

Part 4: A few challenges of managing a shelter today

The early successes, as well as unintended consequences, shape many of the challenges that shelters face today.

See if the next few slides address a few that resonate with your experience.

Tension between creating a safe, shared living environment and supporting survivors' autonomy

“Oh my goodness, those awful house rules! I began to think I was in a branch of the armed forces. The rules were to be enforced without exception.”

- shelter worker, *Women and Male Violence*, p. 90

Facing the downsides of becoming more professional and structured

"[By becoming an agency,] we were driven away from the main issue, which is: How are we going to stop violence against women? . . .

Are we going to change the situation? Or are we just going to build a social service to meet the needs of abused women only to a point; we get that far and no further."

- *Women and Male Violence*, p. 111

More Challenges of Shelters Today

- ❑ Lack of enough funding for comprehensive support to help survivors get free, or to pay a living wage to workers;
- ❑ The myth of the “good victim,” vs. the complex realities of how survivors sometimes cope with powerlessness (such as using drugs, alcohol and illegal violence against an abuser);
- ❑ Pressure to cooperate with the criminal legal system and social services that hold great power over a survivor and her children;
- ❑ An artificial, national divide between rape and domestic violence services and agencies;
- ❑ Can you think of more?

Meeting the challenges

In Lesson 2 of this distance learning course, we will explore what a few shelter leaders in Washington State are doing to deal with some of these challenges creatively and successfully.

Conclusion

Activists for women's rights and liberation helped give birth to domestic violence shelters. The history of violence against women, as well as the history of organizing to stop it, helps us understand the challenges facing those shelters today.

"We were not alone because thousands of other women were doing the same thing we were all across the country. And we were not alone because we got so much from each other . . . So much women's pain came out in that building, but so much caring and attention were born. . ."

-Women's Advocates: The Story of a Shelter, 1980, from Women and Male Violence, by Susan Schechter, p. 39.