

# Batterers learn how to change with intervention

They're grown men, who batter their spouses or female partners because they think it's okay.

But the M.E.N.S. program of HAVEN is where they go to learn differently. Men Exercising Non-Violent Skills is what M.E.N.S. stands for. Each week in Oakland County, HAVEN holds classes for batterers, most of whom have been sent there by the county's court system.

"Batterers intervention is one part of what we call community-

coordinated response," said Kathleen Laprise, director of the M.E.N.S. program. Reporting the violence and getting help from the police department and the court is all wrapped up in making the intervention work, she said.

"Kat" Laprise explained that battering is more than an anger control problem. "He gets angry, not just with his partner, but doesn't strike out at everyone. He makes a choice. He wants control of the situation," she said.

Classes attended by groups averaging 12 to 19 men are held mornings, early evenings and late evenings. A total of 250 men are currently going through HAVEN's intervention program.

## Class visitor

Recently, this reporter sat in as an observer on one of two men's groups that met in adjoining rooms at a downtown church in Pontiac. Observers are not allowed to participate in the group

discussion, ask any questions, take any notes or tape record. Only first names are used and identities are not revealed.

At this early evening meeting, most of the 16 men were in their 20s and 30s and a few were middle-aged.

The two-hour meeting was an absorbing session where the men, who have owned up to being batterers, talked about what they are doing to stop their violent behavior. Co-facilitators — a man and a woman for each class — listened as the group leader, who is one of the batterers, conducted the program.

The group focuses by lighting a candle at the beginning of the class, and each person attending gives his or her name. Each man who wishes gives the name of a spouse, partner or child to whom he dedicates the class.

A small, fluffy toy duck, referred to as a "duckie," is passed around, just to keep the class centered on who has the floor.

## The hot seat

At most meetings, a question and answer session between the facilitators and the men is a

lengthy one. "We call it 'the hot seat,'" Laprise said. "I ask them lots of questions they don't want to answer."

Laprise asked one of the men to explain why he said he was "embarrassed" when he went to court with his wife. She got him to acknowledge that his purpose in apologizing to his wife, just before the court session, was really to get the judge to go easy on him.

"Batterers usually come up with excuses. We go beyond that. We keep challenging them," she said.

Sometimes other business takes up a lot of the class time. This night the first hour was centered around a man who declared he was not a batterer. He said he had a problem — with his wife. He and his wife had "a heated argument" and he told her to "shut up." She called the police, and he "turned himself in."

After about a half hour, the group got him to admit that he had been "arrested." He denied he had physically abused her and only admitted to verbal abuse. Facilitator David Garvin pointed out verbal abuse is not a charge for an arrest.

The man said his wife's bruises were from objects she came in contact with at work. He also said, "She bruises easily. You just have to touch her." He said he didn't belong in the batterers class.

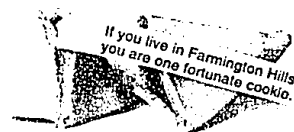
Because the first step is for a man to admit he has a problem and that he is accountable for it, the group leader suggested the class "vote him out." They did, and he left the room.

## In denial

After class, Laprise said that no one is kept in the program unless he acknowledges that he is a batterer. If someone who was in denial stayed, his partner would think he's getting better when he wasn't, he would just be sitting in class to avoid the consequences and he would not be changing his ways. Usually going to class for a year is in lieu of going to jail, for a misdemeanor.

The second half of the class was devoted to the question and answer session.

Class ended with 20 seconds of silence in memory of women who have been battered. Then, the leader blew out the candle



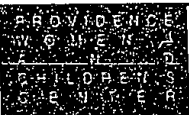
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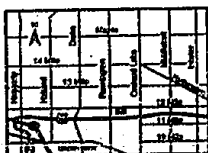
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Dr. Collins graduated from Wayne State University School of Medicine in 1986 and completed her internship and residency at Children's Hospital. She is board-certified with subspecialty training in pediatric infectious diseases.

Dr. Collins is a member of several medical societies including the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics. She is an assistant professor of pediatrics at Wayne State University.

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Through a collaborative effort with the Immunize for Healthy Lives Program and as a service to the community, we're having an immunization day on October 28 from 10 am - 2 pm.

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- comprehensive exercise equipment
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botford general hospital

If you should join on October 28, during the open house, Botford General Hospital will be conducting Mini Health Checks which include a Health Questionnaire, Blood Pressure and Cholesterol reading. During the first hour of the open house, they will also be conducting talks on Nutrition and Getting Started in an exercise program. So that you can begin on a positive note in your new fitness program (becoming a more energetic you) must pre-register to participate.



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