Project Woman Opens National Domestic Violence Awareness Month With Candlelight Vigil!

On October 2, 2014 at approximately 6:15 pm - The beautiful voices of Wittenberg's Just Eve filled the City Plaza...

Though the sky was not as dark as would emphasize the light from our candles, nearly 150 people gathered to remember those we have lost, to celebrate survivors, and to give hope to those that continue to endure Domestic Violence.

Most lives are touched by domestic and intimate partner violence. The impact of domestic violence is far reaching. The statistics are perhaps familiar – one in four women experience domestic or intimate partner violence; nearly 5 million children witness domestic violence in their homes each year; 1 in 3 teen girls in the US is a victim of physical, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner. To put this into perspective: US troops killed in Afghanistan & Iraq = 6,614; US Women killed during the same period by their partners = 11,766.

Women and girls can flee from abuse and violence. They can seek shelter, become self-reliant and empowered. But, the truth is there is a high probability that they will enter into another relationship that is abusive and violent.

95% of victims are women and 98% of batterers are men. In order to break the cycle of violence men must be willing to say to other men and boys...NO MORE. As Eli Williams (director of Fatherhood Clark County) challenged, “What would it be like if all men stood up and said STOP [the VIOLENCE]? …”

In 1974 Domestic Violence was a “woman’s issue.” It wasn’t openly discussed in comfortable conversation. It was a source of controversy. In 2014 – today – 40 years later it MUST become a “man’s issue” and a shared issue among all! In truth, we are all a Friend, the Family, an Ally – the Community – that has the power to choose to nurture, respect, protect, support and live violence free! Say No More...and say it loudly to everyone who will listen.

As the Vigil came to a close and the voices of St. John’s Youth Choir sang we “…Must Survive...” we were all reminded by lighting our candles that this fight continues beyond October into each and every day. We must provide hope to those who continue to endure domestic violence; hope that they can overcome and survive!
How Far Have We Come?

I would like to begin by saying “Thank-you” to Jean Martensen, one of the Founding Sisters of Project Woman who shared with me Edition 1 of ‘She Is...’ the original Project Woman newsletter.

Jean shared, “Given the professional pages that are created today with so much talent and fine design, it is fun to simply hold Project Woman’s old typed newsletter ‘She Is...’ with its uniform, duplicated pages, no artwork and few frills in one’s hands.”

In the first issue of ‘She Is...’ – Project Woman’s newsletter, an article appears called “Mobilizing WomanPower” by Ruth St. Clair (Project Woman interim board member) where she recaps a 2-day conference/rally where “those attending were all women; all ages; all sizes; and all degrees of experiences in women’s groups ... The conference affirmed the uniqueness of being an individual, the power of working together, and the expectation of reaching particular goals.” It is clear in reading some of the early archives from 1974 that the initial volunteers joined together to bring about change in the status of women. Only one of which was women’s safety but as Project Woman became an incorporated non-profit agency it took shape and became the 3rd established Rape Crisis Center in the State of Ohio.

There were many who gathered in those early years – Sue Collins, Barbara Kaltenbach, Ruth St. Clair, and Jean are only a few of the Founding Sisters of Project Woman. Perhaps one day we will have a complete archive in honor of the courage and commitment of those who paved the way.

In a later edition of ‘She Is,’ (1998) Donna Hart, then Executive Director tells the story of how Rape Crisis Services became the focus of the agency in 1974; citing a serial rapist posing as a Gallup Pollster who obtained information about women enabling him to access their homes and rape them. Donna stated, “Project Woman worked with the women; a composite artist picture of the alleged rapist was drawn; an arrest was made; and the rapist was convicted.” It was later in the same year that Project Woman expanded its services including the 24-/hour Crisis Hotline to include those who were fleeing domestic violence.
In 2013, the Office of Violence Against Women established a grant funding program to encourage Men as Allies in preventing violence against women.

And today...Project Woman celebrates 40 years of dedication to ending domestic violence and sexual assault through protection, education and empowerment!

In 1971, the New York Radical Feminists held a series of speak outs and a conference on rape with women's treatment by the criminal justice system. This resulted in the establishment of Rape Crisis Centers across the country.

In 1975 NOW declared marital violence a major issue. Also in 1975, in Philadelphia, PA, women gathered to rally for the first Take Back the Night after a woman was stabbed to death by a stranger no more than a block away from her home.

The Domestic Violence Prevention and Services Act passes in 1979 establishing the first funding source for emergency shelters. The annual budget for the whole national program was $200,000.

Project Woman becomes the 3rd established Rape Crisis Center in the State of Ohio in 1974.

In 1975, NOW declared marital violence a major issue. Also in 1975, in Philadelphia, PA, women gathered to rally for the first Take Back the Night after a woman was stabbed to death by a stranger no more than a block away from her home.

The Domestic Violence Prevention and Services Act passes in 1979 establishing the first funding source for emergency shelters. The annual budget for the whole national program was $200,000.

More than 10 years later - in 1994, the Violence Against Women Act is instated under President Bill Clinton. This was called an Act of Hope.

In 2013, the Office of Violence Against Women established a grant funding program to encourage Men as Allies in preventing violence against women.

The shelter, originally called the C-SAW house – Center for Safety of Abused Women, continues today in a non-disclosed location to provide maximum safety and security for those seeking shelter. Services have been expanded over the years to include a full continuum of education, prevention and recovery programming.

As I look through these archives including brochures, pamphlets, newsletters, etc. I see humble beginnings (an initial annual budget of $10,000) that are clearly infused with passion; passion for respect, equality, and change! 'She Is' cited the purpose of "Mobilizing WomanPower" – in 2014 we continue to encourage women to find their Power Within! In 1974 those attending that hallmark conference were celebrating the uniqueness of being an individual and the power of working together. Today, we ask everyone to do the same – take a stand against violence – with ONE VOICE, saying, NO MORE!

-Laura Baxter, Executive Director

Two pieces of Project Woman History- One of the first pamphlets (left) and the first Project Woman Newsletter (above)
Because it takes a Community...

Recently, local and national news media has been focusing on domestic violence. But, do we really need articles about NFL players to know that domestic violence is a serious problem everywhere? How did we lose sight of the fact that 1 in 4 women experience domestic violence or sexual assault in their lifetime?

Forty years ago, a group of concerned citizens started Project Woman to respond to Springfield’s domestic violence and sexual assault problem. Today, Project Woman is still educating, sheltering and helping to empower survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

This does not happen, however, without support from our community. Federal and state funds for non-profit agencies like Project Woman have dwindled as have charitable donations. If Project Woman’s future is important to you and to our community, as I believe it is; and if you are asking – “what can I do?” Here are some easy options:

Volunteer to help. (See our volunteer section at ProjectWomanOhio.org)

Just this month, the Zonta Club gave their time to decorate items for Project Woman’s Diva Night Out (Oct. 16: buy your tickets at ProjectWomanOhio.org), and the Wittenberg Women’s Basketball Team helped decorate the trees on the Fountain Esplanade with purple ribbons. St. John’s Missionary Baptist Church’s Youth Choir performed at the Candlelight Vigil (Oct. 2, 6:00 at City Hall Plaza) along with Wittenberg’s female a capella group, Just Eve. Like these organizations - You and/or your group can make a difference.

Become a sponsor for our events or consider a monetary donation:

April, Sexual Assault Awareness Month – Project Woman sponsors a 5K walk/run.

October, Domestic Violence Awareness Month – Diva Night Out.

Your sponsorship or donation can help us provide necessary services to those in need and ensure adequate community-wide education – everyone must join together to say, “No More!”

Be a Responsible Bystander!

Make sure that those that your life touches know that you stand against violence; connect those that need help; and share the belief that they can become a survivor.

Help us keep Project Woman healthy and financially secure for another forty years.

-Leanne Wierenga, Project Woman Board Member

Upcoming Project Woman News and Events!

Dr. Alan Berkowitz, Ph.D.
Bystander Response Ability and Social Change
Wednesday and Thursday, November 13 and 14

Returning this year to continue the conversation. SAVE the DATE and check our website, or call for more information about the series of discussions and events with Dr. Berkowitz.

Keep Up With The Latest News and Photos!

Check out ProjectWomanOhio.org and like us on Facebook for photos and recaps from Diva Night Out and our other October Events!

Thank You Sponsors and Supporters!