

'Womenspace' helps clients gain control

By DAWN GARCIA
Of the Emerald

Linda had been home only a few minutes when she heard the front door slam. She hadn't started dinner because her biology lab had run late, and something in her stomach quivered.

Mike stepped into the kitchen, expecting to smell dinner. This was the last straw in a trying day, and his self-restraint snapped.

"What kind of house is this to come home to," he yelled. Mike became more enraged as he saw his two small children drawing away from him in fear.

"This isn't even a home!" he shouted, grabbing and shaking Linda.

For the third time that week, Mike slapped Linda hard and threw her against the kitchen wall.

A 1979 government study on home violence found that 50 percent of American wives are victims of domestic physical abuse, and 10 percent of all women are regularly beaten by their husbands or partners.

For four years, local women trapped in violent home lives have had a peaceful haven to go to for help — Womenspace, a Eugene organization for battered women.

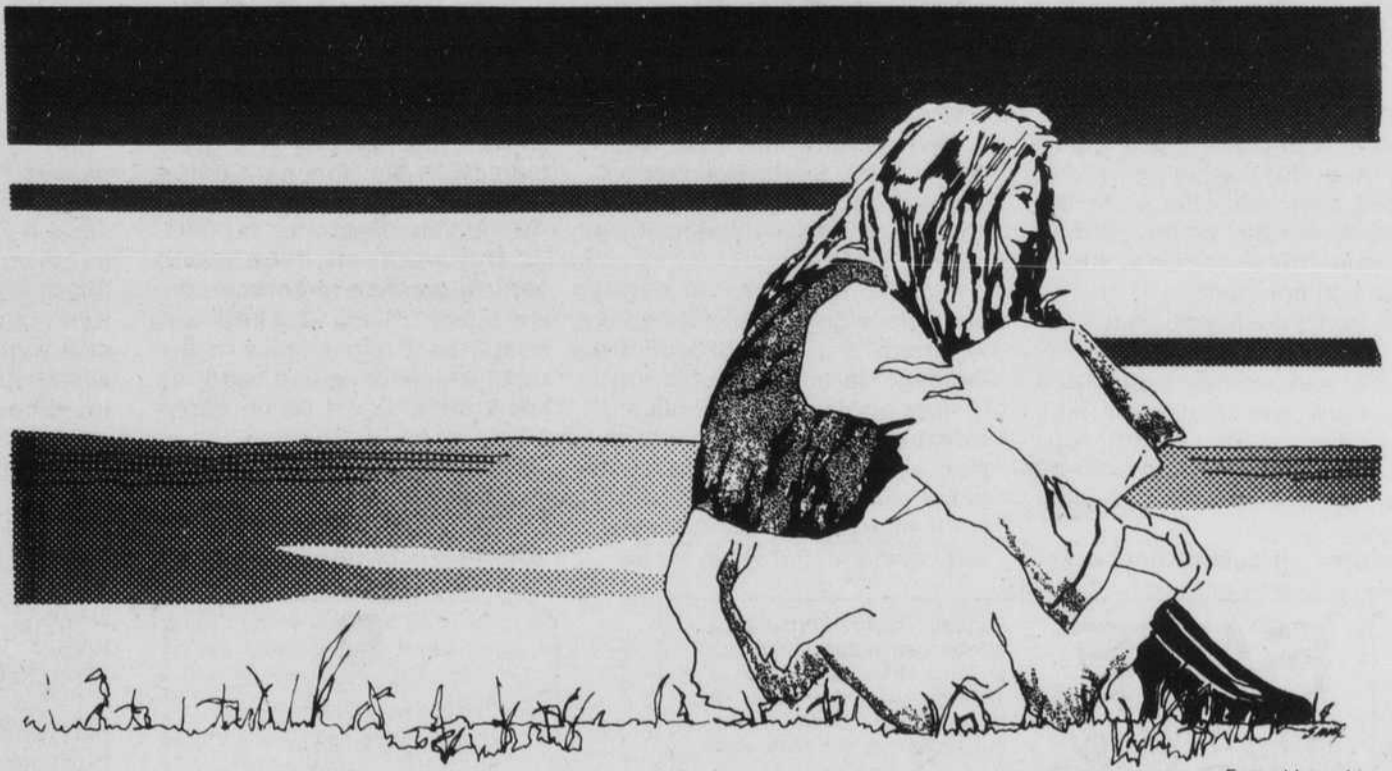
"Our overall goal is to assist women in gaining control over their lives and to provide them with options," says Marleen Lasher, program coordinator for Womenspace.

Started in 1977 by a group of three women, Womenspace has grown into a non-profit service for the community, with four paid and 40 volunteer workers providing shelter and services for abused women and their children.

"We've gone from being sort of revolutionary to being a real part of the community," says Lois McClellan, a Womenspace counselor and one of the organization's founders.

The seriousness of domestic violence and the importance of Womenspace to the community becomes evident through recent statistics, Lasher says. National studies show that one out of every five police-officer deaths occur when intervening in a domestic-violence episode, and one-fourth of all murders occur within families — half of those between spouses.

Womenspace's services range from information about referral sources and a 24-hour crisis line to group counseling and a safe place to stay. In 1980, it



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received more than 1,000 crisis calls and housed 491 women and children in a "closed" shelter.

A "closed" shelter means the location is confidential to protect the people staying there, Lasher says.

"It's very important for women coming to Womenspace to know that he (her abuser) can't find her," Lasher stresses.

Fear that their husbands will find them if they leave is only one reason why many women put up with physical violence as long as they do, Lasher says. Feelings of guilt, failure and inferiority are instilled in women by their partners to maintain the sense that it is the women who are at fault in the abuse situations.

"It's a very difficult thing for a woman to decide to leave," Lasher says.

When women do make the decision to seek outside help, it is often after reaching a point of desperation when they see the emotional and physical impact the abuse is making on their children and themselves, Lasher explains.

The woman realizes the situation is affecting her children's sense of values when "violence becomes a

solution to conflicts," Lasher says.

University psychology Prof. Linda Terry says the use of violence to solve problems is "a disorder."

"It's a combination of the men having learned to deal with women in an abusive way and not having social skills to deal with it any other way," Terry says.

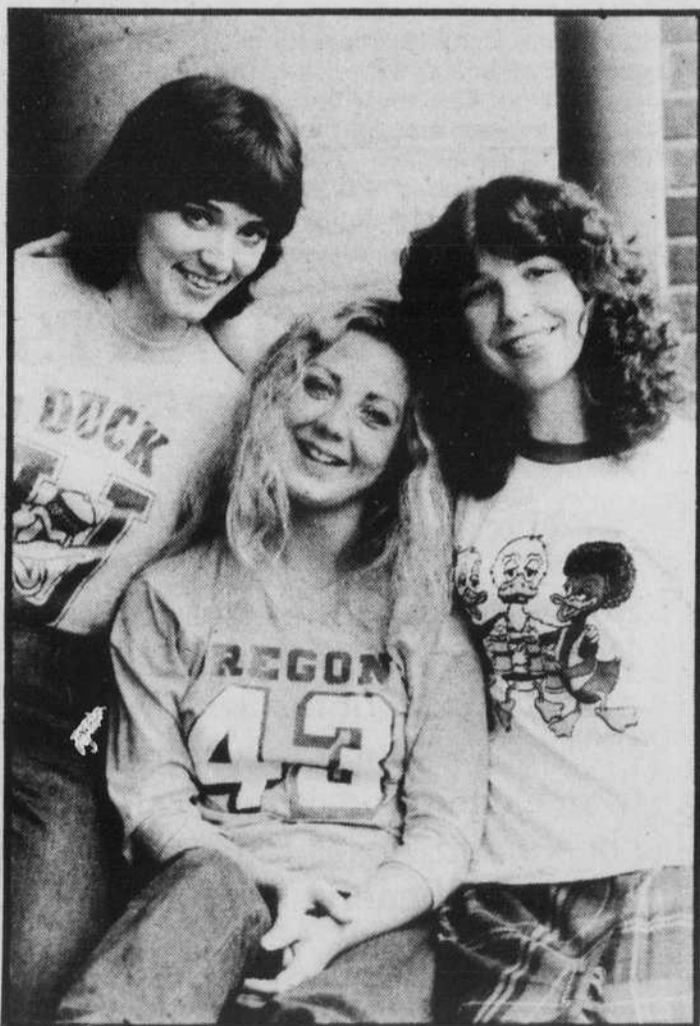
Womenspace offers a helping hand to men who are abusers through an anger control group. The group is headed by a man and woman counseling team that aids men in changing their violent behavior, Lasher says.

Counseling and a wide variety of other services are offered, but the women at the shelter find that "one of the biggest support systems is the abused women supporting each other," Lasher says.

"It comes home to a woman that she's not alone."

The shelter is open to women of all ages and backgrounds, but Lasher says the majority of women who come to Womenspace are between 20 and 30 years old and some are students.

For information on upcoming fund-raising activities including a swimming "lap-a-thon," call Womenspace at 485-6513.



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