

March 2009

**A Special Message from the Executive Director
Preparing for the Future**

A Woman's Place, the only domestic violence organization in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, needs your help. The current economic challenges are affecting every person and every organization, and A Woman's Place is not immune. I ask for your support during these hard times.

I understand that a number of people have been and will be affected by the economic downturn. Still, A Woman's Place needs your financial help to sustain its position of excellence and strength.

The bad economy and related increase in unemployment do not cause domestic violence. There is, however, a positive correlation between the two and increases in severity and frequency of domestic violence incidents. At A Woman's Place we are faced at this time with hard decisions that will limit resources and services to victims. These decisions will in turn limit victims' choices and options and create barriers to those who want to leave abusive relationships. At a time when more services are needed we must work together as a community to ensure that there are not less to give.

Your invaluable contributions make this work possible. Last year A Woman's Place provided counseling to more than 3,500 individuals and their families; educated over 6,000 school age children about healthy relationships; provided emergency shelter to 81 families, including 90 children; trained more than 2,500 medical professionals on how to identify and respond to domestic abuse and violence. All totaled, more than 25,000 lives were touched by A Woman's Place.

During these uncertain times, your generous contribution to A Woman's Place is more important than ever. Your support of A Woman's Place provides vital dollars that allow A Woman's Place to provide services to the most vulnerable amongst us. It provides critical funding for direct services to victims of domestic abuse and violence and their children, and ensures our continued commitment to ending domestic abuse and violence in Bucks County.

A Woman's Place remains a valuable and important investment. I ask you to please keep A Woman's Place a top priority in your charitable giving and make a contribution today. [Click here](#) to donate online today.

With deepest thanks and gratitude,



Donna Byrne
Executive Director



**Message from the Executive Director
Donna J. Byrne**

An Exciting Time

As the economic roller coaster ride continues, a period of creativity and excitement has been birthed. While there are challenges that we must face head on, the road ahead is also paved with possibilities. The work of building a community of healthy individual and family relationships has not ended and is not remotely expected to slow down. The work of ending domestic and dating abuse and violence is still there. The expectation from those counting on us that we will “rise to the occasion” focuses us on our work and challenges us in ways that bring out the best that is in us. What is undeniable is that this is a very exciting time to be doing our work.

At A Woman’s Place, we have the opportunity to further expand our base of supporters. We will continue to reach out to new audiences to share what we are doing to end the violence that can tear communities apart and identify new and exciting ways to engage each and every community member in the movement to end violence. There is no contribution too small. There is no such thing as an insignificant donation.

- \$4 buys a pair of shorts at our thrift store, Full Circle, and provides 1 hour of emergency shelter for a victim of domestic abuse and violence.
- \$5 buys a sweater and provides 6 hotline minutes.
- \$15 buys 5 sweatshirts and provides 1 hour of counseling for a family affected by violence.
- \$25 buys 5 shirts or blouses and provides 1 hour of prevention education for an elementary, middle, or high school student.
- \$28 buys 7 pairs of shoes and provides 1 hour of legal counseling for a domestic violence victim.

At A Woman’s Place, we believe that every dollar counts and we appreciate every gift that can be made.

We have the opportunity to work with more volunteers, offering them a meaningful experience and a chance to see the clear and measurable impact of their efforts. The work of our volunteers has a clear meaning for families and the community. Time and talents contributed to A Woman’s Place impact not only the individuals and families that we serve, but strengthen the entire community – an invaluable outcome that should not be taken lightly during the current time.

We also have the opportunity to sharpen our mission and our goals. Like you and the rest of the nation, A Woman’s Place is creatively identifying ways to “tighten our belts” and step up to the plate to ensure that each dollar and each minute invested in this work is invested in the most effective and efficient manner possible. Guided by a strategic plan launched in July 2008, A Woman’s Place is committed to partnering with individuals, families, organizations, and businesses through our community to ensure that each individual and family in need has the support, information, and services necessary to enhance their safety.

Again, this is a challenging and exciting time to be doing our work. Having been athletic in my younger years, I remember well the spirit and energy that rose in me while preparing for a competition. I can feel that same spirit rising in me now as I think of the challenge and opportunity facing A Woman’s Place during these times. I believe that the strength of our mission and commitment to our work will bring out the best in all of us. I look forward to embarking on this exciting chapter in our journey with each and every one of you.

With deepest thanks and gratitude,
Donna J. Byrne
Executive Director



**Message from the Executive Director
Donna J. Byrne**

A Call For Action

As both the demand for domestic violence services and the cost of providing them have steadily increased over the years—and have surged since the economy downturn—funding for these life-saving services has stagnated or decreased. To address the critical shortage of funding for domestic violence and child abuse prevention services across the Commonwealth, state legislation has been introduced that will increase the existing fees on marriage licenses and divorce filings that are dedicated to funding statewide domestic violence services and child abuse prevention programs through the Children’s Trust Fund.

Background

- Since 1990, a \$10 surcharge on the marriage license has been dedicated to funding statewide domestic violence services; this amount has never been increased.
- The existing \$10 marriage license fee raises \$733,000 per year for domestic violence services.
- Since 1988, a \$10 surcharge on both the marriage license and the divorce filing fee has been dedicated to the Children’s Trust Fund; likewise, this amount has never been increased.
- The Children’s Trust Fund receives about \$1.2 million per year for child abuse prevention efforts.

Marriage License Surcharge

- The cost of marriage license and divorce filing fees varies by county. Each county establishes its base cost; certain fees are added to that base cost, resulting in the total fee charged.
- The cost of a marriage license varies from a low of \$20 (Franklin) to a high of \$80 (Philadelphia). The cost in Bucks county is \$60.00.
- The average cost of a marriage license in PA is \$43.00.
- 35 other states have marriage license fees dedicated to domestic violence/child abuse funding.

Divorce Filing Fees

- As with marriage license fees, divorce filing costs vary from county to county, with the majority of the fee going to county.
- The divorce filing fee varies from a low of \$55.50 (Potter) to a high of \$338.50 (Cumberland). The cost in Bucks County is \$310.00.
- The average cost of the divorce filing fee in PA is \$136.00.
- Low-income people may use the *in forma pauperis* (IFP) process to waive court filing costs, thereby exempting those whose incomes deem them hardest hit by court costs.
- 12 other states have divorce filing fees dedicated to domestic violence/child abuse funding.

Anticipated Revenue

This legislation will increase the existing marriage license fee for domestic violence services from the current \$10 to \$35, and will dedicate a \$25 fee on divorce filings, generating nearly \$3 million more each year for life-saving services for victims.

This legislation will also raise additional revenue for the Children’s Trust Fund via a \$25 increase to the marriage license fee and a \$15 increase to the divorce filing fee. The legislation would thus equalize the fees—\$35 on marriage licenses and \$25 on divorce filings—for both domestic violence services and child abuse prevention programs.

There is significant and growing legislative support for the legislation, but more is needed in order to pass the bills first in the Judiciary Committee, and then within both the Senate and the House. The goal is to have the bills passed this Spring, so immediate action is needed!

“What can I do?” “How can I help?” You are probably asking. Well, here’s exactly what you (and your friends and family) can do! Roll up your sleeves and set aside 15 minutes, then:

1) Call your State Senators* and ask them to cosponsor and support Senate Bills 919 and 920

- Senate Bill 919 is the legislation to increase the existing fees for child abuse prevention programs of the Children's Trust Fund statewide to the marriage license and divorce filing fees to support domestic violence programs statewide.
- Senate Bill 920 is the legislation to increase the existing marriage license fee and dedicate a divorce filing fee to raise revenue for domestic violence services.
- **Senator Greenleaf**, District Office telephone number (215) 657-7700
- **Senator Wonderling**, District Office telephone number (215) 368-1500
- **Senator Tomlinson**, District Office telephone number (215) 945-2800
- Note: **Senator McIlhinney** is already a cosponsor of the legislation, so please call to **thank him** for his support. His District Office telephone number is (215) 489-5000

2) Call your State Representatives* and ask them to cosponsor and support House Bills 1586 and 1588

- House Bill 1586 is the legislation to increase the existing fees for child abuse prevention programs of the Children's Trust Fund statewide to the marriage license and divorce filing fees to support domestic violence programs statewide (same as SB 919 above).
- House Bill 1588 is the legislation to increase the existing marriage license fee and dedicate a divorce filing fee to raise revenue for domestic violence services (same as SB 920 above).
- **Representative Paul I. Clymer**, District Office telephone number (215) 257-0279
- **Representative Gene DiGirolamo**, District Office telephone number (215) 750-1017
- **Representative Frank A. Farry**, District Office telephone number (215) 752-6750
- **Representative John T. Galloway**, District Office telephone numbers (215) 943-7206 & (215) 781-2451
- **Representative Anthony J. Melio**, District Office telephone number (215) 943-8669
- **Representative Bernie O'Neill**, District Office telephone number, (215) 441-2624
- **Representative Scott A. Petri**, District Office telephone number (215) 364-3414
- Note: **Representative Marguerite Quinn** is already a cosponsor of the legislation, so please call to **thank her** for her support. Her District Office telephone number is (215) 489-2126

Points to Emphasize When You Call:

- These are not new fees, they are cost adjustments to existing fees to reflect the increased cost of services.
- These fees have never been increased in the two decades they have existed.
- Between 2001 and 2007 alone, the Consumer Price Index rose by 16% for all items.
- This legislation is about improving access to services for domestic violence victims, among the most vulnerable in the population.
- These fees are not taxes and not part of the Governor's budget. This legislation will travel with the budget, but is not part of it.
- While small at the individual user level, these increases will generate millions of dollars every year to sustain statewide domestic violence services and child abuse prevention programs.

*If you are unsure of who your senators and/or representatives are in your district, or what their current contact information is, you can visit the PA General Assembly Web site by [clicking here](#) and typing in your ZIP code for a list of your current officials and their contact information. To see who has already cosponsored HB 1588, [click here](#), and to see who has already cosponsored SB 920, [click here](#).

Funding is a critical issue now for all domestic violence programs statewide. The revenue raised by these dedicated fees would be a much-needed, stable source of revenue that would ensure the sustainability of services to victims of abuse. It is so important that we get our local officials behind these bills so that domestic violence organizations across the state, including A Woman's Place, can continue to offer quality services and support to victims of domestic violence.

Taking these steps is social change in action. Thanks in advance to each reader for helping to make each home in Bucks County a safe one.

With Deepest Thanks and Gratitude,



Donna J. Byrne
Executive Director



**Message from the Executive Director
Donna J. Byrne**

A Step in the Right Direction

Last month, I appealed to the community to contact our State Senators and State Representatives in order to gain support for House Bills 1586 and 1588 and Senate Bills 919 and 920. This legislation will increase the existing marriage license fee for domestic violence services from the current \$10 to \$35, and will dedicate a \$25 fee on divorce filings. It will also raise additional revenue for the Children's Trust Fund via a \$25 increase to the marriage license fee and a \$15 increase to the divorce filing fee. These increases will generate more than \$3 million more each year for life-saving services to victims.

I am pleased to say that both the house bills and the senate bills have passed through their respective Judiciary Committees this week! This is a great victory, and could not have been accomplished without the help of everyone who contacted their local senators and state representatives to lobby for support.

These bills must still pass through their respective Appropriations Committees before they will be presented to the Senate and the House floors. We still need your help to ensure that we have continued support from our legislators throughout this process. It is important at this stage to both thank all those who voted yes and contributed to the successful vote as well as continue the efforts to get more legislators to support these bills.

Special thanks are in order to Senator Greenleaf and Senator McIlhinney, as well as Representative O'Neill and Representative Quinn. These legislators have co-sponsored the bills and helped to pass them through the Judiciary Committees. For a list of your State Senators and State Representatives and their current contact information, [click here](#) and type in your ZIP code.

Thank you, thank you, thank you! The victories that those of us that provide services to victims of domestic abuse and violence had this week would have never been possible without the support of the community. This is one more step in the direction of the social change that needs to take place in order to create a safer place to live in Bucks County.

With deepest gratitude,

Donna J. Byrne
Executive Director



**Message from the Executive Director
Donna J. Byrne**

Celebrate Women's Equality Day – August 26!

In 1848, the first women's rights meeting in the United States was held at Seneca Falls, New York, began a movement that would continue on for more than 70 years before one of its most pivotal milestones was reached. On August 26, 1920 women were finally given the right to vote. Since 1971, August 26 has been recognized as Women's Equality Day. I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the Presidential Proclamation from August 26, 2008.

"With vision and determination, American women have helped build our great Nation. On Women's Equality Day, we remember the dedication of women who overcame many obstacles in order to secure the right to vote.

The struggle for women's rights is a story of strong women willing to take the lead and pave the way toward equal voting rights for all American citizens. In 1848, a group of determined women came together in Seneca Falls, New York, to proclaim that "all men and women are created equal," and demand suffrage. On August 26, 1920, their voices were finally heard, and the 19th Amendment to the Constitution guaranteed women the right to vote.

As we look back on the journey to women gaining suffrage, we remember the sacrifices of people like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. More than 160 years after the Seneca Falls Convention, we celebrate the spirit, leadership, and hard work of those pioneering women. We also recognize the women who continue in this tradition by acting as role models in their communities, helping raise the next generation of Americans, leading in their professions, and serving in the Armed Forces protecting our country. These women are continuing on the path set by those who came before them, so that all Americans can realize the great promise of our Nation.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE W. BUSH, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim August 26, 2008, as Women's Equality Day. I call upon the people of the United States to celebrate the achievements of women and observe this day with appropriate programs and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-second day of August, in the year of our Lord two thousand eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-third."

On Wednesday, August 26 remember all of the strong women who have overcome adversity and persevered for equal rights for women. Also, take time to acknowledge those that still are.

With deepest gratitude,

Donna J. Byrne
Executive Director



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Donna J. Byrne**

Intentionality.

In Pittsburgh, a man walked into a LA Fitness and opened fire, killing three women and injuring nine others. One story reported that he had made “test runs” earlier in the day and quoted a police officer who said the shooter “had a lot of hatred, he was hell-bent on committing this act, and nothing was going to stop him.” Intention.

A recent *O, The Oprah Magazine* article tells the story of Vernetta Cockerham. On November 13, 2002, Cockerham’s estranged husband dug graves in the empty lot across the street from the home she shared with her three children and left her a voicemail message. “You and the kids will be in those graves and no one will ever know.” On November 19, 2002, Cockerham’s oldest daughter was dead and Cockerham had been strangled and had her throat slit. Intention.

The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, of which A Woman’s Place is a founding member, reports that since Memorial Day, 47 Pennsylvanians have lost their lives to domestic violence. Of that number, 34 were victims. The other 13 were perpetrators who committed suicide or were killed by police. The details of each incident demonstrate a shocking disregard for life, a chilling pattern of premeditation, and a reckless endangerment of children. Intention.

The dark side of intentionality is reported daily. We are bombarded with it. But our lives are filled with intentionality. Some moments have a bigger spotlight than others. But, imagine how our lives, our community around us could change if we acknowledged or celebrated the good intentions that we act with each day. **A Woman’s Place intends to end domestic abuse and violence and build healthy individuals, healthy families, and a healthy community. Your support is vital to achieving this vision. Please join me in supporting this vision with bold, unwavering intention with a contribution of \$50, \$100, \$250, or even more. Even better, our monthly pledge program allows you to give regularly in increments of any amount, boldly sustaining the A Woman’s Place through the year.** Intention.

Times are tough. As the only domestic violence organization in Bucks County, A Woman’s Place faces challenges head on every day. We see it every day – in the requests for food and clothing as families struggle to survive... in rising tensions as the economy further squeezes already strained family dynamics... in the funding cuts that threaten core services to those in our community with some of the greatest needs. Our mission to end intimate and familial violence for all is bold and comprehensive and demands a tenacious spirit. A spirit of unwavering, good intention.

A Woman’s Place will lead Bucks County into a safer future. A Woman’s Place is positioned to advance the movement to end violence and abuse and achieve powerful and durable results. **With your intentional support, the vision will be achieved.**

I thank you, in advance, for your generous contribution and support. I thank you for your intention.

With deepest appreciation,

Donna J. Byrne
Executive Director

Making a gift to A Woman’s Place is easy! Here’s how:

- (1) Write a check and mail it with the enclosed reply card to A Woman’s Place at PO Box 299, Doylestown, PA 18901.
- (2) Call Development Associate Jenny Salisbury, at (215) 343-9241 ext. 108 and make a gift using your credit card.
- (3) Support A Woman’s Place every day by pledging a monthly gift on the enclosed card and mailing it to A Woman’s Place.
- (4) Log onto the website at www.awomansplace.org, click on the “Donate Now” button, and make a safe and secure donation online.

Thank You!



**Message from the Executive Director
Donna J. Byrne**

Women and White T-Shirts Can Change the World

More often than not, when we turn on the news or open up the paper we see stories of war, murder, natural disasters, and unthinkable acts against humanity. At our last staff meeting, one of our medical advocates shared the story of Leymah Gbowee with us. This story began with war, murder, and civil unrest but ended on a much more positive note.

Gbowee, a Liberian woman and social worker, united a group of women against a dictator and restored the rule of law to their county.

In 2002, Liberia was in the middle of a civil war between the government, run by Charles Taylor, and warlords battling to overthrow him. It was a result of economic inequality, the control of natural resources, and rivalries among ethnic groups. More than 200 thousand people had lost their lives and one out of every three had lost their home. The women of the county-housewives, fishmongers, farmers – were so desperate to stop the fighting they took it upon themselves to do so. Led by Gbowee, “the market women” armed with only plain white t-shirts used a tactic once used by the women of ancient Greece: No peace, no sex.

This movement united both Christian and Muslim women together. They were able to meet with Charles Taylor in person and send him the message that “the women of Liberia...we are tired of war. We are tired of running. We are tired of begging for bulgur wheat. We are tired of our children being raped. We are now taking this stand, to secure the future of our children because we believe as custodians of society, tomorrow our children will ask us, ‘Mama, what was your role during the crisis?’”

During the meeting with Taylor, “the market women” we able to force him to make the promise that he would sit down with the warlords in Ghana. A delegation of Liberian women then went to Ghana to continue to put pressure on the warring groups. Nearly 200 women gathered outside the “Peace Hall” where the talks were being held and looped arms to block the men who were not making any progress from leaving. When security forces were sent to arrest them, all of the women threatened to strip off their clothing. The men in the peace talks saw this happening, and related this group of women to their mothers and grandmothers. To keep them from taking off their clothes they continued with their talks. Two weeks later, the terms of a peace treaty were announced.

Since then, Taylor was forced into exile, and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first female elected head of state in Africa, was voted into office. Sirleaf is now the President of Liberia. In June, Gbowee was awarded the prestigious Profile in Courage Award from the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, Ma. Her story, along with the stories of all of the women who took part in the movement has been made into a feature length documentary called “Pray the Devil Back to Hell.” It is now being shown around the world and was awarded “Best Documentary Feature” at the Tribeca Film Festival.

On Wednesday, October 28, 2009 at 7:00 pm, AWP will be hosting a screening of “Pray the Devil Back to Hell” at Doylestown United Methodist Church on Swamp Road. Join us to watch this moving film and pay tribute to an extraordinary group of women who have exhibited the courage and strength to save their children and bring peace to their country. RSVP to Jenny Salisbury by Friday, October 23 at 215.343.9241 x108 or email jsalisbury@awomansplace.org.

With deepest appreciation,

Donna J. Byrne
Executive Director



**Message from the Executive Director
Donna J. Byrne**

Quiet is not Peace

Quiet is not peace.*

*On May 31, 2009, a 56-year-old woman was shot by her 55-year-old boyfriend at a Philadelphia bar at closing time. He then turned the gun on himself.
Another voice lost.*

Last year, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, there were 144 domestic violence fatalities. This represented a 19 percent increase over the prior year. Across Pennsylvania and the nation, domestic abuse and violence continues to threaten to silence the voices of women, men, and children. One in four women will experience domestic violence within her lifetime. One in four adolescents, girls and boys, will experience violence in a dating relationship before graduating from high school. Such statistics reflect the insidious nature of domestic violence. A Woman's Place is committed to being the voice and hope for these victims, their families, and the community.

Quiet is the sound of fear... hiding from uncontrolled anger.

*On August 3, 2009, a 68-year-old woman was shot by her 70-year-old husband in their Springettsbury Township home. The victim had locked herself in the basement and called 911 to say that she feared for her life. Responding police went inside the home and then they heard gunshots. They left the home, waited a few minutes, then entered to find the victim dead. The perpetrator had committed suicide.
Another voice lost.*

Last year, A Woman's Place experienced an 11 percent increase in the provision of services to victims of domestic violence: 3,514 new victims were served; 77 families, including 101 children, were housed in the emergency shelter; 4,311 crisis calls were answered on the 24-hour hotline. As the only domestic violence organization in Bucks County, A Woman's Place faces challenges head on. We see it every day – in the requests for food and clothing as families struggle to survive... in rising tensions as the economy further squeezes already strained family dynamics... in the funding cuts that threaten core services to those in our community with some of the greatest needs. Our mission to end intimate and familial violence for all is bold and comprehensive and demands a tenacious spirit. It is our job to ensure that members of the Bucks County community do not lose their voice. **Please join me in ensuring voices are heard with a contribution of \$25, \$50, or even more by clicking here. Even better, our monthly pledge program allows you to give regularly in increments of any amount, boldly sustaining the A Woman's Place and Bucks County voices throughout the year.**

Quiet is pain that takes your breath away so you can't scream.

*On June 7, 2009, a 71-year-old woman was found dead in her home, sitting in her motorized wheelchair, strangled by a guitar string. Her 45-year-old son, who lived in her Swatara Township home with her, was charged with homicide.
Another voice lost.*

Domestic abuse and violence does not discriminate and can happen to anyone. A Woman's Place provides a full range of assistance and support services for victims of domestic abuse and violence and their children, including a free 24-hour confidential hotline, a full-service residential shelter, individual and group counseling, legal and medical advocacy, and a children's program. As domestic violence is a community issue, requiring community effort and support to successfully eradicate, A Woman's Place also provides comprehensive community-based domestic violence training, education, outreach, and advocacy. Last year, A Woman's Place delivered prevention education programs to 10,688 adults and youth in Bucks County. It is these services and your support that ensure that there will always be a voice in Bucks County.

Quiet is the child who will not speak.

July 21, 2009, a 10-year-old boy and his 9-year-old brother were killed in a house fire set by their 40-year-old father in Scranton. On July 3, the perpetrator had threatened to kill the boys' mother and the boys by burning down the house with them in it. The boys' mother and a third son, 12-years-old, suffered injuries and survived. The boys' mother had a Protection from Abuse Order against the perpetrator.

Two more voices lost.

A Woman's Place is committed to being the voice - for those who have been silenced and those desperately seeking to not lose their voice. **We want and need you to join us in being the voice for victims of domestic violence, their families, and the community... because quiet is not peace. I thank you, in advance, for your generous contribution and support.**

Nothing can keep peace quiet. Please, Be The Voice.

With deepest appreciation,



Donna J. Byrne
Executive Director

*Taken from the poem "Of Quiet and Peace", by Harold Pugh, Jr.