

Haven

Abused spouses of rich, poor find a home

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

From prostitutes to upper-crust matrons, they drive into the parking lot in beat old VWs and luxury BMWs.

Some bring only the clothes they wear. Others arrive with designer wardrobes for themselves and their children.

But all have one thing in common. The Haven is their only refuge from abuse.

"They come from wealthier suburbs as well as low-income housing," said Debi Cain, director of the agency. It is housed in a brick building in Pontiac which provides shelter for victims of domestic violence and their children. "We see women whose husbands have six figure incomes, but they don't have access to any of it."

OAKLAND COUNTY'S only domestic violence center provides temporary shelter and support services to abused men and women, as well as their children.

Started by the Pontiac North Oakland YWCA in 1975 as a rape crisis center, Help Against Violent Encounters Now (HAVEN) also counsels abuse victims and deals with incest.

"In most of the families we see, there are multiple kinds of abuse," said Cain, adding that 40 percent of the chil-

dren Haven works with have experienced incest.

With its 24-hour crisis center receiving more than 300 calls a month, Haven has seen the demand for its services triple in the last year.

MORE THAN 100 individuals, 17 churches, 43 businesses and 32 clubs contribute to the facility, which is also supported by the Department of Social Services, the Domestic Violence Prevention & Treatment Board, United Foundation, Oakland County CETA and United Way of Pontiac-North Oakland.

To help with the growing need, Oakland County's Circuit Court judges and Board of Commissioners last week awarded the facility \$42,000 in public aid funds.

The Haven is the first outside agency to receive the funds, which are taken from marriage license fees and go to combat the growing problems of divorce, domestic violence and child abuse.

Haven's director doesn't blame unemployment for the increase. Most of those Haven helps have been abused for years.

The stereotype is that people who were never beaten before are now being beaten. It's just not true," said Cain, a Bloomfield Hills resident who developed the domestic violence program.



Each family gets its own room in the Pontiac shelter.

"Most of those we see have been in abusive situations for a long time, although unemployment may have intensified the abuse."

ALTHOUGH THE victims come from all walks of life, most Haven clients share definite personality patterns.

Only one man has sought refuge from abuse, although the facility has housed a number of male rape victims. Victims usually are women with low

self-esteem who live in a "traditional" family relationship where they have little power and control. Often, they don't even know how much money their husband makes or what is in the checking account.

One was abused by her husband all 42 years of their married life. In her 60s, the grandmother of seven came to the Haven in order to get some happiness out of her remaining years.

A 35-year-old mother of three left her husband of 11 years after a therapist told her she was a battered woman. Now she has her own home and is attending college.

"MANY ABUSED women come here believing that's the way a relationship should be. They feel they should do whatever the man wants," said Cain, who has a bachelor's degree in psychology and is working on a master's in business administration with a focus on social service administration.

"One thing that the women's movement has done is open up some options. As women get more assertive and take on jobs, they are less likely to have to stay in bad situations."

Assailants — who sometimes follow their victims to the Haven or even out of state to abuse them more — have very definite ideas about a woman's place.

Often they too were beaten as children or witnessed spouse-beating.

Haven clients contact the shelter through the 24-hour crisis line, which is staffed by about 40 volunteers.

With room for just 30 families, the agency carefully screens callers. To qualify for help, they must be physically, emotionally or sexually abused.

If they are severely mentally disturbed or dependent on drugs or alcohol, they are referred to other facilities. And no children are allowed without parents.

IF THE assailant is likely to pursue them, victims are sometimes sent to other parts of Michigan or even other states.

Assailants do sometimes show up on Haven's doorstep, even though the address is not made public. And they are firmly turned away without information.

"At least 50 percent of the time, the wife really isn't here," recalled Cain. "But they're convinced they are."

Those accepted usually are allowed to stay 30 days. During that time, they get counseling, some help organizing their living situation and parenting classes.

"No spanking is allowed here, so we have to give them something to take its place," explained Cain, whose staff spends a lot of time with the children

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For many of those Haven director Debi Cain works with, abuse is just a normal part of life. "There are women who come in and think that's the way a relationship should be," said the Bloomfield Hills resident. "They feel whatever the man wants is OK."

who stay in the Haven.

"We feel they are the key to eliminating abuse in the future. It's hard for the women to break out of it. And sons who come here having seen abused are exactly the ones who will abuse their wives," she added.

"So we try to teach them other ways of dealing with anger."

SUPPORT GROUPS allow the women who stay in the Haven to share their experiences and help each other deal with common issues.

Sometimes they join forces to find housing, although most who go out on their own prefer to be independent for the first time.

"It's good for them to share; to find out they're not the only ones," said a volunteer, who became involved in the program when a member of her family experienced abuse.

"We spend our lives buried in the sand without realizing this can happen to anyone."

NOT ALL of those who head to Haven for help end up turning their lives around. In fact, 50 percent return home to the situations they frantically left.

And Cain — who will accept a client only three times during a year — says that number is increasing. "Now it's closer to 60 percent going back because of the economy. It's hard to make it on your own."

Haven offers follow-up counseling for the victims and will provide counseling for the assailants, who seldom consent to it.

"He usually sees it as her problem, not his, and won't look at why he's doing what he does," said Cain.

"Abuse is learned behavior and can be changed with counseling. But rarely will they come for it."

Staff photos by David Frank



Haven staffers and volunteers spend a lot of time working with children who have witnessed a sexual assault within their families. A large number of the youth have also been incest victims.

COUNSELING ADVICE

By Robert Goodwin, A.C.S.W.

MAKING A COMMITMENT

For most people, one of life's richest rewards is having an enjoyable, satisfying relationship. But many individuals have difficulty getting emotionally involved and making a commitment. The issue of commitment is important in a marriage as well, for the existence of a marriage certificate is no guarantee of an emotional attachment. It is a painful experience to feel conflict and uncertainty, just as it is most difficult to feel an on-again, off-again response from someone you love.

If your relationships always seem to reach a point of ambivalence, it is important to look within yourself for the cause and solution to the problem. Chances are that it is not an imperfection in your partner that is causing your difficulty, but rather an inner fear of which you may not be aware. Search honestly to see what is holding you back.

On the other hand, you are continually involved with people who are not able to get involved with you. It is equally important to "look within" instead of blaming them. For example, are you acting out some habitual, self-defeating pattern from your past, or are you nervous about meeting someone who would want to really get to know you? If such a pattern is present, it certainly isn't simply "bad luck" that you're choosing unsatisfying partners.

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