



women's resource center
of the New River Valley

WRC: Historic numbers again

"Lee" arrived at the Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley after her husband abused her physically. Lee, 37, needed a safe place to be, food, clothing, medical care and rest. She found those things and more at the Women's Resource Center. She also found someone to help her navigate and understand the court system. While at the Emergency Shelter, Lee secured a protective order against her husband and pursued alimony payments.

Lee is one client out of the 4,292 served by the Women's Resource Center in Fiscal Year 2009. She is one face in the ever-rising numbers of domestic and sexual violence clients the Women's Resource Center is seeing. Many of you may remember that Fiscal Year 2008 ended with us reporting a historical increase in our services – a 37 percent increase in clients. We saw numbers last year that we had never seen before. It was expected as the economy was drowning in its recession. But what we didn't expect was another increase at the end of the 2009 Fiscal Year – 4,292 clients, or a 2 percent increase over last year's historical numbers. Still a number we have never seen.

While the Chairman of the Federal Reserve has declared that the economy is turning around and that the recession is over, the New River Valley remains mired in unemployment as it is now the second highest in the state with 8.8 percent as of July, second only to Danville, Va., which stands at 12.7 percent. But even economists are recognizing that a total recovery from this recession is likely to take a little longer.

With so many people out of work in the New River Valley, this year is shaping up to be worse on those living in the area

than last year. People's options for jobs are limited, so people face higher levels of financial distress or the possibility of relocation to a new area.

While financial

stress is pressing down on families, if domestic and/or sexual violence already exist in a family unit or between partners, that financial stress can exacerbate the potential for violence.

With that being said, some other statistics from Fiscal Year 2009 include:

- 14,358 nights of shelter in 2009, an 11 percent increase over the 12,931 nights of shelter we provided in 2008. Both are record numbers for the Women's Resource Center.
- 2,386 24-Hour Crisis Hotline calls were answered, a 15 percent increase over the 2,076 calls made to the Hotline in 2008. Both are record numbers.
 - 505 primary sexual assault counseling victims in 2009, a 13 percent increase over the 446 victims 2008. Both are record numbers.
 - 157 times the WRC sent someone to meet a sexual assault victim at a hospital to assist them in any way possible, a 96 percent increase over the 80 times the WRC met a victim at a hospital in 2008. Both are record numbers. Within this category, our numbers are broken down by the numbers of children and adults. Of those 157 occasions, 108 of them were to be with a child sexual assault victim, a 100 percent increase; 49 of them were for adults, an 88 percent increase.

"We are seeing more people with more desperate circumstances," said Pat Brown, Executive Director of the Women's Resource Center.

"People need more and more resources to help them untangle their particular situations and to help them along the way to independence."

The WRC is not alone in its record numbers. While it's a little early to evaluate the full FY09 statistics, some state numbers are already beginning to tell a story. According to the Virginia Sexual

continued on page 4



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

Pat Brown



Twenty-nine years ago, I was elected to the Board of Directors of a relatively new and small non-profit organization in the New River Valley called the Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley. (A little known fact: Founded in 1977, the Women's Resource Center was the first women's shelter in the Commonwealth.) Six years later I was hired as the Executive Director. I would like to give some perspective to the issues then and now.

THEN: We served about 200 women and children a year.

NOW: We serve about 4,300 adults and children a year.

THEN: We served mainly battered women and their children whose primary need was safety.

NOW: We serve women, men and children who experience domestic or sexual violence. Their primary needs are safety, housing, food, crisis intervention, counseling and legal advocacy.

THEN: We operated one temporary facility that served 14 people at a time.

NOW: We operate an Emergency Shelter for 26, a Transitional Housing Facility for 28 and a Counseling and Training Center,

which also houses our administrative office.

THEN: Our services included the 24-Hour Crisis Hotline and in-shelter direct services.

NOW: Our services include the 24-Hour Crisis Hotline, in-shelters direct services, in-office private counseling and support groups, outreach services delivered at hospitals, law enforcement agencies, courts, universities and public schools and extensive training, education, community coordination and prevention work to approximately 20,000 people a year.

In short, today there are a record number of people who are coming to the WRC for assistance because they have experienced domestic and/or sexual violence. We have made a concerted effort to "get the word out" to as many citizens as possible about our services. And even more startling, the people who come to the WRC, in general, have more complicated problems. I have never seen the needs greater. You have always been a critical partner to us in delivering services and preventing domestic and sexual violence. We need your continued help now as much as we ever have. On behalf of thousands, thank you for supporting the WRC.

In Peace,

Pat Brown
Executive Director

Empowering victims through the legal process

The process of going to court and being questioned by attorneys while testifying before a judge or jury can be frightening for victims. The seemingly simple task of walking into a court room or meeting with an attorney is also just as difficult and unsettling; however, there is hope for victims going through this process. Women's Resource Center staff, as well as other community agencies, are there to offer support – to hold a hand, to give a hug, to lend an ear – and help with each and every step to healing and recovery. The presence of these advocates can make the difference between a victim feeling alone and powerless and a victim being empowered to take back their control.

When people take the time to listen, to patiently explain things, to thoroughly answer questions, and to simply ask the victim how they're doing, the healing process is so much more effective. In the days and months leading up to a trial, both the victims and their family members may

meet with a counselor, a victim witness advocate, an attorney, a social worker, a detective, and other members of the community support network. They are given opportunities to ask questions, process emotions and feelings, and make decisions for themselves. Spending a few extra minutes with the victim to explain court jargon, to applaud them for standing up for themselves, and to encourage them to keep asking for help when needed, the victim is once again empowered and strengthened by the support.

The Women's Resource Center is available to walk the victims and family members through every step of the process. Before a victim enters a courthouse, there is a Women's Resource Center victim witness staff member or a Women's Resource Center legal advocate ready and waiting to meet them in front of the courthouse. The Women's Resource Center staff member escorts them into the courthouse and reserves a private waiting room to

avoid having to interact in any way with the perpetrator. This staff member waits with them, escorts them in and out of the courtroom and sits in the courtroom during the victim's testimony. The victim is never left alone.

Sometimes victims and their family members visit the courthouse before the trial, which can alleviate stress and anxiety before the trial.

A private waiting room is another option that can make a big difference in a victim's court experience. While waiting in this room, it is not uncommon to see victims, family members and support people playing board games, telling funny stories, cracking jokes and coloring bright pictures to help keep their minds occupied until they have to testify. While some might consider these things silly or insignificant, the effect of this shared time with the families is immeasurable. The sense of fear

continued on page 3

AWARENESS:

WRC sponsors activities for Domestic and Sexual Violence Awareness Month

As the overall numbers that the Women's Resource Center serves stands again at a historic level, awareness of domestic and sexual violence is even more important to the New River Valley Community. October is Domestic and Sexual Violence Awareness month, and the Women's Resource Center and Radford University have teamed up to provide the community with a slate of activities planned for this special month.

The Women's Resource Center is raising awareness about domestic and sexual violence by asking those in the community to wear purple and teal ribbons during the month of October. Purple honors domestic violence victims, and teal honors sexual assault victims.

"This is a simple and very obvious way for people to make a stand against violence," said Diann Diaz, coordinator of the event. "It conveys a powerful message that there is no place for sexual or domestic violence in our homes, workplaces or schools."

If you or your organization would like ribbons, please call the Women's Resource Center office and ask for Diann Diaz.

The Clothesline Project

In addition to the display of ribbons, Radford University and the Women's Resource Center are coordinating the Clothesline Project, a powerful display that bears witness to interpersonal violence. It is a way for survivors of domestic and sexual violence to express their emotions by personalizing a T-shirt with their experience with violence. All personalized T-shirts are then hung shoulder to shoulder on a clothesline for the public to view. The Clothesline Project started in Cape Cod, Mass., in 1990 and has grown into a national project. The project's mission is four-fold:

To bear witness to survivors; to help with the healing process for survivors and for those who have lost loved ones

to violence; to educate, document and raise a community's awareness of violence against women, and to provide a national network of support, encouragement and information for other communities.

If you have never seen a Clothesline Project, we recommend this event for you. It is powerful.

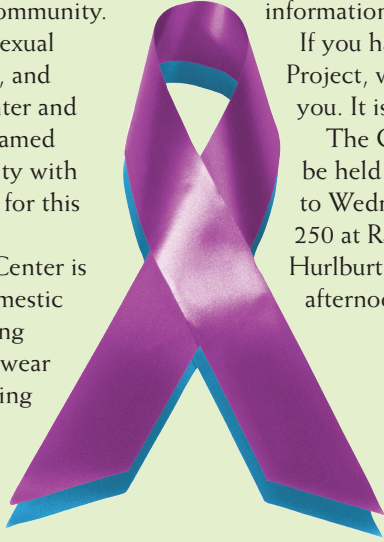
The Clothesline Project will be held from Monday, Oct. 12, to Wednesday, Oct. 14, in Room 250 at Radford University's Bonnie Hurlburt Student Center each afternoon.

"Take Back the Night"

A "Take Back the Night" rally and march is scheduled with Angela Rose as the keynote

speaker. Since the late 1970's Take Back the Night events have been held by organizations dedicated to helping women achieve safety and empowerment. Most events involve candlelight vigils, speak outs, marches and rallies in order to raise awareness about sexual violence. Angela, the keynote speaker, was abducted at knife point outside a mall and sexually assaulted by a repeat sex-offender who was on parole for murder. Now, she is a grassroots activist on issues of sexual assault. She spearheaded a movement that culminated with the passage of the 1998 Sexually Violent Persons Commitment Act in Illinois. This law enables the state to hold a sexually violent person in custody under psychiatric care if the person has been convicted of a previous sexual offense, exhibits a mental disorder and is seen as a threat. Nearly 200 convicted sex offenders have been committed as Sexually Violent Persons in Illinois since 1998. For more about Angela, go to <http://www.angelaroseinfo.com/about.html>.

The "Take Back the Night" event is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 14, at Radford University's Preston Hall.



'The advocacy and support victims and family members receive does not end with the criminal justice process.'

EMPOWERING VICTIMS: continued from page 2

and anxiety is often less overwhelming because of the patient, understanding and encouraging care that constantly surrounds victims and family members.

The advocacy and support victims and family members receive does not end with the criminal justice process. When the criminal process is over, Women's Resource Center staff continues to offer advocacy and support for the days, weeks, months and years ahead – this continued support reinforces the victim's sense of empowerment and recovery and helps them to move forward with their lives.

The sense of empowerment a victim has when they are given an opportunity to take back what is rightfully theirs is so much more possible with a strong support network. Without that support, the experience can be traumatizing and unbearable for the victim.

Staff at the Women's Resource Center and other community agencies play an important role in helping victims recover from domestic and sexual violence. The passion and dedication shown by those support people is evident in their patience with and understanding of victims and their families.

Through simple human kindness – a listening ear, a warm hand to hold, an encouraging embrace – a victim's life can be changed for the better. After all, it is human kindness and a desire to see change that makes the world a better place.



women's resource center
of the New River Valley

P.O. Box 477 | Radford, VA 24143

HISTORIC NUMBERS: *continued from page 1*

and Domestic Violence Action Alliance's data collection project, VaDATA, domestic violence shelters across the state reported a 14 percent increase in the nights of shelter in Fiscal Year 2009, up from 231,077 in FY08 to 264,056 in FY09. Statewide Hotline calls were up as well by 7 percent, up from 58,939 in FY08 to 63,085 in FY09.

Nationally, statistics such as those kept by the Women's Resource Center are harder to come by, but national statistics you can find are:

- Every 4 days someone is killed by domestic violence.
- More than 3 million children witness domestic violence in their homes each year.
- 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 5 to 6 boys have been sexually assaulted by the time they are 18.

the WRC provided:

14,358 nights of shelter in Fiscal Year 2009, an **11%** increase.

2,386 24-Hour Crisis Hotline Calls, a **15%** increase.

505 primary sexual assault counseling victims, a **13%** increase.

157 sexual assault victims met at the hospital by a WRC representative, a **96%** increase.

- 73% percent of sexual assaults are by acquaintances.
- Every 2 minutes someone in the U.S. is sexually assaulted.

There are some in our community who may think domestic and sexual violence aren't problems they should worry about, but we at the Women's Resource Center think differently. Anytime someone abuses their power over someone by using force is a community problem. We believe everyone should have the opportunity to live a violence-free life. Talking about the problem is always a first step. Learning about

the problem is another. Please take the time to see our related story on October's Domestic and Sexual Violence Awareness month. If you have never attended an event, we cordially invite you to attend. Consider it a personal invitation. It will take us all to create a community free of domestic and sexual violence.

DOCUMENTING OUR WORK

I would have "been sleeping in woods and/or fields in a sleeping bag and tent. Possibly dead in a ditch somewhere."

- A CLIENT RESPONDING TO A CONFIDENTIAL SURVEY ABOUT THE WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER'S SERVICES

The Women's Resource Center is participating in a state effort to better document from a client's perspective the work that we do. This effort is spearheaded by a confidential survey that clients voluntarily complete, seal and return to the state coalition. One question on this survey is: If you hadn't had the Women's Resource Center to turn to, where would you have gone?