Domestic violence: Taking action

(This is Part III in a series on domestic violence. "...There has never been anyone to call...") Letter from a battered wife.)

A new community based board, calling themselves Hope House is offering parish residents a means of helping abused women escape abusive situations through a “safe homes” volunteer program.

A “safe home” is a private home or apartment in the community where a victim and her children can stay for up to three nights while she receives counseling and examines her options. During her stay a volunteer will work closely with the victim and will help her look at her choices and work out a plan for her future. The three-night stay will provide a relief from the immediate battering situation and give time to think in a safe environment. It will also convey to the women that other people care about her.

Families and individuals will be recruited as safe hosts initially through a public meeting and will be screened and interviewed by the project coordinator. All the members of the family will meet together with the coordinator to discuss the mutual responsibilities, concerns and anticipated problems of the family and the project. Training sessions will be provided to teach volunteers how to deal effectively with the battering victim.

The method of using safe homes is as follows:

1. A battered woman calls for help through a crisis line or a social service agency.

2. An escort volunteer is sent to pick up the victim from a safe location. (Never from the victim’s home if the batterer is present."

3. The victim is then taken to a safe home, (or if she needs medical attention she is taken to a medical facility.) Once in the home she is “processed” (signs release forms, etc.)

4. A volunteer meets with her the next day or later the same day to discuss her legal, counseling and shelter options.

5. If, after three days, she has no plan worked out she can be transferred to an established shelter in Houma, Lafayette, or Baton Rouge where support and counseling will continue.

Volunteers are needed at this time for:

1. Safe home volunteers—providing emergency shelter for battering victims and their children for a maximum of three nights with meals and essentials provided.

2. Escort volunteers—providing transportation to a safe home for a victim and her family.

3. Advocate volunteers—helping a victim think through her choices, exploring the available legal, counseling, economic options and working with her accompanying feelings of helplessness, isolation and ambivalence. Also assisting in referrals to long-term services.

4. Community outreach, educational services, recruitment of volunteers and presentations to community groups, churches, professional and social service agencies.

If you want to find out more about battered women or want to become a volunteer attend the public meeting in your area. Meetings will be held January 31st, Monday, 7 p.m. at the Iberia St. Library in Franklin and February 1st, Tuesday 7 p.m. at the Morgan City Courthouse.

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