



**Message from Executive Director Donna J. Byrne
February 2007**

Love: Take It Back

Wherever you fall on the Valentine's Day spectrum, from those who believe it's a thinly-veiled greeting card company collusion to those who can't get enough heart-shaped boxes of chocolates or sugary "conversations" hearts emblazed with "LUV" or "HUGS" and the like, 'tis the season to think about love. This time of year it's difficult to avoid not having "love" cross your mind at least once. Even if you've steered clear of the television and radio commercials, I think the Valentine's displays went up in stores before the tree ornaments and Hanukah menorahs even made it to the 75-percent off bins.

While February might make a case for being National Love Awareness Month, at A Woman's Place (AWP) our work throughout the year inevitably seems to draw us back into the idea of what love is...and what it isn't. Part of the insidious nature of domestic violence is how it co-opts love, takes what Sophocles called the one word that "frees us of all the weight and pain of life" and twists it into something painful, violent, and dangerous.

An important part of ending domestic violence is education. Part of that education is to help others identify, recognize, and understand domestic violence. Learn about its prevalence and its tactics, including physical, emotional, psychological, and economical abuse. Realize there are options out there if you need help, and ways you can contribute if you want to help. The other part of education is prevention. Stopping the violence before it starts. Recognizing warning signs. Learning to set boundaries for how you expect to be treated, and what to do if those boundaries are crossed. Begin to learn how to build healthier relationships.

Inevitably, whenever discussions about domestic violence crop up, love comes into play. "Love doesn't hurt." "But, he loves me." "I love him." The list of statements stemming from domestic violence's and its perpetrator's ability to co-op "love" as their own are far too common, whether you're a victim of domestic violence or not. It's quite possible, and almost probable, that all of us, whether or not we've been in violent relationships, have at some point used "love" as an excuse for behavior that was most certainly not love. It might have been something minor, or something very important. But, it's important to remember that when we hear a woman's story of violence and gasp when she claims, "I love him."

You can help take the "love" back from domestic violence. Education is a key. The more you learn about domestic violence, the more you recognize the clear distinction between true love and when love's being used to justify something very different. Love means respect, freedom, and equality. Sure, it can be butterflies, long walks on the beach, getting caught in the rain, and maybe even heart-shaped boxes of chocolates on February 14th. It's important to remember that love is a verb, an action, not just a word. It's time to take it back.

A Woman's Place, P.O. Box 299, Doylestown, PA 18901
Business Office: 215-343-9241 FAX: 215-343-3411
24 Hour Hotline: 1-800-220-8116



**Message from Executive Director Donna J. Byrne
June 2007**

Community, Community, Community

We've been saying that word a lot this year. If you've come to one of our trainings, presentations, or events; read one of our new publications or newspaper articles from the past year; or visited our website, you've probably seen or heard that word "community" a lot too. At AWP, helping victims of domestic violence and their children has always been the heart of what we do. Community, this space that we share in Bucks County that's our piece of the world's collective humanity, gives AWP's heartbeat its rhythm.

Domestic violence is a community issue. At our recent Chocolate Lovers' Fantasy event, a reporter asked, "Why a community issue?" It's understandable. If you or someone you care about aren't victims, domestic violence is an issue that can get lost in the public shuffle of "what to worry about now."

The reality of domestic violence is that one in four women will experience it in her lifetime. Moreover, one in four teenagers, both boys and girls, will experience violence in a dating relationship before graduating from high school. If it's not you, it's someone you or your child knows. Another way to think about those statistics is, as you go through your day, it's every fourth woman or teenager that you see. As you drive to work or school or on errands, think of it happening in every fourth house that you see.

There are other statistics that shed light on how domestic violence reaches beyond its direct victims and impacts the community. Fifty percent of homeless women and children in America are fleeing from domestic violence. Domestic violence is the leading cause of death for women in the workplace. It costs employers \$727.8 million annually in lost productivity, with more than 7.9 million paid workdays lost each year. Healthcare costs related to domestic violence exceed \$4 billion a year.

It's a safety issue. It's a bottom-line issue. It becomes a community issue when you realize that as long as one person is victimized, every person has the potential to be victimized. It becomes a community issue when the solution – the answer to ending domestic violence – can only come through ongoing community effort and support. Domestic violence is a community issue. Safety in the home is a basic civil right.

I mentioned before that AWP's expanding community gives our heartbeat its rhythm. That rhythm comes from our volunteers, who keep us going with their generous donations of time and effort. It comes from our supporters, whose donations ensure that our projects and programs will be able to expand and adjust as needed. It comes from every individual who attends one of our trainings or awareness and prevention presentations. It comes from you.

AWP's 30th anniversary year is coming to an end. There have been moments during this past year to reflect on where we've been and where we're going. The movement to end domestic violence started with small, quiet conversations. They were brave and humble beginnings. Today, the movement to end domestic violence is gaining ground where it needs to most: in the community. Thank you for supporting AWP through the past 30 years, and we look forward to our ongoing work with you, as part of the community working to end domestic violence.

A Woman's Place, P.O. Box 299, Doylestown, PA 18901
Business Office: 215-343-9241 FAX: 215-343-3411
24 Hour Hotline: 1-800-220-8116



**Message from Executive Director Donna J. Byrne
October 2007**

22,000 and Counting

Last year, the programs and services of A Woman's Place (AWP) touched more than 22,000 lives in Bucks County. By refining our services and making directed efforts to engage more and more of our shared community in the ongoing work to end domestic violence, AWP's messages of domestic abuse and violence service, support, awareness, and prevention reached more people than ever before.

The scope and success of AWP through the past year would not have been possible without the effort and support of so many of our "unpaid" staff – the volunteers. Those 22,000 lives were touched in part because volunteers contributed more than 23,000 hours of service to AWP last year. Within nonprofit circles, it's estimated that one hour of work by a volunteer is equal to about \$18 of paid time. So, yes, 23,000 hours are amazing. An in-kind contribution of more than \$400,000 worth of work is beyond amazing!

This fall, AWP will go through a strategic planning process. For several weeks, board and staff members, volunteers, and former clients of the organization will gather to assess where AWP is and plan for where AWP needs to go. At the end of the process, we'll have a document that will outline the goals and strategies that will guide the organization through the next three to five years.

Of course, part of the process is a lot of "roll up your sleeves, get your thinking caps on" kind of work. It's a process that's daunting and exciting, challenging and rewarding. It's a very proactive approach for an organization that was born out of a reactive, but necessary, response to domestic abuse and violence. In other words, we're going to stretch a little, willingly taking on those pesky growing pains as they come.

The conversations, work, and debates that happen throughout the strategic planning process will be the living piece of the document that will be a touchstone for AWP's future. The journey will be as important as the destination. Our strategic plan will guide the organization, but how far we get in the work to end domestic abuse and violence depends on what it always has: you. It's you, who joins AWP as a staff member or volunteer to actively work with victims or in the community. It's you, who partners with AWP to create change within the systems in Bucks County and beyond. It's you, who supports AWP through donations and funding. It's you, one of the 22,000 who received our services or heard our message last year.

So, we're 22,000 strong and counting. Whatever lies at the end of our strategic planning process, or at the end of another year, AWP, along with its community of supporters, will continue to work to have our reach exceed our grasp until the work is done.

A Woman's Place, P.O. Box 299, Doylestown, PA 18901
Business Office: 215-343-9241 FAX: 215-343-3411
24 Hour Hotline: 1-800-220-8116



Message from Executive Director Donna J. Byrne November 2007

There's No Place Like Home

Home. It conjures Norman Rockwell-esque images of milk and cookies, where parents are still heroes in their children's eyes, where safety, love, and happiness abound, all wrapped up with a trusty Golden Retriever asleep by the hearth.

Well, maybe not.

For most of us, "home" is something different. Not better or worse, but it's a home shaped by the realities of our lives, not the aspirations of our art. Reality has taken its toll on home. As we toil on in an uncertain world, the nostalgia of home is left where it belongs: in myth. Maybe Rockwell is what we've aspired to be, but home means something else to each of us.

It's a place many of us dreamed of leaving, and have been searching for ever since. Whatever your memories of home, it's a place where people did the best they could with what they had. It's a place you built on, laying the foundation for the rest of your life. Today, it's a place where you recreate the best of what you knew with the best of what you've learned.

For Amy Comly, a 31-year-old former resident of Bucks County, home is where she was stabbed to death in her kitchen by her boyfriend, where she was kicked in the head while dying as he called 9-1-1 to explain how he had "just lost it."

It's blunt. It's disturbing. It's happened again, another woman murdered by a man she trusted and loved. The details are different, the end result the same. A life is lost, a child is left motherless, and we are left to wonder not why, but why again.

Hearing about Amy's death in October, my friend commented, "Even this month?" Saddened and shocked, my friend didn't really think that because October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, women in abusive and violent relationships would somehow be more protected, be more safe in their own homes.

Safety in the home is a basic human right. The time has long passed where anything less is acceptable. The time has long passed for families to be left in unspeakable sadness, feeling they knew something was wrong, but having no idea until it's too late. The time has long passed for law enforcement to be baffled how the calm abuser they served a Protection from Abuse Order that morning could commit murder later that afternoon. The time has long passed for silence. The time has long passed for any victim to feel she has no place to turn, for any abuser to feel he has anyone left to fool.

Domestic Violence Awareness Month is about a lot of things. It's about the one in four women that will experience domestic violence in her lifetime. That one in four teens, both boys and girls, will experience abuse in a dating relationship before graduating from high school. That \$ 727.8 million is lost in worker productivity each year due to domestic violence, while \$4.1 billion is spent in related healthcare costs. It's about Amy's death, and the horrific tragedies of the 163 people who died in Pennsylvania last year because of domestic violence.

As you read this, seven families, most with only the clothes on their back, are home. They're strangers, making a home in a safe house, right here in Bucks County. The house is rough around the edges, but for them, for now, it's home. It's not the home they dreamed about, the home they wanted, the home they were promised. But, it's where they go to sleep safe and wake up with something new: hope.

Domestic Violence Awareness Month is about home. It's about every person being safe in their homes. It's about what only a community united can, and must, do to make that happen. It's about seeing the value of Amy's life as equal to your own. Until we, as a community, stand united with public will and public action to end domestic violence, the promise of home remains a promise unkept.