Battered Women's Shelter

Haven During A Storm

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Seeking out shelter in a storm is common sense, an instinct rooted in self-preservation. But not everyone survives. Some are victims. One hundred fifty-four women in Lafayette, who were victims of wife abuse last year, sought shelter from the storm of abuse. For the first time, they had somewhere to go. The Haven, a shelter for abused and battered women, operated by the Salvation Army since it opened a year ago, the number of women who have sought it in time of need is small when compared to the number of inquiries made in the same period of time. Six hundred twenty seven inquiries made by abused women who are still caught in the storm.

"We give them a place to go when they don't know where to go or to whom to turn," said Mrs. Major Sam Crowder, director of the shelter. Mrs. Crowder describes The Haven as a place to think removed from a traumatic situation. A woman can go to the shelter and no one knows she is there. Her stay is completely confidential. Members of the staff will not release the names of women staying at the shelter. The husband cannot reach the wife unless she wants to speak to him. All callers are screened.

"It's been a great asset to Lafayette and something that was needed and used, we're sorry to say," Mrs. Crowder remarked. The shelter offers the abused women some counseling by Mrs. Crowder, who is a registered social worker, and L. Beverly Horne, the "housemother" of the shelter. The women are usually referred to various agencies where they can get legal aid and further counseling. Most of the women who have used the shelter press charges, according to Mrs. Crowder.

"Some are able to go home and start again," she said. Others seek employment and set up their own homes on permanent or trial separation basis. "And some come back," she said. One woman came back three times. Different women have different reasons for remaining in a situation of abuse. For some, the reason is children.

"They'll put up with the abuse to keep a family unit together for the sake of the kids," Mrs. Crowder said, "but when they abuse the child that's the last straw."

A PLACE TO STAY— The Battered Women's Shelter, operated by the Salvation Army on Sixth Street, is a place to stay for abused women. Mrs. Major Sam Crowder, director of the shelter, sits in one of the bedrooms of The Haven. The six-room facility can accommodate 16 women and children. Opened a year ago, the shelter has been a place to stay for 134 abused Lafayette women and 146 children. (Staff photo by Lisa Frey.)

Mrs. Crowder and her husband, Major Sam Crowder, are the commanding officers of the local post with its headquarters on Sixth Street. Both Mrs. Crowder and Lt. Horne are ordained ministers.

Established on Jan. 1 of last year by the local advisory board of the Salvation Army, the Mayor's Commission on the Needs of Women and the Altrusa Club, the shelter has made some important changes. It is now limited to sheltering women from Lafayette Parish, unless the circumstances are extenuating.

"We're adequate for the parish but we can't handle more because of limited space and limited funding," Mrs. Crowder explained. The Haven is funded by the United Givers Fund, the Lafayette Parish Police Jury, the City of Lafayette and private donations. The shelter, which was furnished by various local groups and individuals, has six rooms and can lodge 16 women and children. According to Mrs. Crowder, approximately half of the women come with children. In a year, 140 children have come with their mothers to the shelter.

Another important change is the length of the stay. In the past, women were allowed to remain as long as they wanted. In one case, a woman stayed for two months. Now, unless there are unusual circumstances, the women are limited to staying for five days.

"We wouldn't force a woman out onto the street," the director said. By putting a limit on the time a woman can stay, Mrs. Crowder believes, that they seek counseling, legal or otherwise, more quickly.

In its year of operation, the shelter has also had some physical changes. For privacy and security reasons, a wall was built around the front of the building and a building was added to expand the 134 facilities for women. One bathroom was added, and the center has separate bathrooms, older children can be brought.

According to Mrs. Crowder, the shelter plans to add a child care room this year for the children in rainy weather. "Before," she said, "the children would be playing in the office which was distracting to business."

The Citizen's Committee of the Shelter has grown to include I. A. McBride, Lafayette Fire Department, Rosie Roy, Acadiana Mental Health Center, Mrs. Jessie Taylor, Mayor's Commission on the Needs of Women, Duncan Smith, a local attorney, Mrs. Ollie Jacobs and Major Nick Lane, Chief Deputy of the Sheriff's Department. Also on the advisory committee are Jack Martin, chairman of the Salvation Army's Advisory Board, John Fusseller, Lafayette Office of Family Security, Marjorie Currey, En Avant, Sarah Brabant, Mayor's Commission on the Needs of Women, Sister Joan Ridley, Acadiana Legal Service Corporation, and Paula Woodruff, assistant district attorney in charge of Criminal Non-Support Division.