

SERVICES FOR ABUSED WOMEN

by Tonia Jurbin

One in three women is sexually assaulted before they reach the age 18. One in eight women in Surrey is abused by her parent. These are typical of the kind of statistics that one hears if they are in the business of counselling women who have lived in, or are living in, an abusive relationship. But really, no one working with abused women has time to sit down and sort through the statistics. "We are constantly frustrated by our lack of funding and by the need for our service," says Kathy Marsden of Women in Violence. "Our waiting lists are closed. This office has only enough funding for me to work here 11 hours a week, four hours of which is administration".

What the Women In Violence Centre and many others like it offer is short-term counselling for women who are currently in or have recently left an abusive relationship, or have experienced abuse from a stranger or relative. About 1/3 of their clients are still in abusive relationships. About the same number live in constant fear of having their children taken away from them by vindictive former partners who, in many cases, slander the women relentlessly.

The counselling sessions are free to women in need. Typically 10-12 sessions are offered; however, many women are not able to complete their short-term counselling, usually due to childcare difficulties, or being forbidden to go out by the partners they fear.

Many women in abusive relationships are isolated and feel worthless. The immediate goal of short-term counselling is to help the victim of abuse regain a sense of self-esteem. Other goals are to help the woman gain emotional confidence, address work issues, rediscover friendships and social networking, deal with intimacy, and deal with spiritual questions about their lives (though not necessarily through religion). "It's really amazing the wisdom some of these women demonstrate with their children," says Marsden. "I have learned so much from my clients." She estimates about 70% of the mothers she meets have wonderful, close and

loving relationships with their children. They have all found unique and sensitive ways of explaining their current situations to their children.

For more information about Women in Violence call (604)596-4321. The wait lists are very long, so those who can afford it may consider seeing a private counsellor. Sessions run \$45-\$75, depending on what the client can afford.

Many other excellent yet under-funded services are available for victims of abuse. Women Against Violence Against Womens (WAVAW) Rape Crisis Centre is a sexual assault centre that deals with the more immediate business of getting women and children out of harm's way. Some of their services include:

- 24 hour crisis lines in several languages, including American Sign Language
- short-term counselling
- support groups, including one for young women (12-20), and one for women of colour
- medical, police and legal information
- accompaniment to hospital, police and court
- transportation and childcare costs for appointments
- advocacy and referrals for services not provided by WAVAW
- assistance in completing criminal injuries compensation forms
- 3rd party reporting (for women who do not want to be identified but still wish to report abuse for the police data base on sex offenders)
- extensive volunteer training.

WAVAW also welcomes donations of office furniture, clothing for women and children, computers and toys. In fact, in their efforts to use all of their funding prudently, they also welcome donations of tea and coffee, paper towels and toilet paper. Please call Kam at (604)255-6228 for more information or to make arrangements for donations. 24 hour CRISIS LINE telephone numbers are (604) 255-6344 for voice and (604)254-6268 for TTY. Other

sources of funding for women's services include proceeds from the Thrift Store at Commercial Drive and Grant Street in East Vancouver.

The Workers Compensation Board (WCB) offers Criminal Injuries Compensation to anyone who has been a victim of assault since 1972. The victim must co-operate with the police in laying charges, and the victim is eligible for up to 24 counselling sessions, and compensation for loss of wages, damaged clothing, medical,

dental and ambulance services, false teeth, glasses and hearing aids. If the injury was inflicted in the workplace any time after June 1, 1995, the victim is also eligible for WCB benefits. For more information on Criminal Injury Compensation call (604)273-2266.

You can obtain information on many other government services in B.C. by consulting a copy of *The Red Book* which is available at the reference desk of most libraries.



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