

Child Abuse: It's closer than you think

Ten-year-old "Tiffany" came to WRC's Counselor Debbie McClintock angry and defiant, and her mother wanted staff to "fix" her daughter. Tiffany had been sexually abused when she was 5; she had seen a WRC counselor at the time, but clearly, something else was on Tiffany's mind.

Tiffany arrived to her session livid and rebellious. When it was clear Tiffany wasn't going to talk, Debbie asked Tiffany if she would draw a picture of a person. Tiffany did agree to that much. Once drawn, Debbie asked Tiffany about her person. Tiffany proceeded to tear the person in half and threw the picture at Debbie.

"I told her she could put her person back together if she knew how," Debbie said. "I licked the edges of the paper and put it back together. Once dried, usually the pages are stuck back together. Well, this time it didn't work. And that little girl took great delight in my failure."

So she applied her craftiness to Tiffany. "I told her that I suspected what she had been through really felt more like this, and I began tearing that paper into tiny bits. I told her that my job was to show her how to put her paper back together."

Torn to shreds, Debbie told Tiffany that when something is torn up "first you cry." Debbie put the shreds into a coffee cup with water. Over the course of several weeks, Debbie took her through four more steps.

Step 2: People need help from friends. Debbie added a cotton ball.

Step 3: People need a bit of magic. Debbie added glitter.

Step 4: You don't think it can get worse, but it does. Debbie put the mixture into a blender.

Step 5: When you are vulnerable, you need support. Debbie placed the blender goop into a mold.

"This wildly angry child took this creation home at every step of the process. She didn't trust me to keep it, and she



wanted to see every step."

When it was all done and after five sessions, Tiffany dumped her dried goo out of her mold and found an angel, beautiful and strong. Through all the steps, which took five weeks, Debbie worked with Tiffany to get at the heart of what was bothering her – Tiffany felt that her family had not protected her from the sexual assault. "And that's a normal feeling for sexually abused children."

This process is significant on so many levels, Debbie said, and "it's a process I use with many of the children I counsel. It represents everything that we wish for all of our clients – you can have a life ruined but you have the power to put it back together, with tears, time, friends, support and of course knowledge."

Child abuse is closer than you think. Child abuse, sexual assault and neglect all cross the span of socioeconomic class, race or

by the numbers

315 children were helped by the Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley during Fiscal Year 2007.

Every **75** minutes a child is abused in Virginia.

Every **14** days, a child dies in Virginia due to child abuse.

Annually, **3** million reports of child abuse are made in the U.S.

That's about **1/3** of the actual number of child abuse that is occurring.

ethnicity, and religion. It strikes the rich and the poor, the majority and the minority, men and women.

Here at the WRC, our services to children have increased during the 30 years of our existence. What began as a mission to assist women turned into a mission to assist all those who experience domestic violence, including children – our largest growing sector of need. During Fiscal Year 2007, the WRC served 178 children as a result of sexual violence. Only half-way through the year, already staff has seen the same number of child sexual assaults within six months as they saw during the entire 2007 fiscal year.

Other children's services we provide include shelter, counseling and group sessions. During Fiscal Year 2007, the WRC

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housed 112 children at the Emergency Shelter and 25 children at the Transitional Housing facility. We provided 683 child support group meetings at the shelter and 239 at the Transitional Facility. At the shelter, we provided 239 hours of after-school care; at the Transitional Facility, we provided 172 combined parent and adult group sessions.

The WRC serves Floyd, Giles, Pulaski and Montgomery Counties and the City

"...You can have a life ruined, but you have the power to put it back together..."

- DEBBIE MCCLINTOCK
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
PROGRAM COORDINATOR

of Radford. Pulaski County is ranked second highest for founded child abuse investigations in Virginia (16.9 percent per 1,000 children); Giles County is ranked fifth (15.4 per 1,000 children)¹.

In Virginia, a child is abused or neglected every 75 minutes, and every 14 days, a child dies from abuse or neglect². Nationally, 3 million reports of child abuse are made annually, and experts predict that is one-third the amount of abuse that is actually being reported³.

More than 36 percent of all women and more than 14 percent of all men in prison were abused as children³. Children who have been sexually abused are 2.5 times more likely to abuse alcohol and 3.8 times more likely to become addicted to drugs³. One-third of children who are abused become abusers as adults³.

The WRC sees numerous effects of domestic and sexual violence manifest in children. The most common effects are:

Physical

- Bruises/Cuts/Burns/Broken Bones
- Headaches • Stomachaches
- Frequently sick
- Regression in development
- Physical problems related to anxiety
- Frequently tired/Sleeping difficulties

Emotional

- Low self-esteem • Depression
- Anxiety • Mood Swings
- Fearfulness • Anger
- Guilt • Confusion/Frustration
- Embarrassment • No healthy boundaries
- Feelings of worthlessness/helplessness

Social

- Can't trust others • Bullying
- Isolation from friends and family
- Turbulent relationships
- Poor anger management and problem solving skills
- Involved in exploitative relationships

Behavioral

- Extreme behavior • High risk play
- Sexual activity • Promiscuity
- Lying • Care taking
- Seeks attention • Mood swings

Educational

- Truancy • Learning disabilities
- Literacy issues • Poor grades
- Concentration problems
- Difficulty adjusting to school environment

With sexual violence

- Children expressing more feelings of overwhelming guilt and shame.
- Younger children may display excessive masturbation or sexual "acting out."
- Displaying more directed fear toward specific people.
- Displaying anxiety that the attack will recur.

With proper work, children like Tiffany and the countless others we see who have been abused won't be vulnerable to the effects of child abuse. Our hope at the WRC is that with the services we provide and other community resources the cycle of abuse will stop and that we can assist a child on their journey to healing.

April is Child Abuse Awareness Month. We would like to take a moment to honor all those who live with or who have lived with their innocence being stolen. Join us in our fight against child abuse. It's closer than you think.

¹The Virginia Department of Social Services (2007: Oasis), http://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/about/reports/children/child_protective_services/2007/rateofabuse-neglectper1000children_SF07.pdf

²Virginia Performs, <http://www.vaperforms.virginia.gov/i-childAbuseAndNeglect.php>

³Child Help, national child abuse hotline, <http://www.childhelpusa.org/resources/learning-center/statistics>



A moment...

In honor of April as Child Abuse Awareness Month, the WRC would like to take a moment and recognize all the children who have died as a result of child abuse. National statistics report that more than 1,500 children die every year as a result of child abuse or neglect – that's 4 children everyday. Of those children who die, 3 out of 4 of those children are under the age of 4.

Homicide is the leading cause of injury deaths among infants in the U.S. Overall, it is the 15th leading cause of infant mortality. Homicide risk for children is higher in the first year of life than any other year of childhood until the age of 17.

The Virginia Department of Social Services reported that 29 children died of founded child abuse during Fiscal Year 2006.

Our own community added to the overall statistics within the last several weeks. Evan Tucker McFalls, 14-months-old, died February 9.

They're not just statistics – they're beautiful, angelic faces full of innocence and curiosity.

With heavy hearts, we take a moment to remember them all.

Statistics from Child Help, national child abuse hotline, <http://www.childhelpusa.org/resources/learning-center/statistics>

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

Pat Brown



The Battered Women's Movement and the Rape Crisis Movement, both of which began in the early 70s, had everything to do with creating and delivering services to people who had experienced domestic and sexual violence. As a result, the Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley was established in 1977 as a non-profit human service organization in the New River Valley of Virginia. Its mission was to create a community free of domestic and sexual violence.

What those who founded the WRC had not anticipated was the impact of domestic and sexual violence on children. Children who witness violence and children who themselves are primary victims of violence have had portions of their childhood stolen from them. Our work as a society must be to do what we can to help children deal with these horrendous victimizations. From the fears and nightmares, let us help them find peace and happiness. From the self-doubt and self-hatred, let us help them find positive self-esteem and self-worth. From a childhood of violence, let us help them find

a future life of violence-free living.

The Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley strives to be a beacon of hope to hurt children and to provide them services. Last year, we provided on-going services to 315 children in the New River Valley.

But what if there were a way to prevent domestic and sexual violence from happening? Peaceline, our violence prevention program, is our part of trying to make this happen. We present 350 programs a year to more than 8,769 public school students in the New River Valley. We talk about domestic and sexual violence, boundaries, sexual harassment and healthy relationships. We open our presentations to questions, and invariably, a student discloses domestic or sexual violence to our staff. Not only do we teach violence prevention, but we reach children and youth who might not have found us otherwise and connect them to services they need. It is our hope that one day no child will be abused or will witness abuse. We know it is your hope as well.

In Peace,
Pat Brown
Executive Director

WRC launches new website

The Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley is excited to announce the launch of its brand new website, which remains at the same address, www.wrcnr.org. The website, designed by Access in Roanoke, not only has a new look but much more up-to-date resources for those seeking information and resources on domestic and sexual violence and about the WRC in general.

The WRC faced a situation several years ago when a woman had been raped. "The very first thing this woman did was go online to our website to find out what to do," said Executive Director Pat Brown. "It was clear to us at that point that the information on the website needed to be thorough and as current as possible."

That incident precipitated the organization's revamping of its old site. The updated website now includes:

- More in-depth information about domestic and sexual violence for people to read and understand.
- Links to other resources and information.
- Downloadable safety plans.
- A special section for teens only.
- A special section about children.
- Information regarding computer safety.
- Easily accessible information on how to schedule a presentation for you or your organization.
- How to donate to the WRC and what the WRC needs.

"I'm particularly excited about the teen section and the computer safety section because I think that teens access information online and through computers," Pat said. "We're constantly asking ourselves: 'How do we get our message to people who need our services?' This website is a targeted outreach to anyone who uses a computer."

One very special feature the new site includes is an "Escape" button in consideration of the unsafe situations domestic and sexual



violence victims find themselves in. The "Escape" button will immediately take a visitor from our site to a nondescript site in case someone's abuser is in the vicinity of the user's computer. Once a person hits the "Escape" button, the user cannot hit the back button to return to the WRC's site.

Another feature for the site is "Words from Survivors." "Not only does this page give survivors a safe way to express their feelings," Pat said, "but people who have experienced domestic and sexual violence are very interested in what survivors have to say. They want to find hope, and who better to give it to them than survivors themselves."

We hope that you will check out our new website. Should you have suggestions or feedback, please feel free to e-mail us at assistantdirector@wrcnr.org.



THE GIVING CORNER: **How you can help**

The Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley is a non-profit organization, one that depends on a variety of income sources. As we continue to provide free services to those in need, we find that our expenses, just like most households, are increasing. We continue to seek local, state and federal funds as well as private foundation and grant funds, but those funds are decreasing.

In Fiscal Year 2007, we provided services to 3,600 people who experienced domestic and sexual violence. We gave 800 educational and violence prevention presentations to 18,000 people within the New River Valley. To continue to provide the same level of service to those within in the New River valley facing domestic or sexual violence, we have to compensate for lost funds through private solicitations.

We are preparing to launch our annual fund drive, the WRC's annual solicitation to friends of the WRC. Those letters will be sent to friends of the WRC. We are planning several fund-raising events this spring. The first fund-raising event is being held in conjunction with Virginia

Tech's Department of Music. Pianist Lise Keiter-Brotzman, the Chair of the Music Department at Mary Baldwin College, is presenting a program of music by women composers, called "A Tribute to Women Composers," at 8 p.m. Wednesday, March 19, in the Squires Recital Salon at Virginia Tech. This program is supported by the Music Department, the Women's Center, and the Women and Minority Artists and Scholars Lecture Series at Virginia Tech. The event is open to the public and a donation is requested. The Music Department hopes to raise money from the event to go toward supporting the Women's Resource Center's general fund.

Additionally, the WRC has received a grant to host a fund-raising event. We will be hosting an evening on the lawn of the Inn at Virginia Tech on May 30. Details on that exciting event will be forthcoming, but we are looking for sponsors for the event. If you are interested in a sponsorship, please call Susan Dickerson at (540) 639-9592. We



anticipate tickets for the event to go on sale in April. Look for exciting details on that event to be forthcoming.

If you cannot give monetarily to the WRC, consider an in-kind gift. We have a list of needs for the WRC that can be found on our new website at www.wrcnrv.org.