

# Womenspace offers shelter, support for battered women and their children

By Frale de Guzman  
Emerald Reporter

Escape. For battered women and their children trapped in an unending cycle of violence in the home, freedom is not an alternative. It's a choice between life and death.

For these women and children who have nowhere else to run, Womenspace is there. This non-profit organization, which has been serving Lane County since 1977, has sheltered more than 500 physically and emotionally abused women and children. In addition, the shelter has responded to 5,516 calls on the crisis line, which operates 24 hours a day.

Volunteer workers offer social service assistance, crisis counseling and emotional encouragement to battered women. Through these programs, workers attempt to re-instill a feeling of self-confidence and self-worth to these women and their children, said Alissa Joerger, volunteer coordinator of Womenspace.

"A woman in an abusive relationship who reveals her feelings often gets hit," Joerger said. "So what a lot of abused women do is turn off their feelings or stuff them. It's only after they've been out of a situation long enough that they become angry or cry."

However, battered women have to feel safe before these feelings can be expressed and Womenspace attempts to reinforce this

sense of safety by giving these women "time and space to make personal decisions," she added.

Battered women who first come to the shelter are "emotionally numb," Joerger said. Although many of these women are extremely competent, running away from their spouses places them in a risky position and those who decide to return to their husbands often will be abused again, she said.

However, many battered women still choose to return home.

"It's hard to be alone and single parent," said Joerger. "It's lonely and it's scary. Lots of times the partner will make a token gesture of change and will catch the woman at a lonely moment, and she'll go back to him thinking things have changed. But things don't change and she'll get hit again."

Because many women do return to their spouses, intervention plays a very important role in many of the programs offered by Womenspace.

"We want to reach people before things get so bad that all we can do is to pick up the pieces that remain after the relationship," said Joerger.

For many volunteers, volunteering time at Womenspace gives them a deeper awareness of the problems that face abused women.

"I was the first one to blame the victim," said volunteer trainee Judi Noel, a resident of Junction City. However she add-

ed, "I've learned a lot about the patterns of abuse and can understand why (battered) women do not get themselves out of their home situations."

Unfortunately, many of the women who take refuge in the shelter already are established victims of abuse.

"By the time we see women, things have gotten so bad that there's not a real good chance that the relationship will heal," Joerger said.

In addition to its counseling services, Womenspace also offers additional social services. They include 24-hour emergency transportation, counseling, women's support groups, legal and financial advocacy, play therapy for children, and men's anger management.

Programs like the children's program often attract volunteer workers to Womenspace. These volunteers undergo a 14-hour orientation meeting, which is followed by individual training sessions.

The training sessions may consist of six to 15 additional hours of training time. However, the need to help often outweighs these slight inconveniences.

"The shelter serves a real need in the community and I want to be a part of it," said Felise Padron, volunteer trainee and sophomore criminal justice major at Lane Community College. "I am more conscious of what battered women go through. The training sessions sensitizes you to these women's needs and to the reasons why many of them return to their husbands."

## Woman remembers life as an abused wife

By Shelly Kehm  
Emerald Contributor

"It was like being lost in a tunnel without a light at the end. I wasn't even aware the way we were living wasn't normal because I had nothing to compare it to," remembered Mary Beth Barkley, whose husband beat her for 18 years before she escaped to Eugene, changed her name and began a new life.

Barkley didn't do all this on her own, however. She had help from Womenspace, a Lane County shelter for women and children who are victims of domestic abuse and violence.

Now an ambitious college student and loving mother, Barkley recalled a very different past:

"It was a dark August night when my daughter and I walked up the street hand in hand, constantly looking over our shoulders. We each carried a suitcase, and our hearts were full of hope and fear for an uncertain future."

In 1980, Barkley was living in a state of hopelessness and abuse. Her husband threatened to kill her if she ever left him, and he packed a gun to reinforce this promise.

"I never dreamed of a way out," she said, although she and her daughter tried more than once to escape. But her husband always caught up with them.

Once after leaving him, she entrusted her new address with her pastor. Her determined husband convinced the pastor that he was a changed man, however.

Her husband found the two and brought them back to Tacoma, Wash., where they were residing at the time. At this point, Barkley divorced him. She remembered thinking at the time the legal break would hopefully keep him away, keep him from further harming her mentally and physically.

Barkley said her husband pleaded for her forgiveness, claiming that he had changed

for the better. She was so physically and mentally exhausted and insecure, she collapsed into the marriage once again.

Within three days of their remarriage, her "new" husband was once more swearing he would kill her if she ever tried to escape again, Barkley said.

"I was a part of the 'battered women syndrome,'" she said. "It's not easy to leave once you're in it. A battered woman is a battered woman. It's not just what she is, it is her. It's her life. It's who she is."

Barkley decided it was time to put an end to the syndrome when her husband beat her in their own front yard, knocking her down to the grass and injuring both her back and her neck.

That was the straw that luckily broke the camel's back and not her own, she said.

Barkley contacted Womenspace, who arranged for her "big escape." On that night, she and her daughter knew little about who would help and where they would go.

They met Womenspace representatives near a 7-11 store and were driven to a bus station.

Approaching the station they caught a glimpse of her husband driving around and looking for them. The fear was intense, she said.

Aided by the bus drivers and Womenspace representatives, Barkley and her daughter sneaked onto one bus while her husband searched with his gun.

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