and we are trying to obtain State funding, but as you know the State is having financial woes. You'd be surprised how much help a little money from a lot of people can be. We can also encourage you by reminding you that any help you give us is tax deductible. Please be **generous**.

HAVE HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

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and A LOT OF HELP from our friends

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