

After Katrina Crisis forces shelters to be even more responsive to victims

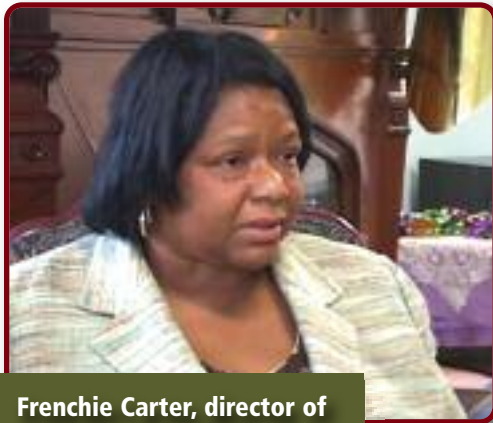
By Susan Bonne

Before Hurricane Katrina hit, Crescent House, a shelter for domestic violence victims in New Orleans, operated much like hundreds of others across the country. Then the world turned upside down for both staff and those who depended on them.

Crescent House lost contact with many of its clients. Their government contracts were in jeopardy because they had to convince policy makers that there was still a priority need for the services in the hurricane's aftermath. Staff members literally had to search for their clients throughout the city and beyond.

Strangely, what happened at Crescent House could be considered a true "blessing in disguise." Having to do more with less forced Crescent House staff to listen more closely to what was most important to their traumatized clients, so they could serve their most essential needs.

Listening healed and improved services



Frenchie Carter, director of services for Crescent House.

Executive Director Mary Claire Landry was forced to rethink how to respond to the women in her community and keep them safe. Because they no longer had the facilities to house women onsite, the shelter began to offer other options, including hotel rooms, safe houses, and apartments, and for survivors who couldn't leave their homes, Landry and her staff provided something even more basic: a willingness to just listen.

"The community was devastated; housing needs were overwhelming," recalls Landry. "We couldn't provide nearly enough. What we could do was listen to survivors at that moment, and find out what they needed."

What they needed, it turned out, was connection; under the circumstances, they didn't expect a bed—but they did need to know that someone was there to hear, and care, about their stories. As Landry and her staff listened, they

Continued next page

Executive Director's Message— Listen carefully to serve needs more effectively



Dr. Oliver J. Williams

By Dr. Oliver J. Williams,
executive director

Academics and practitioners who work to heal domestic violence are used to dealing with tight budgets and expanding workloads. As times in this country become more challenging from an economic standpoint, many of us are figuring out more and more ways to do better with less.

This issue will help us do that by getting us to think more deeply about the work we do. I have the privilege in the work I do as a researcher to work with domestic violence healers from throughout the country and throughout the world. Over the years, a primary lesson that I have learned is that we must be willing to *listen* better to the people we serve, so we can better respond to their needs. Fortunately, listening doesn't cost us anything but a little more time.

We have listened to what they tell us, which is difficult because sometimes what they tell us is complicated and/or contradicts the competencies we've developed. But we need to continue to hone our abilities to listen more closely. In the past, our primary objective was to get people to safety, which is a basic issue to attend to. Now, we're at a place where we need to listen and deal with complexities of domestic violence victims' lives. Our feature story on pp. 1-3 examines some of the organizations that have done this.

Another primary lesson is that victims have needs beyond shelter services -- needs to stay in their communities before, during and after shelter. This is important because victims need professionals who understand their cultural communities, so they don't have to educate them on that very basic aspect of their lives.

In this issue

In addition to the feature on the changing roles of shel-

Continued page 6

After Katrina (continued from cover)

began to learn that the traditional shelter model they had offered maybe wasn't what many women in their community really wanted, and that in fact, had been keeping a lot of women away, for a lot of different reasons.

Three years later, Crescent House operates very differently than it did before Katrina, in part due to scarce resources, but increasingly because they feel that the new way of operating that has evolved serves their community better than before. Now, they're proud that it more accurately reflects a broader voice.

The storm's mother of invention



Mary Landry

"It's just too hard, They're in crisis; they don't want to have to deal with other people's issues. They've been controlled; now they're going into another situation where they have no control over their living space, their food."

Today, for example, Crescent House has loosened its rules and regulations, welcoming women off the street 10 hours a day, without requiring lengthy registration procedures or limiting entry to standard business hours. Women can come with their kids, their mother, their sister, and whomever they come with can accompany them to the hotel or safe house. Women can drop in for a conversation or to feed their children lunch, or to relax, sleep, and just simply be in a place where they are out of harm's way.



Crescent House

Making Crescent House a warm and welcoming drop-in center removed barriers to entry that Landry and her staff hadn't known existed before Katrina. Other changes also stayed. Today, instead of providing traditional shelter beds, Crescent House gives vouchers for nights in hotels, or guides women to safe houses. If shelter is needed for more than a few nights, survivors are placed in apartments for up to two months.

It turned out that a lot of potential shelter users didn't want to make a move to a communal setting. "It's just too hard," notes Landry. "They're in crisis; they don't want to have to deal with other people's issues. They've been controlled; now they're going into another situation where they have limited control over their living situation. And staff was spending more time on sorting out disputes than they were on counseling, or helping clients in other ways."

The new model also takes into consideration the fact that many survivors don't want to leave their homes, but needed to be able to

"Before, it was all about helping victims leave. We need to define a new advocacy for victims who are choosing to stay connected to an abusive partner, whether it's because of the relationship, the kids, or other family connections."



Anne Menard

come and talk about what was happening, and learn about their options. It also better serves gay/lesbian and disabled populations, who tend to avoid traditional shelters, and enables providers to be more culturally sensitive, placing Asian or Hispanic victims in safe houses or apartments in their own neighborhoods.

The staff at Crescent House really feels like they're helping the women they see. Before, they spent more time on paperwork and on resolving community living issues and mediating tensions. Now, when a victim comes in, they're able to spend more time finding out what she really needs and then helping her get it, whether that's counseling, legal advice, support, children's groups, safety planning or access to other information.

Along with the changes in philosophy are changes in language to remove old labels and stigmas. Support groups are now family nights, and Landry says kids never hear the words 'domestic violence' or 'shelter'—"some clients don't identify themselves that way, and for kids who still go home at night, there's less chance that they'll inadvertently let a batterer know where they've been," says Landry.

While many domestic violence programs feel strongly about the traditional shelter model, new ideas and approaches are gaining support. Landry says that when she talks to shelter directors, many express an interest in exploring new ways of responding to community realities and needs. They point to struggles to maintain funding and staff, and like Landry, are listening to survivor points of view as well.

Supporting survivors who stay connected to their partners

A new paper recently released by the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRC DV) also examines how domestic violence advocates can be more responsive to survivors who seek help of a different sort. "When Battered Women Stay...Advocacy Beyond Leaving," written by long-time advocate and author Jill Davies, provides a framework for identifying some next steps toward expanding advocacy.

"Historically, our primary means of addressing abuse has been to help victims leave relationships," says Anne Menard, director of the NRC DV. "And while this remains very, very important, we find ourselves needing to define more clearly a new advocacy for victims who are choosing to stay connected to an abusive partner.

Some victims want to try to help their abusive partners get treatment and change. Others want their kids to be able to maintain a relationship with their fathers, if that can be done safely.

Advocacy that is also more responsive to survivors who, while wanting the violence to end, have good reasons for not wanting to leave their relationships, their homes, their communities.”

In New Orleans, after Katrina, it was very difficult for survivors to leave their homes, primarily because there simply was no place else to go, but also because after having been through so much, many victims didn't want to put themselves or their children through another traumatic event.

But there are other reasons why victims are choosing to stay in their homes, and there is growing consensus among shelter workers that supporting these victims is also an important aspect of their work. Some victims want to try to help their abusive partners get treatment and change. Others want their kids to be able to maintain a relationship with their fathers, if that can be done safely. Many have economic concerns about leaving, fearing that they won't be able to provide for or care for their children. Still others are concerned about their partners, given the disproportionate number of African American men in jail, believing they will not receive fair treatment in the legal justice system.

That doesn't mean safety and empowerment take a back seat to other concerns. Says Menard, “Safety is always primary. But we have an opportunity to provide more support to survivors as they explore whether staying makes sense—in the short and long term—and when it is not a good idea. The reality is, even after a survivor has left an abusive partner, often there is still a lot of contact between them, especially if there are children involved. How do we help survivors manage these ongoing contacts and connections? While answers are far from clear, it's clear that we must ask the questions.”

Menard argues that the best advocacy is to recognize how varied and complex survivors' circumstances and resources are, and to approach women as not just victims but also as mothers, employees, members of extended families, church members, consumers, and often very connected to their communities.

Doing more with less

In an era of ever-shrinking resources, doing more with less presents an ongoing challenge, and meeting a broader set of needs is not an either-or proposition; emergency shelter remains a crucial resource for survivors, and many survivors are looking for other kinds of support. How do shelters rethink and retool their advocacy approaches so that they are as responsive as possible to survivors with different needs? How do shelters better help women with economic issues—housing, jobs, education, childcare—and still provide core services such as legal advocacy, support groups, transportation and emergency shelter? Communities also differ in their needs, and what is pressing in one city or county may be of less concern in a neighboring area.

Where will the money come from? Says Menard, “Clearly, a huge challenge here is how to do more with less and balance what appear to be competing needs. We have to be persistent and creative. And we have to find new partners. Survivors are counting on us to be and do nothing less.”

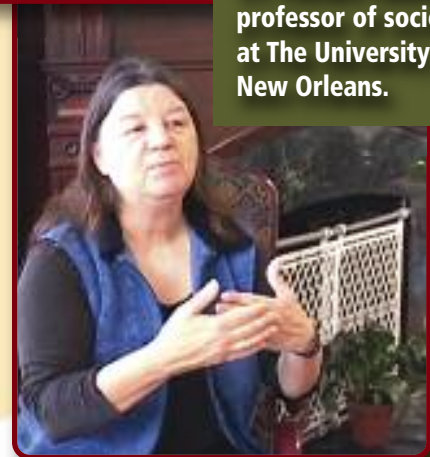
A copy of “When Battered Women Stay...Advocacy Beyond Leaving” can be requested by calling NRCDF at 800-537-2238. 



Lynnette is a victims' advocate at Crescent House.



Dr. Pamela Jenkins is a professor of sociology at The University of New Orleans.



Shelter remains a crucial resource for survivors, and many survivors are looking for other kinds of support.



By Kelly Mitchell-Clark

Ethiopian safe house provides refuge to survivors of gender-based violence

In Ethiopia, as is true in most of the world, women and girls face enormous social, economic and political obstacles, and the gender-based violence (GBV) they are forced to endure both stems from and reinforces their subordinate status.

In this deeply patriarchal society, violence against women and girls is widely practiced and takes many forms, including rape, domestic violence, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), sexual harassment, marriage by abduction and early marriage. Such acts of brutality are generally not viewed as human rights violations, and survivors are expected to suffer in silence.

Violence against women and girls that occurs in the family is usually tolerated and even condoned as an unquestionable cultural practice. Survivors who muster the courage to protest their victimization most often face ridicule, a lack of concern, and few options for protecting themselves or getting help.

While more research is needed on the prevalence and extent of GBV in Ethiopia, statistics currently available indicate:

1. Forty-nine percent (49 percent) of Ethiopian women who have been in domestic partnerships have experienced physical abuse by a partner at some point in their lives and 29 percent during the past 12 months, according to findings published in 2005 by the World Health Organization's Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women.
2. Fifty-nine percent (59 percent) of these Ethiopian women experienced sexual violence at some point, and 44 percent during the past 12 months, also according to the 2005 World Health Organization (WHO) report.
3. Three in four women age 15-49 have undergone FGM, according to findings from Ethiopia's 2005 Demographic and Health Survey.
4. Fifty-nine percent (59 percent) of rural girls and 22.6 percent of urban girls are married before age 18, reports the Population Council. Of these, only 14.9 percent wanted to get married, only 15.3 percent knew about the marriage beforehand, and only 19.6 percent consented to the union.
5. Eight in 10 women believe there are some situations in which a husband is justified in beating his wife, according to the Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey.

Emerging anti-violence movement

Despite these challenges, an emerging women's anti-violence movement is providing critically-needed services to survivors and their children; advocating for expanded legal protections for women; and working to change cultural and social norms so that GBV becomes unacceptable and, therefore, less likely to occur.

One of the leading organizations in this social change effort is Tsotawi Teqat Tekelakay Mahber ("Organization against Gender-Based Violence" in the national Amharic language), which was established in 2003 following a mobilization of women's rights activists who were concerned about increasing numbers of rape, abduction and physical abuse cases against women and children.

The activists were particularly troubled by the public's refusal to acknowledge and condemn these acts of violence. Based in Ethiopia's capital of Addis Ababa, Tsotawi Teqat Tekelakay Mahber (TTTM) employs a human rights framework in its efforts to create a society that is gender-equitable and violence-free. In January 2006, TTTM opened Adanech's Safe House, the first facility in Ethiopia to offer comprehensive support and services to women and girls fleeing abuse.

Like battered women's shelters in the United States, Adanech's Safe House works to rehabilitate and empower GBV survivors by providing temporary shelter, psycho-social support, job skills training, and access to medical care and other essential services.

The women and teenage girls – some as young as 13 – who find





“When they come to the safe house, many want to commit suicide,” says Maria, reflecting on how the facility changes the residents’ lives. “They are hopeless and all alone and feel no one cares. They think that they caused the problem.”

of TTTM’s plans to open the safe house and meeting Maria Munir, the dedicated and tireless member who would become its director, I was eager to support the organization’s efforts in any way possible. As a volunteer, I have provided technical advice and support on program development, organizational capacity-building and fundraising.

From the outside, Adanech’s Safe House appears no different from the other well-kept, cheerfully-decorated houses in its middle-class Addis Ababa neighborhood. Women talk and laugh among themselves as they crochet sweaters and doilies while their children play noisily beside a blooming flower garden. The residents’ pleasant demeanor gives no indication that, like guests who have overstayed their welcome, their personal memories of violence and pain refuse to leave. But ask the right questions and one will hear terrible accounts of women’s vaginas burned with heated axes; of 13-year-old girls raped and impregnated by men in their 30s and 40s; of young women trafficked to faraway towns by brokers, denied salaries and raped; and of women infected with HIV by husbands who beat and abandon them after the women’s status became known.

Maria and the 14 other TTTM staff remain strong in the face of these crimes against humanity, refusing to let them overshadow the growth, rebuilding, reclamation and emancipation that take place at TTTM minute by minute, day by day. “No matter how terrible their story is, I cannot cry,” says Maria. “If I cry then they will feel their situation is hopeless.” A photo album on a nearby table documents the profound transformations the women and girls have undergone with help from TTTM.

“When they come to the safe house, many want to commit suicide,” says Maria, reflecting on how the facility changes the residents’ lives. “They are hopeless and all alone and feel no one cares. They think that they caused the problem.” But at the safe house, “there’s someone to listen, someone who’s concerned. And they think, ‘I am somebody and I have a future!’”

Post script: Adanech’s Safe House welcomes contributions of clothing for all its residents, as well as educational toys and writing materials for children. To donate items, please contact Kelly Mitchell-Clark at kmd62_is_me@yahoo.com.

Kelly Mitchell-Clark, an ex-officio IDVAAC Steering Committee member, resides in Ethiopia where she oversees U.S. Embassy grants to community-based organizations working in the areas of small-scale development, democracy and human rights, and HIV/AIDS. ◆



Kelly Mitchell-Clark

refuge at the safe house are poor, lack support from family or friends, and have experienced repeated and/or severe violence. They arrive with little more than the ragged clothes on their backs, usually hungry and unwashed. Some are sick from HIV or in pain from severe physical abuse.

Most safe house residents are from Ethiopia’s vast countryside (85 percent of the population is rural) and come to Addis Ababa in search of better opportunities or to escape violence. Instead, far too many end up as poorly-paid, live-in housekeepers and cooks who are vulnerable to sexual and other violence by their employers and other men.

A refuge for women with nowhere to go

A common scenario is that after being raped, the woman or girl becomes pregnant and is subsequently thrown out of her employer’s home with no where to go, having no family or friends, and sometimes not even speaking the language used in Addis Ababa. The fortunate ones find out about TTTM after seeking help from the Addis Ababa Women’s Affairs Office, one of the women’s rights organizations, or the local police. The even luckier ones are admitted to TTTM, where they live from three to up to six months, depending on their circumstances.

Since opening just over two years ago, the safe house has provided shelter and services for 131 women and teenage girls and their 80 children, 32 of whom were born after their mothers arrived at the safe house. The house has already outgrown its 20 bunk beds that the mothers share with their children, and 14 more beds will soon be added. In addition to providing shelter, TTTM offers non-residential services for survivors through a Drop-In Center, carries out intensive community education, and conducts research to inform program development.

I first learned of TTTM’s work in 2005 after moving to Addis Ababa in January of that year. I met Dr. Konjit Fekade, one of TTTM’s founders, when I joined a group of women who were organizing Ethiopia’s second V-Day performance. After learning

Meet Tonya Lovelace

Project Manager for Women of Color Network

By Kirsten Lesak-Greenberg

Tonya Lovelace has worked in the field of violence against women for over 13 years.

“I choose to devote myself to the field of violence against women, because it has impacted my life both as a survivor of sexual assault and as a child witness,” said Lovelace.

Lovelace’s devotion to women’s issues, with a focus on women of color, has been unwavering. She attended the Miami University of Ohio and acquired a Bachelor’s degree in Interdisciplinary Studies. She then went on to obtain two Master of Arts degrees in Black Studies and in Women’s Studies both from Ohio State University.

In addition to these educational accomplishments, Lovelace worked as an adjunct professor at several universities and has conducted numerous trainings on local, state and national levels.

Lovelace has had many different positions related to violence against women. Among other major career accomplishments, Lovelace succeeded in pioneering two programs that support her goal of ending violence against women: Rise Support Group for women of African Descent and CaseWatch, a volunteer court watch program.

Lovelace has been the recipient of several awards, including Write State University of Ohio’s Women’s Studies Community Award (2001) for her work with CaseWatch, WROU Radio in Dayton, Ohio’s Black Achievers Award (2001) and SafeHouse’s Flame of Life Award (2001) for outstanding commitment to the fight to end domestic violence.

Currently she works as the project manager for the Women of Color Network (WOCN), which has a close partnership with IDVAAC as well as several other institutions.

WOCN works to eliminate violence against women and families. WOCN provides women of African, Asian, Latin and Native descent with access to information and ways to challenge systems and institutions to enhance their ability to achieve violence-free lives.

WOCN promotes the development of independent, women-of-color-led initiatives to serve communities of color. It also assesses government and tribal policies, programs and laws and provides women of color with opportunities to make a difference regarding issues that affect their personal and professional lives.

As the project manager for WOCN, Lovelace works with and oversees staff members, Advisory group, Mentor Project and consultants across the country who provide WOCN constituents and colleagues with the national training, technical assistance and support.

Through her work with WOCN Tonya Lovelace has had the opportunity to work with members of IDVAAC and attend IDVAAC events. Last year, Lovelace attended IDVAAC’s national conference, and most recently, Lovelace attended an on-site meeting with IDVAAC in New Orleans.

“It felt good to attend the meeting in New Orleans and to be able to support the one standing program in New Orleans after Katrina,” said Lovelace. “The program works to provide technical assistance on the ground to communities of color, which is consistent with the mission of WOCN.”

Lovelace has also participated in meetings alongside IDVAAC around public policy concerning issues that affect underserved populations in communities of color, fatherhood and marriage programs and violence against women programs.

Lovelace has included members of IDVAAC in work that she has done and would like to involve them more in call-to-action statements and work that WOCN has been doing.

“It’s one of my goals to work together with IDVAAC in many different ways,” said Lovelace. “As an African American woman, it is important to me to support IDVAAC and other institutions that directly serve and support communities of color.”



Tonya Lovelace

Executive Director’s Message

Continued from cover

ters in a resource-scarce world, our newsletter goes global with a feature on pp. 4-5 by IDVAAC Steering Committee Member Kelly Mitchell-Clark. Mitchell-Clark lives in Ethiopia where she works on community development projects on behalf of the U.S. Embassy. Her story about an Ethiopian safe house shows what can be done by a few dedicated souls in the midst of a country where abuse and sexual violence is experienced by half or more of the women who live there.

We’re excited about our August 2009 conference, which is currently in the planning stages. Please keep an eye on our web site, www.dvinstitute.org, as our plans unfold. Also, look for our next newsletter, which will focus on parenting after domestic violence.

As always, IDVAAC strives to be on the cutting edge of research and public education related to healing domestic violence in this country and throughout the world. We trust you’ll learn something new by reading this issue, and we welcome your comments.

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Institute on Domestic Violence In
The African American Community

290 Peters Hall • 1404 Gortner Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108

Phone: 877-643-8222 • 612-624-5357
Fax: 612-624-9201

E-mail: NIDVAAC@umn.edu

Web site: www.dvinstitute.org

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My Girlfriend Did It:

Considering the effects of domestic violence within lesbian relationships

By Susan Bonne

My *Girlfriend Did It*, a documentary originally released in 1995 by Casa de Esperanza, explores the dynamics of violence in lesbian relationships and examines the impact of the oppression that victims typically experience. This year, Casa de Esperanza has issued an updated version of the film, with a new forward and afterward delivered by singer/songwriter Ellis.

According to Amy Sánchez, Chief Executive for External Relations, the film's message—describing and validating lesbian victims' experiences in dealing with partner abuse—hasn't changed, but the new material adds a strong call to action to viewers, particularly the lesbian community itself: This is real. Talk about it. Bring it out into the open.

"Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people face unique challenges in dealing with domestic violence. There is a deep belief in our culture that domestic violence stems from gender issues between men and women—and therefore doesn't take place in GLBT relationships," says Sanchez.

The reality is, intimate partner violence occurs in approximately 25% to 33% of GLBT relationships, the same rate as for heterosexuals. Yet many police departments, human services workers and even shelters don't take victims seriously or are unprepared to handle GLBT participants for reasons that include institutional homophobia, a culture of heterosexism, or lack of training.

The courageous women profiled in the film tell us that lesbian abusers use the same tactics that men use to intimidate their partners, including isolation, control, emotional threats and physical violence.

Additional fears keep victims from seeking help

But lesbian victims also must face fears related to their sexual orientation in deciding how and when to seek help. In addition to the shame and self-blame many survivors

feel, lesbians may also feel internalized shame about their sexual identity; fears of being outed to the community or in their workplace; of abandonment by disapproving families; and even of losing their children.

There is resistance inside the GLBT community as well. The film points out that the lesbian community has traditionally held an "us against them" philosophy, of the lesbian world as a refuge for women—a place where men, and therefore sexual violence, are not part of the landscape. To admit that intimate partner violence exists within lesbian relationships is to shatter the myth of a lesbian utopia. Many in the GLBT community fear that raising the issue of domestic violence will result in increased fear and gay-bashing from the culture at large.

Yet the women who chose to share their stories of abuse at the hands of other women remind viewers that silence is a more devastating, and more dangerous, course—intensifying their sense of isolation, despair and vulnerability. Bias and prejudice within systems reinforce such feelings.

This powerful film, which also highlights these women's resilience and strength, is often used to help train advocates, police departments and social services staffers. For a copy, contact Casa de Esperanza at 651-646-5553, or at www.casadeesperanza.org under Products. The cost is \$150 plus shipping and handling.


Casa de Esperanza is a nationally recognized Latina organization that exists to mobilize Latinas and Latino communities to end domestic violence, and served more than 10,000 individuals, families, and organizations nationwide in 2007.



Take advantage of free resources available at www.dvinstitute.org

A wealth of knowledge is currently available on IDVAAC's Web site. www.dvinstitute.org is home to informative webcasts, useful links to external Web sites and a wide-ranging bibliography of publications related to the field of violence in African American families and communities.

If you are interested in how other African American communities are thinking about issues related to domestic violence, take a look at IDVAAC's community assessments of the San Francisco/Oakland area, Greenville, N.C., and Seattle. (It's located under Current Initiatives.)

The site also includes the newsletter archive, which features downloadable newsletters from the past 10 years, as well as conference proceedings and reports from 1995-2007. 



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issue**

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