Across the country, there are around 2,000 non-profit organizations whose mission it is to provide support and services to victims of domestic and sexual violence. These organizations are dedicated to providing crucial services. Working on shoestring budgets, a legion of incredibly dedicated individuals have the privilege of meeting people who are struggling at one of the darkest hours of their lives. These advocates, volunteers, counselors, community educators and directors offer unconditional support, non-judgmental solace, access to safety and services and hope for a better future. These organizations are an extension of the communities in which they are located where concerned citizens donate goods and funds to ensure that victims and survivors have somewhere to turn.

There are fifteen Member Programs of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. Twenty-four hours per day, 356 days per year, the staff and volunteers of these fifteen organizations ensure that any Vermonter who is a victim of domestic or sexual violence —
woman, child, or man, regardless of their sexual orientation, disability, race, ethnicity, or ability to speak English — has immediate access to help. This issue of the Network News details the breadth of services available to victims through the Vermont Network’s Member Programs. As you read about the nuts and bolts of the services available, I urge you to look between the lines to see the heart and soul of those who dedicate themselves to making our communities better places in which to live by helping one victim at a time.

Services for Survivors

The Member Programs (Programs) of the Vermont Network (Network) provide a wide range of free, confidential services to victims and survivors and their children. While Programs implement their services in slightly different ways, all are guided by the empowerment model; all share a conviction that the advocate’s role is to support survivors in making their own decisions, identifying their own priorities, and taking back their lives.

• HOTLINE:
  Every Member Program has a 24-hour crisis hotline, which serves as the point of entry for most people who access the Programs and is the backbone of the Programs’ services. Hotlines are staffed with an elaborate patchwork of dedicated staff and volunteers.

• HOSPITAL ADVOCACY:
  Programs offer hospital advocacy, which is most often accessed by survivors of sexual assault. Programs have volunteer or staff advocates on call 24-hours a day to go to the hospital when the emergency room calls on behalf of a survivor. Advocates are able to give survivors their full attention, provide emotional support throughout the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner’s forensic exam, and keep confidential any information a victim chooses to share.

• SOCIAL SERVICE ADVOCACY:
  All Programs provide social services advocacy to support survivors in their interactions with the Agency of Human Services, Social Security, Public Housing Authorities, and other social service agencies. Programs adhere to strict confidentiality policies, and make contacts on survivors’ behalf only at their requests.

• HOUSING & SHELTER:
  Due to the severe shortage of affordable housing in Vermont, almost all Programs provide housing advocacy. Advocates provide survivors with information about subsidized housing in their communities and help survivors connect with landlords and other resources to support their search for affordable housing.

  When a victim of domestic violence thinks about leaving and considers her options, she may realize she has nowhere safe to go. Safe, adequate emergency shelter is among the most basic necessities for someone leaving an abusive relationship. The 10 Program shelters provide more than just a bed. Shelter staff can help a woman identify and access community resources, and help her to develop a plan for obtaining long-term housing. She may browse the shelter book or video collections to learn more about
A woman is standing at a phone booth at 9 pm on Sunday. Her two kids are in the car and she can’t go home because her husband punched the wall and threatened to take the kids and disappear. She calls the local domestic violence hotline and speaks with an advocate, who helps her think through her options: is it safe for her to be out on the street at the pay phone? Is there somewhere safer where she could go, to talk? Does she have any money, or anywhere to stay? Does she need police or medical attention? The advocate shares information about other options: Does she know about the shelter? Is she aware that she can request emergency assistance from Economic Services? Does she understand how to apply for a protection order? Throughout the conversation, the advocate listens to and supports the caller, reassuring her that her partner’s violence is not her fault, and providing informal domestic violence education.

A 8th grade girl is sitting at a round table in the guidance office with other girls from her grade and a youth advocate from a local Member Program. They meet every week during lunch, away from the loud cafeteria to talk about girl stuff. Today, she finally talks about feeling pressure to send a revealing photo of herself to her boyfriend’s cell phone. She is worried that if she doesn’t, he will break up with her. It has taken her weeks to open up about this because she felt stupid about having reservations. The advocate and her classmates listen and help her think through her dilemma without making her feel judged.

day, accompanying victims to the final hearing, and helping to ensure orders are served and enforced. Many Program advocates are also able to support victims/survivors in addressing a variety of legal issues, including divorce, custody, parent-child contact, and immigration matters.

• COURT & LEGAL ADVOCACY:

All Member Programs offer court and legal advocacy, although the specific services available in each county vary from Program to Program. Trained peer advocates can support survivors in making informed decisions about legal concerns, provide information about what to expect in civil and criminal court, and/or accompany survivors to court. Most advocates are able to support victims throughout the entire protection order process, including assisting with completing and filing protection order paperwork 24-hours/day, accompanying victims to the final hearing, and helping to ensure orders are served and enforced. Many Program advocates are also able to support victims/survivors in addressing a variety of legal issues, including divorce, custody, parent-child contact, and immigration matters.

• YOUTH ADVOCACY:

There is a great diversity in the myriad ways Member Programs serve youth exposed to domestic violence, victims of child sexual abuse, and teens dealing with dating and sexual violence. Child advocates provide one-on-one support and facilitate support groups, which are usually art/activity-based in safe and creative environments. Children can receive nurturance on a variety of levels and on a range of issues including feelings expression, healthy communication, non violence, self esteem, domestic violence, sexual abuse, safety planning and identifying support systems.

Many Programs run groups for adolescents and teens at local schools and in the community. Some examples include groups for girls who have survived dating or sexual violence, middle school-aged boys learning about respect, and middle school-aged girls who are dealing with body image issues. These groups work to challenge victim-blaming messages and confront cultural beliefs that support abusive behaviors. Child advocates also provide one-on-one emotional support to youth at shelter and court.

• INDIVIDUAL & GROUP SUPPORT:

All Member Programs periodically run confidential support groups for survivors. Some Programs also provide child care for participants during group.

Programs provide varying forms of individual, face-to-face emotional support services. Whether at the hospital, in shelter, at court or in other settings, advocates listen, validate, provide information and referrals, and empower survivors to make their own choices.
Evolutions in Advocacy

BY CHANI WATERHOUSE
MEMBER PROGRAM SUPPORT COORDINATOR

In 2010, we close out the fourth decade of organized advocacy and movement-building against sexual and domestic violence. 2011 will mark the 40th anniversary of the first known “Speak Out” against rape, the formation of the first rape crisis centers in San Francisco and Washington D.C., and the opening of the first shelter for battered women in England.

In Vermont, we are fortunate that much has stayed the same in how we do advocacy with survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Advocates with years of experience and a deep font of knowledge and skills still see themselves as peers whose role is to listen, believe and empower, and provide support for goals survivors prioritize. Whereas approaches to collaboration and institutional change have become more sophisticated and strategic, advocates still see themselves as part of a movement to create cultural transformation.

While many advocates strive to honor foremothers in the movement, and to be guided by their wisdom, many VT advocates and Member Programs are at the same time responding to community needs with creative and dynamic approaches – sometimes creating things completely new, sometimes re-calibrating time-honored practices to ensure they achieve goals more effectively.

Emergency Shelter for Survivors of Sexual Violence

The Sexual Assault Crisis Team opened its shelter in 2002, one of the first of its kind anywhere in the U.S. SACT’s director Bobbi Gagne says they saw a need for a different sort of shelter, one that would cater to the specific needs of survivors of sexual violence and their families. Eight years later, many female survivors have spent time in SACT’s shelter, but the program has also developed a specialization in working with survivors who are male and/or transgender people.

Gagne describes how SACT’s shelter is set up somewhat differently than many domestic violence shelters, providing high levels of privacy in bedrooms and bathrooms, and with space for whole families to stay if they need to come from out of town to support a family member after an assault or during a criminal proceeding. The space is set up to be safer for people who may self-harm. The length of stay is flexible; some survivors may choose to spend a few hours regrouping in the shelter after a sexual assault exam at the hospital, some will spend a few days getting extra support from advocates, while others may need much longer stays, as in the case of someone relocating as a result of sexual violence by a partner.

Culturally-Specific Advocacy

Vermont is home to three programs providing culturally-specific advocacy. Deaf Vermonters Advocacy Services (DVAS) offers advocacy with deaf and hard-of-hearing people who have experienced violence or abuse. Safespace at RU12 works with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQQ) people who have experienced domestic or sexual violence or hate crimes. Most recently, the Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV) was funded for its community-based work with individuals who have experienced violence or abuse.

These programs are part of a national trend attempting to break down the cultural and linguistic barriers which may prevent some survivors from accessing “traditional” domestic or sexual violence advocacy.

Bol Gai, of AALV, explained that “When somebody is from the same community, it helps in solving the problem.” Gai explained that some of the people they work with, who are concerned about abuse by a spouse, prefer to bring issues to community elders or to an AALV worker, rather than “exposing their problems” to advocates from outside the community.

Keri Darling, DVAS Director, and Ann Atkins, Director of Safespace, echo the idea that some Deaf or LGBTQQ survivors welcome the opportunity to work with an advocate who brings knowledge of issues that are specific to being Deaf or LGBTQQ.

Co-Advocacy

There are culturally-specific and “traditional” advocacy programs developing strategies for working together to better support individual survivors. The different programs may have different and complementary assets – for example, DVAS may be able to provide culturally and linguistically relevant advocacy with a Deaf survivor who uses ASL (American Sign Language), while a “traditional” local domestic/sexual violence program may offer an emergency shelter or be better able to provide in-person advocacy and knowledge of local resources.

Rather than simply making a referral to another advocacy
program, some programs have begun to engage in what can be a complex collaboration, pooling complementary assets to respond to different individual needs.

Advocacy Beyond Leaving
A commitment to responding to and being directed by a survivor’s priorities has long been a central principle for domestic and sexual violence advocates. For many individuals being abused by a partner, leaving the relationship may not be an option, now or even in the future, much less a priority.

At the same time, some of the resources we have worked hardest to develop and maintain (shelter, protection orders and criminal prosecution) are primarily relevant for women who are attempting to leave.

The idea of providing advocacy with domestic violence survivors who have chosen to stay is really nothing new – many advocates have always worked to embody the principles of survivor-defined advocacy. However, renewing our collective commitment to all survivors can shift approaches in individual and institutional advocacy.

At the institutional level, a commitment to this type of advocacy has led Member Programs and the Network Office to engage in less traditional types of advocacy and technical assistance. For example, the Network Office and some local Programs have become involved with “healthy relationship”/“healthy marriage” programs, and Family Group Decision-Making and Family Group Conferencing processes through DCF (the Department for Children and Families). The goal of such collaborations is to ensure that violence awareness is woven through practices and programs which target couples or whole families.

Increasing Access to Shelter by Reducing Rules
Over the last several years, many of Vermont’s domestic violence shelters have worked to dramatically reduce the number and type of “house rules” they impose. Despite shelter advocates’ deep commitments to survivor-defined advocacy, many Member Programs found that their shelter house rules seemed to multiply over the years, as staff attempted to respond to difficult situations that arose.

Shelters have worked to undo rule-focused practices out of a recognition that rules, restrictions and requirements are often incongruent with organizational values, and often have a disproportionately negative impact on some groups. In particular, people with mental health challenges, people with developmental disabilities, and people from some cultural backgrounds may experience significant barriers to being in compliance with some shelter rules. In short, keeping shelter rules to a bare minimum can make shelters more accessible, more culturally responsive, and more welcoming and empowering.

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DIVAS
A Program for Incarcerated Women

BY HEATHER HOLTER, COORDINATOR OF DIVAS AND VT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COUNCIL, AND LIESE BROWN, LEGAL PROJECTS SPECIALIST

In recent decades, the number of women under the supervision of the criminal justice system in the U.S. has increased at a rate nearly double the rate for men. In Vermont, the number of females in prison has increased 5.4 times and the number of women on probation has tripled over the past decade. Studies have found that 80% to 90% of incarcerated women have experienced violence. Strong evidence demonstrates that women’s experiences of violence can create pathways to incarceration in a number of ways. Some incarcerated victims are arrested for crimes directly linked to the abuse they have experienced, such as those coerced by their abusive partner, often through threat of further violence, to commit a crime. Some women are incarcerated for assaulting their partners in response to the violence they have experienced. For others, their experiences of violence created more indirect pathways to prison, such as engaging in financial crimes to mediate their partner’s economic abuse. For many, the untreated trauma of their experiences may lead to substance abuse, which is cited as the primary reason for the rise in incarceration among women. Women’s own experiences of violence do not override their personal responsibility for their crimes, however, they do demonstrate a heightened need for specialized advocacy for these victims/survivors.

Creating DIVAS
To begin to address this issue in Vermont, the Network... continued on page 6
**DIVAs**

*continued from page 5*

collaborated with Jill Evans, the Director of Women and Family Services with the Department of Corrections, to create the Discussing Intimate Partner Violence and Accessing Support (DIVAS) program. Since 2003, the DIVAS program has allowed incarcerated survivors to connect directly with advocates from the Member Programs, primarily through educational support groups. The project has been largely funded through the support of the Department of Corrections.

DIVAS creates a space for reflection, offering incarcerated women an opportunity to explore and understand the impacts sexual violence and intimate partner violence have had on their lives. Women examine how the effects of trauma and abuse may have contributed to choices that led to criminal behavior and eventual incarceration.

**Where We Are Now**

Vermont women are currently incarcerated at the Northwest State Correctional Facility (NWSCF) in St. Albans and the Tapestry Program in Brattleboro. At NWSCF, the largest of the two facilities, DIVAS consists of three main components: orientation, support group, and advocacy. The DIVAS orientation, one of several orientations women are required to attend, provides participants with information about domestic and sexual violence and community resources. For many, it is the first time they have been able to talk to other women about these issues and begin to understand their experiences through the lens of power and control. Educational support groups, offered on an ongoing basis throughout the year, allow participants to go more deeply into a variety of topics, including healing from trauma; establishing healthy boundaries; and exploring their use of violence against their partners, family members, and others. In 2009, DIVAS was able to expand services at NWSCF to address an unmet need: individual advocacy and re-entry planning. A new Verizon Foundation grant enables Liz Conforti, an advocate from Voices Against Violence, to work one-on-one with women to support them in developing strategies for safety and independence upon community re-entry, transforming unhelpful coping techniques, and establishing supports and connections to services outside the facility, including the Network’s Member Programs.

A smaller number of women are incarcerated at the Tapestry program, a facility in southern Vermont which allows women to begin long-term residential substance abuse treatment up to a year before the end of their minimum sentence. The Women’s Crisis Center (WCC) provides two to three eight-week group series at the facility each year, and explores such topics as the root causes of violence against women, the disproportionate criminalization of women within the criminal justice system, and the impact of media on teenage girls. Because the women incarcerated at Tapestry have a less-restrictive status, WCC advocates were also able to take them to a film festival in their community, where they watched and then discussed a movie about a young woman’s experiences of violence. Many women connect with WCC advocates outside of group to safety plan around abusive relationships that still concern them, or where the batterer is attempting to exert power and control over them even while they are incarcerated.

**Lessons Learned**

DIVAS has evolved significantly over the past seven years—and we have learned valuable lessons—most of which come down to a re-connection with the foundation of effective advocacy. One important lesson we’ve learned is that, while women who are/were incarcerated share many of the same advocacy needs as women who were not, they also face additional barriers to safety and autonomy because of their involvement in the criminal justice system. According to the National Clearinghouse on the Defense of Battered Women, “when battered women are arrested, they often face increased risks and dangers…Both the woman and her batterer know that her arrest usually decreases her options and increases his power over her.” Even though a survivor is incarcerated, she may not be safe, and as incarcerated survivors re-enter the community, they are often returning to an unsafe environment.

Advocates know that great transformation and healing is possible when women tell their stories. When incarcerated women are able to share their stories and listen to the stories of other women who have survived similar abuse, neglect, and exploitation, an opportunity for healing is created. The goal of DIVAS is to offer incarcerated survivors support, information, and a context within which they may begin to examine their own journeys, their own stories, their own experiences, and the choices that lay ahead of them.

As Liz Conforti, DIVAS advocate from Voices Against Violence at NWSCF, often reminds women in her group: “We are all worth so much more than our worst mistake.”

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2. Vermont Department of Corrections, Statistics 2005
3. Gender-Responsive Strategies for Women Offenders, U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute for Corrections, May 2005
4. Fondacara, K 1998 in Vermont Department of Correction, facts and figures, 2006
Economic survival in today’s economy is a challenge for many. Survivors of domestic and sexual violence experience particular financial stressors. Network Member Programs have recognized this need and have acquired the skill sets to assist survivors in overcoming barriers to economic well-being.

Survivors of domestic violence often experience the stress, isolation and devastating impact of economic abuse. Abusive partners can either prevent their partner from working, or insist that their partner work. They can control the family’s income and assets, limiting their partner’s access to bank accounts, credit cards, cash, or transportation. Abusive partners can use their partners’ name to gain credit, damaging their partner’s credit score and limiting future access to credit and financial independence. The abusive partner can use the victim's name to enter into leases and utility agreements which if left unpaid, create barriers for her to secure safe housing if she decides to leave.

Likewise, some survivors of sexual violence experience such trauma and violation that financial independence and economic stability become difficult and sometimes impossible to maintain or achieve. For a survivor of rape, this may mean the inability to resume work or continue with schooling. Survivors of sexual violence may need time to heal from both the physical and emotional impact of sexual assault, a need that may have a negative impact on their employment situation.

Specialized assistance can be found within the Member Programs of the Vermont Network. The advocates who work to help victims and survivors provide resources and referrals related to housing, child care, economic assistance, nutritional needs, job training and skill building. Economic advocacy at the Member Programs may include support for a victim/survivor applying for benefits to help pay the cost for housing; it may be assisting the victim/survivor with locating transportation options, so that she can get to and from her workplace. This advocacy may also include longer-term economic support such as assisting a victim/survivor in obtaining, repairing and building her credit score by connecting with local community partners, banks and credit unions. Program advocates have a continually expanding breadth of skills and knowledge about community resources and financial assistance. These skills enable them to successfully assist victims/survivors of domestic and sexual violence with the myriad of economic challenges they experience.

Challenging Times at the Vermont Legislature

The legislature is considering several major initiatives this year that will have tremendous impact on survivors of domestic and sexual violence. As we go to press, there are proposals under discussion to enact sweeping changes to the structure of the court system and the entire agency of human services, including significant changes to the department of corrections.

Smaller bills are also under consideration: S.272 will create a Human Trafficking Task Force to analyze the issue of trafficking in Vermont and make recommendations to the legislature about necessary services and statutes; and S.218 makes changes to the state’s voyeurism (also known as “peeping tom”) statute to make it more easily enforceable by investigators and prosecutors.

New at the Network Office: Michele Olvera

I am Michele Olvera, the new Training and Technical Assistance Specialist since January 5, this year. I am so pleased to be a part of the Network and to have received such a warm welcome.

My background includes domestic violence and sexual violence direct service work, public policy advocacy and litigation on behalf of victims. I directed a domestic violence litigation project at Legal Services of New Jersey where we represented survivors, and worked at the Battered Women’s Justice Project’s technical assistance center for civil litigation at the Pennsylvania Coalition against Domestic Violence. In Oregon, where I went to law school, I worked at the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, and lobbied for the Women’s Rights Coalition.
Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

P.O. Box 405
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Vermont Network Member Programs

Addison County & town of Rochester
WomenSafe
P.O. Box 67, Middlebury, VT 05753
Hotline: (802) 388.4205 or 1.800.388.4205

Bennington County
PAVE*
P.O. Box 227, Bennington, VT 05201
Hotline: (802) 442.2111

Caledonia, Orleans & Essex Counties
The Advocacy Program at Umbrella*
1222 Main St. #301, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819
Hotline: (802) 748.8645

The Advocacy Program at Umbrella (Satellite Office)
93 E. Main Street #1, Newport, VT 05855
Hotline: (802) 334.0148

Caledonia County (Hardwick area)
AWARE
P.O. Box 307, Hardwick, VT 05843
Hotline: (802) 472.6463

Chittenden County
Women’s Rape Crisis Center
P.O. Box 92, Burlington, VT 05402
Hotline: (802) 863.1236

Women Helping Battered Women*
P.O. Box 1535, Burlington, VT 05402
Hotline: (802) 658.1996 (also TTY#)

Franklin & Grand Isle Counties
Voices Against Violence*
P.O. Box 72, St. Albans, VT 05478
Hotline: (802) 524.6575

Lamoille County
Clarina Howard Nichols Center*
P.O. Box 517, Morrisville, VT 05661
Hotline: (802) 888.5256

Orange & NE Windsor Counties
Safeline
P.O. Box 368, Chelsea, VT 05038
Hotline: 1.800.639.7233

Rutland County
Rutland County Women’s NW & Shelter*
P.O. Box 313, Rutland, VT 05701
Hotline: (802) 775.3232

Washington County
Battered Women’s Services & Shelter*
P.O. Box 652, Barre, VT 05641
Hotline: 1.877.543.9498

Sexual Assault Crisis Team*
4 Cottage Street, Barre, VT 05641
Hotline: (802) 479.5577

Windham County
Women’s Crisis Center*
P.O. Box 933, Brattleboro, VT 05302
Hotline: (802) 254.6954 or 1.800.773.0689

Windsor County (NE)
WISE*
38 Bank Street, Lebanon, NH 03766
Hotline: (603) 448.5525 or 1.866.348.WISE

Windsor County (southern parts)
New Beginnings
23 Pleasant St., Springfield, VT 05156
Hotline: (802) 885.2050 or (802) 674.6700

Statewide Hotlines:
Domestic Violence: 1-800-228-7395
Sexual Violence: 1-800-489-7273

* Indicates Shelter

This publication is available in alternate format.