

## **DAWN Program Report for 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2011**

### **Community Advocacy Program Update**

DAWN's community advocacy program and crisis line advocates continue to stay busy supporting survivors in South King County. We've seen a steady number of calls to our crisis line, and our support groups also continue to have a high volume of participation. This quarter, we had an inspiring support group moment.

#### **Support Group**

During support group last month we watched the documentary titled *Sin By Silence*. The film depicts the true story of a group of women who (with the leadership of one) started their own support group. What is really unique about these women is that they were all living in the California prison system. They had all experienced domestic violence. They were all forced into a situation of desperation where they had to protect themselves or risk further harm, injury, or even death. All of these women were charged for murdering their abusive partners. These victim/defendants rallied together and formed their own support system called Convicted Women Against Abuse (CWAA).

The CWAA support group decided to work with the system to make social change for survivors of DV. The point in time when most of these women were charged with their crimes there were no DV agencies, no shelters to go to, no advocates to call for safety planning assistance. The women of CWAA made a lot of headway in the DV Movement through thoughtful orchestration of letters to politicians, media, and court hearings. Fortunately, thanks to these women, many survivors don't have to experience what the women of CWAA had to.

After watching and discussing this film, the group decided to write letters to the remaining women who have not won their appeal. The group felt that they wanted to show their support and tell the women how the documentary had impacted their lives. It was nice to see the women working together as a team to construct their messages. A couple of weeks ago we were surprised to see that we had gotten two letters in return! The correspondences were filled with words of thanks and encouragement.

"So, my hats off to all of you too! Don't ever forget your worth as a woman okay! And, settle for nothing less! My heart, my thoughts, and my prayers are with you all! Today! And always!" CWAA members.

When we read these letters back to the group there seemed to be a feeling of camaraderie. Some of the women noted feeling less alone. Others mentioned the fact that they felt connection to something larger... perhaps a national community of DV survivors who are each making change in their own way, in their own time.

#### **Shelter Program client success story.**

Monika arrived at DAWN's House with 2 sons, aged 4 and 3, and 8 months pregnant. Monika had spent most of her childhood in a series of foster care homes before meeting her husband in their senior year of high school. They married at 18 and Monika said her husband immediately started becoming more controlling. Monika had to account for every moment of her day and every penny she spent, even though they were both working.

Monika's husband began tampering with her birth control within a year of their marriage and after the first child was born refused to allow her to go back on birth control, resulting in a quick second pregnancy.

Monika was able to seek out a new form of birth control without her husband knowing, but not being able to get to her doctor's appointment one month led to the 3<sup>rd</sup> pregnancy.

He also refused to let her go back to work and then when she took a part time job anyway, he harassed her so much at the workplace she ended up being let go.

Monika had not been allowed by her husband to attend more than 2 prenatal appointments in her 8 months of pregnancy and the abuse was escalating as the pregnancy progressed. Monika was feeling increasingly unable to parent effectively and was physically in pain on a daily basis.

Within 3 weeks of arriving at DAWN's House, Monika was receiving weekly prenatal care (where she found out she was expecting a girl), meeting with the Children's Advocate twice a week to learn new parenting skills, and attending 2 support groups per week specifically for domestic violence and trauma survivors.

In the last 3 weeks of Monika's stay, she completed work training, gained part-time work and secured preschool and daycare for her children. In her final week at DAWN, Monika gave birth to her daughter and was accepted into Transitional Housing that will allow her 18 months of stability for herself & her children.

