

Housing Crisis Makes Families Less Safe

Jessica's* eyes are constantly scanning, her ears are always listening. Her three small children play quietly in the living room. She smooths her shorts as she repeats the question, "What was the hardest part of leaving?" A moment passes, "All of the unknowns. I didn't know how I would feed my children, put a roof over their heads, find a job...anything. There were just so many unknowns."

Two years ago when Jessica's husband pinned her against a wall by her neck, screaming in her face and spitting on her because she "laughed at him" and "wanted other men," a well-meaning friend or family member might have asked her, "Why don't you just leave him?" Listening to Jessica recount the struggle she and her children have been through, one realizes that there were a thousand reasons why leaving wasn't simple.

Jessica continues, "I had a plan to leave for two years, but whenever I was getting close, something would happen...one of the kids would get sick, the car would break down...it was always something.... Finally, when he got de-

ployed the last time, I knew that was my window."

Her husband's deployment made it possible for Jessica to leave the relationship without fear of physical retribution, but she did not have an easy time ending her marriage and starting again on her own. Once Jessica—a stay-at-home mom—informed her husband that she was ending their marriage, he quickly cut off her access to the marital bank account, leaving her with no money and leading to her eviction from their apartment. Jessica's eligibility for TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) was delayed, due to the fact that she was still married and had legal rights to her husband's income. After nearly two months in an emergency shelter without any access to the finances of her legal husband, Jessica started receiving state assistance. It was another seven months before Jessica received a housing voucher.

Despite months of hard work,



Jessica's struggle to establish a life for her family after leaving her abusive husband is not unique.

At this time in the greater Bangor area, the wait lists for subsidized housing units and housing vouchers run from six months to over two years. Families needing a safe place to live while they wait for a voucher soon learn that there are no general homeless shelters in Penobscot County that accept families. Spruce Run's shelter does take families leaving abusive situations, but has limited space, not remotely meeting the needs of everyone who contacts us. Many families must "couch-surf," commute to shelters in other counties, or use any income to rent hotel rooms, crippling their ability to save money for longer term housing. Many women return to their abuser or move in with another abusive person because their other option is to live on the street, literally. (con. on page 2...)



Homefront

October Conference Spruce Run is partnering with Wellspring and the Acadia Hospital to provide two days of training about domestic abuse, substance abuse and mental health. For more information call Kati at 945-5102.

New Grant Spruce Run is the recipient of a Department of Justice STOP grant funding a legal assistant position. This will help our legal program provide legal consultation and representation to even more people.

New Ramp Spruce Run's Resource Center has a new ramp for maximum accessibility. Our old entrance ramp had served us well for many years but had been backed into a few too many times. We love our new ramp and the fact that it helps us be accessible to as many people as possible.

E-newsletter We are excited to be working towards an e-newsletter which will be available next spring. If you haven't given us your email address yet, please visit www.sprucerun.net, click on Contact Us, and indicate you are interested in getting news from us via email. We are excited about becoming a little greener and saving on costs associated with printing our newsletter. Thanks for helping us act responsibly!

Housing Crisis continued...

People living with abuse need all of us to advocate for safe, affordable housing with our state and local legislators. People living with abuse also need their friends, family members, co-workers, neighbors, and religious leaders to not question their sanity, or say, "How bad can it be? She just stays there," or ask the seemingly ever-present question, "Why doesn't she just leave?" Instead ask, "How can we support her as she is leaving her abuser?" "How can we help her feed her children?" "What can we do to ensure they

have a roof over their heads?" "How can we support her in finding a job that will pay enough to really take care of her family long term?" Answering these questions will go a long way in removing the unknowns that often make leaving an abuser a hard choice.

**Jessica is pseudonym.*

By: Candace Sabol, Lincoln Transitional Housing Coordinator and Kati McCarthy, Public Awareness and Education Coordinator

SR Staff and Volunteer Attend NCADV Conference

Five Spruce Run staff members and I attended The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence's (NCADV) 14th biannual national conference from July 31 to August 4 in Anaheim, California. This year, the conference was co-hosted with the National Organization for Men Against Sexism (NOMAS) and the theme was Changing Faces of the Movement. The conference focused on child custody decisions within family courts, human trafficking, and emerging leadership within the domestic violence movement.

This was my first NCADV conference. It was overwhelming and exciting all at once. It was inspiring to see the passion coming from so many different individuals across the country. One aspect of the conference that

was very useful to me was the Formerly Battered/Battered Women's Caucus, made up of women who are survivors of domestic abuse. The women attending represented an array of cultures and ages. Each woman brought something different to the table, but we were all encouraged and supported in our common goal of finding a solution to ending domestic violence. The unity and togetherness from being among other survivors filled a void that I had and I found myself not feeling so alone in this world or this struggle of survivorship.

I look forward to their next conference and hope that more people, especially survivors, are able to attend.

By: BJ Grotton, Volunteer

Family Fun Day a Huge Success!

For the past several years, Spruce Run has thrown a Family Fun Day for families living in our residential programs who are rebuilding their lives after abuse. We know that costs of fun summer events can be prohibitive for many of us, so we make sure that every family in our residential programs has at least one day of summer celebration. This year Spruce Run's Family Fun Day included a bounce house, a cup-cake walk, karaoke, crafts and games for the kids, musical performances, and lots of delicious food, including snow cones. As always, this event could not have happened without the generous and loving support of our community!

Thanks to Governor's restaurant

of Bangor, the Hannaford Supermarket on Broadway, the Olive Garden, Shaw's Supermarket, the Brewer Wal-Mart, Longhorn Steakhouse, Chili's restaurant, and

Maine Equipment & Party Rental for your generous support! If we have inadvertently left any supporters off this list, please know that we thank you too.



Bear Witness with Us on October 1st

Every year during Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Spruce Run has a vigil to bear witness to the thousands of victims of domestic abuse, some

living and some whose lives have been taken from them. This year we are making a special effort to celebrate the lives of each person that has been murdered in the

state of Maine since last October. We will also specially remember Reverend Lyn Bradley, who served at the First Congregational Church of Millinocket for almost six years. She was an advocate for and a friend to those in need, while fervently pursuing peace; her presence will be missed at this year's vigil.

Please join us on Friday, October 1st, in the Veteran's Park in downtown Millinocket at 5:30pm. In case of rain, watch our website for an alternate location. We hope that you'll join us for a time of remembering, singing, lighting candles, and taking refreshment together.

You can help!

Fall is a great time to sponsor a drive! Is your greek organization, church group, community group or club looking to collect items that will make a real difference for families in need? Check out our wish list at sprucerun.net/you-can-help/wish-list/ for ideas about what to collect.

Do you like to cook? The first Tuesday of every month women and children living in our transitional housing program gather for a Community Meeting and dinner. If you or your group would like to take a Tuesday and provide dinner for approximately 20 adults and 30 children, please call Bev at 945-5102.

I Went Purple for DVAM, Now What?

So, you've got the purple lightbulb for your home, organized a Dress Purple day at your office, and donated a purple floral arrangement for your church's altar, but you want to do more. Well, here are some other ways you can raise awareness about domestic abuse this month.

Go to your local library anywhere in Penobscot County and check out the books Spruce Run has donated as part of our **Knowledge Empowers** campaign. We've been donating books for eight years now and there's something for everyone, no matter your age.

Get some shopping done and check out Spruce Run's table at **Community Day at the Bangor Mall** on October 16th.

Come see what has been going on at Spruce Run at our **Annual Luncheon**, scheduled for October 28th. Mark your calendars and watch your mailboxes and inboxes for more information.

Go into **Empire Beauty School** for a cut or a color on their **National Day of Beauty**. Proceeds from the day benefit Spruce Run. Or join Spruce Run, the Student Women's Association at the University of Maine, and other community partners for the annual **Take Back the Night** rally on the University of Maine campus. We'll post the dates and times of both events to our facebook page as soon as they are announced.

Watch our website's News & Events section for fundraisers and

other opportunities!

Or if you are thinking of something less formal... take the opportunity to talk with your kids about healthy relationships... commit to educating yourself by reading a book on domestic abuse... come by our Resource Center and pick up "wooden nickels" with our hotline number on them, and then leave them in bathrooms and waiting rooms wherever you go... "like" Spruce Run's page on facebook... write a letter to the editor of your local paper with your message about domestic abuse... invite someone from Spruce Run to come and speak about domestic abuse at your school, workplace, church, synagogue or community group... or come up with your own idea!



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