

SPRUCE RUN NEWS

Fall 2008

Change attitudes. Save lives. End abuse.

People Have Been Asking: “Will the downturn in Maine’s economy cause an increase in domestic violence?”

Poverty is not an indicator of meanness. In my experience, generosity of spirit is not proportionate to the size of one’s bank account or future prospects. Economic hardship, poverty, career set backs... all very tough challenges, but none cause a fundamental belief that it is okay to mistreat the people we love. In fact, people who love and respect their family pull together to survive such hardships most of the time. That doesn’t mean that they don’t argue, get impatient with each other, or feel trapped by their circumstances. It may lead to people saying or doing things they later regret, but that is not domestic violence.

Domestic violence is an ongoing pattern of coercive, controlling behaviors that perpetrators use to assert and maintain their position of power over their family members, including partners, children, elderly parents, and siblings. People who believe they have the right to such power and authority and are willing to use whatever means necessary to get it, without regard for the costs to their victims, will act from that belief system regardless of their economic circumstances. People who call Spruce Run for assistance come from all walks of life, and many have abusers who are well-paid professionals.

While economic hardship may not cause a person to be a perpetrator of domestic violence and abuse, it certainly strengthens the trap in which a victim is caught. To break free from an abusive partner is expensive: emotionally and economically. Victims of abuse may be clear that they want and need to get away from their abus-

ers, but they face the harsh realities of our economic climate such as expensive housing, food, transportation, heat, health care, and childcare, just to start the list. There are few good jobs that pay enough to support a household as well as a severe public stigma associated with receiving welfare or being a “single parent”. Couples with limited financial means can live ‘happily ever after’, and couples with lots of money can, too. How we treat each other is about our core beliefs, our hearts and minds, our sense of what behavior has a place in our homes, not our relative poverty.

When public officials are considering tight budgets and limited revenues, it is important to keep in mind that the “safety net” of public assistance, from domestic violence agencies to general assistance, to food stamps to Maine Care, is often an essential support for victims of abuse. It is this “net” that often makes the difference between a person being trapped in an abuser’s web of coercive, controlling behavior and violence and being able to create a life, even one of modest means, free from abuse.

Submitted By: Francine Stark

Upcoming Event!

Spruce Run’s 35th Anniversary Homecoming

When: November 9, 2-4pm

Where: Wells Conference Center, U Maine

A gathering of staff, volunteers, community partners, and people who have used Spruce Run’s services to mark 35 years of work to change attitudes, save lives, and end abuse.

Please call 945-5102 for more information.

A New Way to Give: Pay It Forward

The concept for the Pay It Forward project came from a film of the same name. An anonymous donor to Spruce Run was inspired by the film to look at charity and giving in a new way. Pay It Forward is based on the premise that we all have something to offer and there are lots of ways to give back. When people receive a gift (money, a scholarship) they should be given the opportunity, not to pay it back to the giver, but to pay it *forward* to someone else. It needn't be paid back in the same way; people are encouraged to think about their unique skills and what they have to contribute. The opportunity to pay it forward often inspires everyone involved: the giver, the receiver, the following recipient, and on it goes.

The Pay It Forward donor approached Spruce Run and offered to include us in this community-wide project. **We are delighted to be involved and hope that this spirit of giving continues; that it inspires others and gives us all a chance to think creatively and have some fun with giving.**

Community Groups Supporting Our Work

Spruce Run receives support from many generous community groups, including: **Delta Kappa Gamma, the Patawa Club, Altrusa, Lady Eagles, Zonta, Verizon Telecompioneers, Women with Wings, and Order of the Eastern Star.** Groups are free to choose how they would like to contribute to Spruce Run and help the people who use our services. Some contribute money, while others give household and personal products, gifts for children celebrating birthdays while they are in shelter, gas and telephone cards, and gifts for women on Valentine's and Mother's Day. Some groups cook a meal for women and children who attending monthly community meetings, some provide snacks for children in our kids' groups. All of these contributions positively affect the lives of families affected by abuse. We appreciate your support!

Supporting Spruce Run's work to end domestic violence can take many forms; contact us if your group would like to help.

Staff Changes

One of Spruce Run's long-time, hard-working employees, **Rebecca Hobbs**, has recently resigned. Rebecca has given so much to the organization over her 12 years with us, working most recently as the Resource Development Coordinator. Rebecca's fine advocacy skills, knowledge, humor, and passion for the work will be deeply missed.

VOLUNTEER CORNER



The volunteer Spruce Run would like to recognize in this newsletter is **Marvie Meagher**. Marvie has been volunteering for Spruce Run as a hotline worker since March of 2007. Marvie usually takes daytime hotline shifts in the office. We spoke with Marvie to learn more about what volunteering at Spruce Run is like for her. Keep reading to find out more...

How did you hear about Spruce Run and what made you want to come to volunteer with us?

I've known about Spruce Run for years because I used to work in social services. I liked the idea of volunteering because I wanted to be able to provide support and encouragement to those making positive changes in their lives.

What is your favorite part of volunteering for Spruce Run?

My favorite part of volunteering at Spruce Run is talking to people who call the hotline. I like to be able to help callers to process the things that are going on for them and to play a role in their journey to end abuse in their lives.

What is your least favorite part of volunteering for Spruce Run?

On the hotline, it is difficult when you can't find resources to assist a particular caller. Sometimes there just aren't resources out there to help and that is frustrating both for the caller and for me as the worker.

This work is tough. What keeps you going?

It helps me to be able to talk to another worker at Spruce Run after a difficult hotline call. I always feel like I'm working as part of a team and that I have good back-up when I need it for support, brainstorming, and questions.

If you are interested in volunteering for Spruce Run, please call 945-5102 for more information.

New at Spruce Run: Legal Representation



Spruce Run has been able to secure funding to hire a staff attorney. Since April of 2008, we have had the pleasure of employing **Suzanne Saunders Barrett** (pictured above). Suzanne provides legal representation for victims of domestic abuse in civil court proceedings throughout Penobscot County (such as Protection from Abuse orders and Parental Rights and Responsibility matters). Lack of legal representation is one of the greatest barriers preventing people affected by domestic abuse from achieving long-term safety and stability. We know that Suzanne's work in Penobscot County courts will positively affect the lives of countless people.

Community Highlights

Spruce Run continues to provide services in Northern Penobscot county and is excited to highlight some services available to the community as well as Domestic Violence Awareness Month events.

- * In collaboration with Penquis and the KARE Committee, we will be opening a **transitional housing** community in the greater Millinocket area later this fall.
- * Spruce Run is currently facilitating **support groups** in both Medway and Lincoln.
- * Individuals seeking **legal support** services can meet with advocates, by appointment, at both Lincoln and Millinocket courts.
- * With school back in session, educators will continue to provide **abuse prevention** presentations to area schools.
- * During the Month of October, all high school and public libraries throughout the county will display books donated by Spruce Run and MCEDV as part of the annual **library campaign**.

For more information about Spruce Run's work in this region please contact our Northern Penobscot County Advocates, Ruth or Suzie, at 945-5102.

Walk for a Healthy Community

On August 15, 2008, the Penobscot Nation held their annual Walk for a Healthy Community. Over 200 people attended the event, including some Spruce Run staff. Here is one Spruce Run staff member's description of the walk: "It was a beautiful day and Spruce Run had a really nice table set-up with our materials out and a huge Hands Are Not For Hurting banner. Adults and children alike came to the table and added their hand-prints to the Hands Are Not For Hurting banner **affirming non-violence in the community**. After it seemed we could not fit another hand print on our colorful banner, we walked a 2 mile loop around the island, stopping traffic and occasionally receiving the encouraging wave from passersby. Drumming started us on our way, encouraged us at one of the water stops and greeted us on our return." Spruce Run looks forward to participating in this event again next year.



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Spruce Run Services

If you or someone you know is experiencing abuse, the following services may be helpful:

24-Hour Hotline

We offer support, feedback, and information about options, with the firm belief in one's right to make one's own decisions and act on one's own behalf.

Advocacy

Advocates are available to offer information and support at local schools and Child Protective Services.

Legal Services

Spruce Run provides legal advocacy at courts throughout Penobscot County. We also have an attorney on staff who works with battered women seeking legal representation in Protection from Abuse orders and Parental Rights and Responsibilities matters.

Support/Education Groups

Women meet weekly to help each other by sharing experiences and offering encouragement and understanding to one another. They may bring their children to a children's group at the same time. Education groups provide insight into how our society and culture influences and responds to domestic abuse.

Children's Services

We give children the opportunity to talk about their feelings in a safe and fun environment through one-on-one discussions or participation in children's groups and activities.

Residential Services

We provide emergency shelter for victims of domestic abuse and provide information about other housing options. We offer transitional housing as an opportunity for families in crisis to receive housing assistance as they create homes free from abuse.

Training and Education

We provide training, consultation, and education sessions about domestic abuse for schools, employers, service providers, and other community groups to foster a coordinated community response to domestic abuse.