

Shelters help victims break from the cycle of abuse, and the victims aren't only women

By Kathryn Almy
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Although violence against a person by a family member is a highly personal issue, it is clearly a widespread and frequently — hidden — crime.

Domestic violence was not really recognized as a crime until the 1970s.

At that time, official programs began to develop to protect and assist the victims.

DuPage County's Family Shelter Services a private, not-for-profit agency was formed in 1976 and opened its first shelter in 1980.

Today, according to the agency's executive director, Marilyn Detroy, there is more awareness of domestic violence.

"There's more effort to treat it as a crime than there used to be," she said.

In the spring of 1988, State's Attorney Jim Ryan put together a task force to develop a protocol on the crime, according to Jeff Kendall, head of the State's Attorney's Felony Department.

Part of the protocol was the institution of the new crime category of domestic battery, a misdemeanor, in 1990.

Statistics gathered since then show an increase in the reporting of domestic crimes.

An average of 261 calls per month were made from May 1989 to May 1991, the majority of which probably occurred in the second year.

From July to November 1991, an average of 374 calls per month were made.

Over 30 percent of calls result in an arrest.

When the police receive a report of domestic violence, they notify the agency immediately.

Detroy said they follow up on about 320 calls per month.

Victims may find out about the agency through social services, a physician or counselor referral, or by word-of-

mouth.

Women and children whose home situations are unsafe may seek free shelter. Family Shelter Services serves residents of DuPage County with 43 beds in three shelters located in Wheaton, Glen Ellyn and Naperville.

Shelter residents live communally in homes with other victims and are responsible for doing household chores such as meal planning, cooking and cleaning. The homes are staffed 24 hours a day.

Services in addition to shelter include counseling, court advocacy (such as assistance in obtaining an order of protection from the abuser), and children's individual and group programs.

Family Shelter Services runs 14 support groups throughout the county for both shelter and non-shelter clients and has a 24-hour crisis line.

Detroy said they provide service to 1,800 to 1,900 victims per year.

Women and children are not the only victims of domestic violence, men can also be victims. In this situation, the abuser is often an adult child.

Length of stay in a shelter ranges from a few days to six to eight weeks and depends on the goals of the woman, Detroy said.

Factors include the need for an order of protection and whether the woman will retain possession of her home.

The shelter does all it can to make life easier for mothers who have sought refuge.

If the shelter is not near a family's school, the shelter will arrange to send the children to another school.

The biggest problems faced by women who end up in a shelter are finding affordable child care while they work and affordable housing if they are not planning to return to their own homes.

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Although Family Shelter Services will not house men in its shelters, it does provide them services and will make other living arrangements.

"The vast majority domestic violence situations are female victims and male perpetrators," said Kendall.

Part of the State's Attorney's protocol includes a counseling service for abusers through the County Mental Health Board.

The program has a recidivism rate of 4 percent (4 percent of those who go through the counseling program go on to commit another crime).

The program looks successful, Kendall said, although it is too early to be sure. "To really have a good benchmark, look at it in five to seven years," he said.

There is further hope for progress in attending to the problem of domestic violence, Detroy said, and the American Medical Association is currently putting a great deal of emphasis on the issue.

This emphasis is evident in that Illinois hospitals are now mandated to develop protocols in domestic violence.

For information or assistance, Family Shelter Services can be reached at 469-5650.

This year, the Illinois Department of Public Aid has opened a special fund to pro-

vide assistance to victims of domestic violence.

Taxpayers can contribute to the Domestic Violence Shelter and Services Fund on their 1991 Illinois income tax return

by writing in the amount they wish to give.

The donation will come from a refund or increase the amount of payment.

Taxpayers also can support

another public aid fund on their tax returns.

This is the third year for the Homeless Assistance Fund which has raised more than \$500,000.