



**Message from Executive Director Donna J. Byrne
April 2008**

Dollars and Sense

If you've poured a glass of milk or pumped a gallon of gas recently, welcome to the new "material reality" of our economy's current "negative growth." In non-economists speak, trips to the grocery store and gas station are costing more while giving you less. Tune in anytime for a daily dose of headlines trumpeting the economic "crisis, squeeze, crunch, and pain" that's "sharp, wide, deep, and dramatic."

The current economic cocktail of rhetoric and reality is enough to make anyone feel like battering down the hatches and waiting for the rainy day to end. But, not everyone is playing the waiting game.

The proposed federal budget now under debate includes the decrease and elimination of vital funding streams for domestic violence programs and services. On the surface these "cuts" can be easily attributed to an admirable, "tightening our belts" message of fiscal responsibility. The reality is that they represent a reckless political red herring whose impact will devastate the most vulnerable among us.

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) includes initiatives to help children exposed to violence, train healthcare providers to support victims of abuse, and provide crisis services for victims of rape and sexual assault. It continues efforts to help law enforcement respond to victims and provides support services to women and children forced to leave their homes because of violence.

VAWA has a proud history of helping, despite a constant shadow of underfunding. Historically, money authorized for VAWA has not materialized and initiatives have gone unfunded. The proposed 2009 federal budget includes a devastating 30 percent cut (\$120 million) to VAWA, taking the financial viability of VAWA from bad to worse.

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) is a funding source for services that help victims of crime. VOCA funds counseling, legal and medical advocacy, emergency shelter, transitional housing, community education, and school programs that help victims and their children and communities in the wake of domestic abuse and violence, stalking, rape, sexual abuse, elder abuse, terrorism, drunk driving, and murder.

Under the proposed budget, VOCA funding will dramatically decrease starting next year. It will be eliminated by 2010.

What's your bottom line?

These cuts will not save you money, and will actually cost you in the future. In its first six years, VAWA saved taxpayers \$14.8 billion in net averted social costs. VOCA is non-tax payer funded, and is supported by fines and penalties paid by federal criminals. Both VAWA and VOCA have saved money while saving lives. Underfunding and eliminating these programs creates extra strain on state and local law enforcement, criminal justice, healthcare, and social service systems. In effect, it eliminates ounces of prevention worth pounds of cure, replacing progress with penalties everyone will eventually bear.

VAWA and VOCA funding cuts will restrict and threaten programs and services that so many among us need to survive. Cries for help will go unanswered. Safety will lose its possibility. Hope will be forgotten.

Now is not the time to wait for the end of the rainy day.

Contact your representatives and urge them to protect VAWA and VOCA.

Better yet, show them how to spend money that saves lives. Show them that helping others also helps you. Show them that funding the protection of the most vulnerable among us isn't a handout, but a hand-up.

Luckily, the federal government is prepared to fully fund your demonstration of civic and community pride.

In a few weeks, many of us will start receiving checks, averaging about \$600 per qualified individual, from the IRS as part of President Bush's economic stimulus package. Here's what \$600 buys you at A Woman's Place (AWP), the only domestic violence agency in Bucks County,: six days of safe shelter for a victim of domestic violence and her children; 12 hours of answered hotline calls; 40 hours of counseling for families affected by violence; or 24 hours of education in area schools that can stop the violence before it starts. Make it count at www.awomansplace.org.

Like a lot of nonprofits, AWP is darn good at dollar stretching. But we know, every day, it is not enough. Need continually outpaces available resources. Eliminating resources will create a shockwave of devastation that will touch us all.

Winston Churchill said that, "You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give." Your dollars aren't charity; they're change.



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Now We Know

The national movement to end domestic violence is turning 30. This summer, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) will celebrate its 30th anniversary. NCADV organizes the 50 state coalitions, which in turn serve as the organizing body for local domestic violence agencies, like A Woman's Place (AWP). Every day, the people connected to these organizations located across the country, at local, state, and national levels, are working to end domestic abuse and violence.

It's each individual's decision to take action to create change, from volunteers and staff members to supporters and community members that creates and sustains a movement for 30 years. And, we've had our milestones. National and local 24-hour hotlines are available. The Violence Against Women Act was created. Support and service for victims and their children and advocacy, training, and education about the issue are all happening, every day.

It's a job well done, but it's also a job far from finished. At AWP, we witness daily reminders of that fact, on the hotline and in court, shelter, and counseling sessions. And, to a certain extent, those individual stories are directly represented, or at the very least echoed, in the society that extends outside of our AWP world. On the television news and in the newspaper headlines, too often first reported assault, murder, and "murder-suicide" stories really have their roots in domestic abuse and violence.

If you've attend one of our trainings or one of our community presentations, you know that domestic abuse and violence are really about power and control, and that incidents of violence that make the news usually happen very far into an abusive relationship. Too often the struggle is silent, shrouded in shame and secrecy, until it's too late.

An integral part of the movement to end domestic abuse and violence has been and will be education. It's education that lets victims know they are not alone, that help exists, and that there are people who have stood in similar shoes and walked on to a better life. It's education that tears down the veil of denial and shame that abusers thrive behind, creating agents of change in our community, one presentation, training, or conversation at a time.

At AWP, our education mantra falls somewhat in line with Maya Angelou's adage that "once you know better, you do better." The goal is simple: to end domestic abuse and violence. What goes into making that happen isn't as clear. In 30 years we've gotten some of the answers, but to finish the job it's going to take more. Education leads to engagement which leads to change. When we cross that tipping point and leave denial and disinterest behind on a large enough scale, then there will be enough collective community energy for all of us to say, "Now we know, and we will not rest until each individual in Bucks County is safe in his/her home."

On Sunday, August 31 I opened *The Inquirer* and on page 2 a headline caught my eye. The headline, which read, “Official Backs Women’s Burial Death” was followed by a story of five women, three of whom were teenagers, in Pakistan, who were beaten, shot, and then buried alive as punishment for wanting to marry men of their own choosing. The article continued on to explain that a Pakistani lawmaker then asked Parliament to “spare him their outrage” and “not make a big fuss” because what was done fell in line with century old traditions.

This single article got my mind working and I began to reflect back on events that plagued this state throughout the summer. Pakistan may be thousands of miles away, but right here in Pennsylvania, 31 people have died in 17 counties as a result of domestic violence since June 22, 2008.

According to the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV), Bucks County was not one of the 17 counties mentioned above, nor did any of the 117 fatalities in the state in 2007 occur here, but that does not mean that we are unaffected. It has only been three years since Bucks County lost 12 of our own in domestic violence related deaths.

In order to start to rebuild after 2005 we looked for support from the community and received an outpouring of just that. The donations from community and faith groups, as well as individual donations, regardless of the amount or type have enabled us to continue educating about the reality of domestic abuse and violence and supporting those who fall victim to it.

We are supported in our mission, and understand that the answers lie not solely in A Woman’s Place, but in the community as a whole. This is why we move forward into the next three years with a plan to further educate the community about domestic abuse and violence, and ensure that there are resources available so that if someone finds themselves in need or knows someone that is, they are aware that they have services and support available to them. (Reference newsletter page that strategic planning article is on.)

The fact that we are such a supportive community gives me hope. Whether in Pakistan or Pennsylvania, it is all interconnected, so join us as we push forward with a definitive plan to educate, support, and strive for a culture where our services will one day no longer be needed.