



TAKING STEPS

Volume 7, Number 1

1994

NEWS FROM STEPS

During the past year we have not taken time to publish our newsletter, but we have much to tell you as usual. The program continues and our work on behalf of battered women involved with the criminal justice system has become stronger. We are very excited about our two Prevention Programs and encourage you to read the brief article about the Teen Abuse Prevention Program (TAPP) in this newsletter.

We have had two MSW interns with us for the past academic year, and for the past two summers, we had the privilege of having two law school interns working with our program. They participated in our group workshops, counselled clients in jail, advocated for women in court and learned a great deal about domestic violence and its ramifications. They learned about the consequences of battering relationships on everyday life, family and work. These interns have had the valuable experience of learning first hand about domestic violence and the criminal justice system. They have been so helpful to all of us, as they worked with individual clients advocating, interviewing, assessing and counseling. These wonderful young people have assisted our program in a most valuable way.

Our Alternatives to Incarceration Program, rewards us with the challenge (and opportunity) to help women who are going through the court process and are now assigned to our supervision as an alternative to imprisonment. This is a new exciting program. We have the job of helping women pick up their lives and start over. The charges against these women are varied, but all would involve prison time if we were not able to offer an alternative. Cont'd pg.3

Among all female victims in 1992, 29% were slain by boyfriends or husbands. 4% of male victims were slain by their wives or girlfriends.

Working with Women who Kill

When I interviewed to work at STEPS, Sister Mary asked me why I wanted to spend my summer in prisons and criminal court waiting rooms. That first day, after Helen set out cake and juice as part of our welcome, it did seem as if we were preparing for something more than the research and writing my fellow students described in their summer employment.

We went to Rikers Island to gather case information. I was afraid. The special badges; the lit up boards at headquarters, showing every location on the island; the guard's smiles, reminded us how much power prison officers had. The interviews took place in a pastor's tiny office or next to some vending machines. We would scrunch up and try to listen to a woman whose only friend in the world was often the abuser.

I learned that women who kill are the most abused, have tried the hardest to flee and have reached out for the most help. The abuser has usually sexually and physically abused the woman, her children, the neighbors, her friends, in an ever widening circle of violence. Women who do not kill in this situation usually lose at least one child. Often they have to make an impossible choice, never sure of the outcome. When they kill, they never seem to forgive themselves. Perhaps because so many people around them tell them that they should be punished. Their friends, the family of the dead abuser, then the criminal justice system want them punished, statistically three times as harshly as other homicide defendants.

When I was not in prison, I was in court describing the abuse to the judge. Hardly any judge seemed to doubt that the abuse took place. The scars, the hospital records, the police precinct report, the abuser's criminal history usually were proof enough. The question was whether the abuse mattered. Continued on page 2

(Cont'd from pg 1) Because of STEPS' advocacy several women were not indicted for murder or manslaughter this past year. Instead, courts considered the women's victimization, and their charges of assault were dismissed. To achieve this type of success is significant because all of us at STEPS To End Family Violence believe that our work is now beginning to change the legal system for women. This is particularly important for the women we serve who have not found safety within the criminal justice system, but rather punishment for attempting to defend themselves. -Sister Mary Nerney

AWARDS UPDATE

In February 1994 we held our Annual Awards Party. Over the years we have given awards to an impressive group of people who have contributed significantly to recognizing domestic violence and the need for change in the United States. We thought you would like to be reminded of all of the recipients from over the years and be impressed, along with us, with the wonderful individuals and groups who are contributing in their specialized fields.

1994 - Mitchell Dinnerstein, Esq. has successfully defended several battered women defendants. He has lectured and participated in numerous trial and advocacy seminars in universities and local bar association trainings. He is a guest commentator on Court TV. Beth Richie, an activist, consultant and trainer with domestic violence and sexual assault programs for the past ten years. Dr. Richie is Assistant professor at Hunter College in the Masters in Public Health Program. She teaches courses in women's health, human sexuality, and violence as a public health concern. She is on sabbatical in Chicago this year.

1993 - The Coalition of Battered Women's Advocates which provides a New York City network for all who work in the field. They have created and maintained a wealth of information for those who need referrals, data, and facts. They have also advocated change for battered women in New York City and continue to keep the programs networked. Honorable Richard F. Celeste, former governor of Ohio who reviewed the cases of 107 battered women. At Christmas in 1990, Mr. Celeste granted clemencies to 27 women who were serving time for killing or assaulting husbands or male companions who had abused them.

1992 - Sue Osthoff and the National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women is another resource for those of us who need statistics and referrals and support in this work. They also connect us around the country. Jeanne Kwartler, Family Violence Specialist at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, is one of the innovators for services to battered women in New York State. She has been a support to us and a great counselor to the women at Bedford Hills.

1991 - Ellen Yaroshesky, Esq. has responded to needs of battered women in court. She successfully defended one of the first cases of a battered defendant in Seattle, Washington.

The Church of the Heavenly Rest, whose help has provided funding and support for our program, development, and assistance with the children. They also run a support group for battered women.

1990 - Dr. Julie Blackman, PhD., author of Intimate Violence and a real support for us as we work with our clients. She is a social psychologist, an expert witness in court and offers a great deal of help. Leslie Crary and Sara Bennett, are with the Legal Aid Society Criminal Appeals Bureau and have helped us win appeals for our participants.

1989 - Family Violence Program at Bedford Hills, a self-help support group and counseling program for incarcerated women at the maximum security prison. It will take a long list to tell all the ways in which Michael Dowd, Esq., has helped battered women in the courts. He is the Director of Pace Law School's Battered Women's Justice Center and he has successfully defended a number of battered women defendants.

1988 - Holly Maguigan and the NYU Battered Women Defense Back-Up Center. It's name says it all. We have been able to call on them for back-up legal information, support and encouragement. Their third year law students work with lawyers on behalf of our clients. Luz Santana is an abused woman who received clemency from Governor Cuomo, and who now counsels women at Parkside Work Release Facility. She has also worked at Bedford Hills Prison.

Domestic Violence Hotline

English

1-800-942-6906

Spanish

1-800-942-6908

**SAVE THE DATE
MONDAY, FEBRUARY
27, 1995
6 TO 9 PM
THE MANHATTAN
PENTHOUSE
FIFTH AVE. AND 14 ST.
MARDI GRAS PARTY
STEPS AWARDS**

*For more information and
invitation please call
(212) 410-4200*

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Published by STEPS to End Family Violence
a family project of Edwin Gould Services for Children
Newsletter edited by Carolyn Read and Nina Dessart

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104 East 107 Street
New York, NY 10029

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NEW YORK, NY
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EXCITING NEWS

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AS WE GO TO PRESS, WE HAVE HEARD THE GOOD NEWS THAT GOVERNOR CELESTE OF OHIO HAS COMMUTED THE SENTENCES OF 25 BATTERED WOMEN DEFENDANTS IN PRISON IN OHIO. WE CONGRATULATE HIM ON HIS COURAGEOUS POSITION, AND HOPE THAT THE GOVERNORS OF ALL THE OTHER STATES WILL ALSO CONSIDER THE MANY BATTERED WOMEN IN PRISON.

THE BEST WISHES OF STAFF AND PARTICIPANTS OF STEPS TO END FAMILY VIOLENCE GO TO THESE 25 WOMEN AS THEY MAKE PREPARATIONS FOR THEIR RELEASE AND TRANSITION BACK TO FAMILY AND COMMUNITY.

WE CALL ON GOVERNOR MARIO CUOMO OF NEW YORK TO CONSIDER EXECUTIVE CLEMENCY FOR THE MANY BATTERED WOMEN IN PRISON IN NEW YORK STATE. WE ASK OUR READERS TO CONTACT THEIR GOVERNORS TO MAKE SIMILAR CONSIDERATIONS.

AGAIN, OUR THANKS TO GOVERNOR CELESTE!