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A Vision for Women

THE HISTORY OF
THE WOMEN’S CENTER OF WAUKESHA
1977 - 2007

By ELLEN LANGILL, PhD
When I was approached one year ago about researching and writing the thirty-year history of The Women’s Center, I welcomed the opportunity to write the story of the vision that brought such a dream into being in 1977 and the commitment that has carried it forward successfully into 2007.

I also looked forward to a better understanding of the many issues facing the founding mothers in the turbulent decade of the 1970s. In my past work in women’s history, the focus has been on national changes. In contrast, The Women’s Center’s story provides a clear framework to evaluate the local impact of these trends. My own past involvement as a member of the Center’s Board also helped me to appreciate the strength of its mission and the amazing dedication of so many women and men to achieving its fulfillment.

While we have tried to recognize and salute key Board and staff members in this history, it is possible that some important names have been inadvertently omitted. The story that follows is quite comprehensive, but, of course, cannot include every facet of life at the Center or the Shelter. For any such omission, I apologize in advance.

I am grateful to Bonnie Birk who helped bring the idea to life and provided the photographs and sidebar materials. I also appreciate the “Book Committee,” including Marie Kingsbury, Lynne Ketchum, Dave Helling, and Barb Applegate, who provided important insights and corrections. Several of the founding mothers also offered valuable suggestions. The copy editing of Fran Kritzer and the proofreading of Ross Langill have been crucial. I thank them all. Finally, I would like to dedicate this book to my two daughters, Kjersten and Kari, the young women at the center of my life, whose generation will carry the dream into the future.

Ellen Langill ~ April, 2007

Table of Contents

Author’s Preface...............................................................................x

Introduction (Founding Mothers).................................................xx

Chapter One, Beginnings 1977 ......................................................1

Chapter Two, The First Director ..................................................9

Chapter Three, A Shelter Home at Last ...............................23

Chapter Four, Facing Many Challenges ...............................31

Chapter Five, Through Turmoil to Transition .....................41

Chapter Six, Towards the Thirtieth Anniversary ..............55

Chapter Seven (by Bonnie Birk) Telling the Story ..........67

Afterword (Marie Kingsbury) ......................................................73

A Note on Sources......................................................................74
Introduction  The Women’s Center ~ Thirty Years

Can it really be thirty years? We have witnessed many changes. Our children have grown up, and dear friends have passed away. The greater Waukesha community has grown to accept and embrace the challenges The Women’s Center has faced as we have expanded our horizons.

Through all these changes, The Women’s Center has remained true to its vision, faithful to the original mission of helping women achieve self-sufficiency in a safe and supportive environment. We always say it would be wonderful if the NEED for The Women’s Center would go away, but as long as we have violence in our society - and as long as women and their families seek to build productive and healthy lives - we need to continue our life-sustaining work. The stories of the women and their families who have experienced this life-changing place have made this a most worthy endeavor.

We “founding mothers” are so very proud of the work that continues: the shelter, the counseling, the advocacy, the support, the active engagement in the community and the leadership in the realm of services for women and children. We are deeply aware of the dedication along with emotional and physical energy it takes to lead and staff this organization. We are keenly aware of the personal and financial resources the Board of Directors and development staff must attract to ensure and preserve the good work that goes on every day. And we are grateful and honored that so many people share our vision, and put their energy and resources on the line to continue the work of the Center.

Our dear friends and founders Kathryn Bemmann and Jeri Phillips would also be very proud and grateful. We feel they were taken from us too soon. Their leadership and dedication to peace are precious gifts. Their legacy is The Women’s Center. It would never have become what it is today without them.

We offer our heartfelt thanks to author Ellen Langill as well as to Barb Applegate, Bonnie Birk, Lynne Ketchum, Dave Helling and Marie Kingsbury for their tireless work on the “herstory” of the Center. We appreciate having these memories and reflections in one place. We hope the reader will enjoy the story, and be inspired to join in the continuing narrative of The Women’s Center as it unfolds.

Anne Beyers, Kathie Kueht, Gerry Pas
Founding Mothers ~ April 2007

Chapter One

Beginnings ~ 1977

In May of 1977, a small group of courageous women made the decision to establish a center for women in Waukesha, Wisconsin. These five women had a vision which they brought into being - a center for job training, personal empowerment, counseling, safety and security from abuse, and a place for sisterhood to blossom for years to come. Three decades later, The Women’s Center celebrates its anniversary as one of the country’s oldest such havens for women. During this same thirty years, the struggle for women’s equality and empowerment was being renewed in America as the turbulent decades of the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the beginning of the “second wave” of the women’s rights movement.

OUT OF THE PAST

This second wave in the struggle for women’s full equality came to fruition in the 1960s, taking over the unfinished agenda from the earlier women’s movement. Forty years earlier, in 1920, the country had finally ratified the Susan B. Anthony 19th Amendment to the federal Constitution granting women the right to vote - a victory that had taken more than seventy years to achieve.

This victory, however, was followed by many setbacks for women throughout the 1930s, with the great Depression; the 1940s, with the Second World War; and the conservative 1950s.

Yet, a quiet revolution was brewing by 1960 as American women harkened to the voices of female leaders such as Eleanor Roosevelt, who spoke out strongly just before her death. In 1962, she sounded a note of hope, saying, “I feel confident that in the years ahead many of the remaining outmoded barriers to women’s aspirations will disappear.” However, Roosevelt, like Susan B. Anthony before her, would not live to see the vision become reality.

Roosevelt’s spirit and her words of encouragement inspired a young journalist, Betty Friedan, to engage in research about the status and perceptions of women. She did an extensive survey in the early 1960s to find the root causes of “the problem that has no name” which afflicted thousands of American women who felt imprisoned by the conservative beliefs of the 1950s.

SIGNS OF HOPE

Friedan’s work was published in 1963 as The Feminine Mystique, a book that lit a bonfire for the reinvigoration of women’s
rights. The same year, President Kennedy signed the country’s first Equal Pay Act, sponsored by Congresswoman Edith Green of Oregon. The next year, following Kennedy’s death, President Lyndon Johnson signed an even more momentous bill into law, the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Fearing that they would be left out of civil rights again, as women had been during the Civil War’s amendment for equality a century before, Representative Martha W. Griffiths (from Michigan) spoke to her fellow Congressmen and Congresswomen urging the inclusion of rights for women in the bill. As debate continued, one Southern representative agreed to put a clause against sex discrimination into Title VII of the bill, doing so as a joke and as a ploy to defeat the whole measure which he hotly opposed. Griffiths heard the derisive laughter of her fellow representatives when the full bill was read and she rose to chastise them saying, “I presume that if there had been any necessity to point out that women were a second-class sex, this laughter would have proved it.” The measure passed 168-133, with the provision against discrimination based on sex included in Title VII. As passage was announced, one woman stood up in the gallery above Congress and exulted, “We made it...we are human!” Another milestone was reached, although no women were invited to be present at the bill’s subsequent signing ceremony in July 1964.

Two years later in 1966, Friedan and Wisconsin leader Kay Clarenbach spearheaded the formation of the National Organization for Women. They noted that, despite the new equal pay law and Title VII, there were still hundreds of cases of discrimination that went unheared and unheeded. In its first year of guaranteeing equal pay, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) received more than 4,000 cases regarding sex discrimination in wages, but few were resolved.

By the late 1960s, the momentum for women’s rights was accelerating across the country. The racial protests of the Civil Rights movement were also receiving increased media attention under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and also Shirley Chisholm, an outstanding Black feminist. After an unsuccessful bid for the presidency in 1969, Chisholm noted at a women’s rights meeting that “I have been far oftener discriminated against because I am a woman than because I am Black.”

The Issue of Women’s Safety

By 1970, the struggle for equal pay and full citizenship broadened its focus to the issues of women's safety, rape prevention and domestic violence. American law had a long and very checkered history of protecting - or not protecting - women from such abuse. As early as 1641 in Massachusetts, the “Body of Liberties” included a provision against wife beating. Enforcement of this rule, however, was very lax. It was more common to witness a wife in the stocks and pillory of a New England town for being a “shrew” than it was to see her husband there for beating her. In fact, folk wisdom came to allow wife beating if the stick were no thicker than a man’s thumb - the infamous “rule of thumb.”

By the late 1860s, many states passed statutes allowing a husband to discipline his wife if “no permanent injury resulted.” However, a century later in the 1960s, the incidences of domestic violence had come to the forefront of the renewed women’s movement. However, the American Bar Association recommended in 1960 that such domestic abuse be treated quietly as a police matter “without reliance upon criminal or disorderly conduct laws.” It was a problem that many leaders still wanted to sweep under the rug. The subsequent defeat of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution was a further discouragement.

The reluctance to act in cases of domestic abuse was strongly challenged in a pathbreaking book that highlighted the stories of thousands of American women who were victims. Believing that women should keep quiet no longer about the issue, author Del Martin published the book *Battered Wives* in the early 1970s. It sounded the alarm of dire consequences if the issue remained “under the rug.”

Following from Martin’s powerful study, the women’s movement began to focus on the issues of women as victims of violence - rape or domestic abuse. In 1975, a study of the problem and a recommendation for full legal and social remedies was published under the title National Family Violence Survey. The study showed that more than two million American women were victims of such abuse each year, amounting to sixteen percent of all families. Clearly, it was an issue arousing public awareness and concern that had to be treated seriously by law enforcement and groups working for women’s safety and security.

Following the publication of the survey, many women’s groups across the country began to organize support groups, victim’s assistance programs, and to lobby for better police protection. In 1975, the Women’s Coalition in Milwaukee formed a Task Force on Battered Women which worked to publicize the problem and to seek remedies. The following year, the Task Force held Wisconsin’s first statewide conference on domestic violence with more than two hundred women from communities across the state in attendance.
Out of this crucial meeting in 1976 came the Wisconsin Coalition Against Woman Abuse (now the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence). The coalition began to coordinate local efforts with funding from the new federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) which provided some funding for safety, shelter, and support. LEAA trained volunteers to serve as advocates for abused women who were taking action in court.

In Waukesha, several members of the local chapter of NOW had begun to study the problem of domestic abuse and vowed to take action. Local professionals, including Jeri Phillips and Anne Beyers, who worked in the counseling field, spearheaded a study of the problem in Waukesha in the summer of 1976 as part of the domestic violence task force of NOW. Surveying local attorneys, judges, doctors, and social workers, the study showed that Waukesha had a pressing need for such victim services and support for abused women.

Although many people believed that “rape doesn’t happen in Waukesha,” these women knew better from their own experience as counselors. They put up posters with the query, “Have you been raped?” to try to reach victims and heighten public awareness. However, most of the posters were simply ripped down. The Waukesha NOW organization wanted to focus on political action as opposed to direct service, so five women leaders decided to go out on their own to begin a program in Waukesha. As Beyers noted, “We thought it was more important to do direct service rather than just talking about it.”

**Founding the Women’s Center**

These five women became known as the “founding mothers” as their vision became reality early in 1977. Meeting in their living rooms with their young children surrounding them, these five brought the dream to life. They included Gerry Pas and Jeri Phillips, counselors in Waukesha; Dr. Kathryn Bemmann, a local psychiatrist who worked with women in crisis; Kathie Kueht, a leader of NOW and a counselor at Carroll College; and Anne Beyers, who had worked with a shelter program in Michigan before her move to Waukesha. Their collective expertise and professional experience gave them confidence that a women’s center in Waukesha could make a significant difference for the community.

Jeri Phillips highlighted this need for a change in attitude and approach. The old way was to tell women victims: “Adjust to your situation. Cope with it. Something’s wrong with you!” The new philosophy at The Women’s Center would be “You can change it. We’ll help you.”

In late 1976, the women’s plans began to take shape as they sought funding and the assistance of other local leaders. Waukesha’s Mental Health Center took rape calls on its crisis line, and its director Anita Heimsch offered the founding mothers vital assistance in their efforts. After considering calling it the Women’s Resource Center, the founding mothers decided to name it simply The Women’s Center. Attorney Charlie Phillips assisted with the incorporation papers, drawn up to bring it to life as a non-profit 501(c)3 in January 1977. As the founders outlined their plans on paper, the Center would provide counseling and victim assistance in the areas of sexual assault and domestic abuse, conduct job training workshops for displaced homemakers, hold support groups for women in crisis, and offer on-site child care. All of the services would be provided free of charge.

The five founding mothers divided up the early tasks with Phillips providing counseling and group leadership, Kueht working to raise money and find a home base, Pas developing programs and keeping the books, Beyers steering the child care services, and Bemmann bringing in financial support from the professional community. Bemmann recalled an incident where she was asking medical colleagues for donations to help the Center. When one doctor asked her the location of a specialized clinic in the area, she responded that she would find out for him, but it would cost him $100! He cheerfully paid; every donation was crucial.

The five leaders outlined their goals to “provide information and counseling for women...to coordinate with local educational institutions, industry, social and governmental agencies...to bring together unmet community needs with [available] human resources.” More specifically, their short-term goals included two key ideas: the establishment of a shelter for battered women and the provision of a host of programs for women’s empowerment. Jeri Phillips and Anne Beyers described their initial vision as a “dream to provide safety for women and children at a place where women could help women on a journey of recovery.”

The five also stayed very busy giving speeches throughout the area to spread the word about the Center’s services and also to raise money. Area churches responded with early donations and offers of volunteer support. The group even went on television shows like the “Red Hall Show” on August 28, 1977. As Beyers noted, “We worked for publicity, especially free publicity. To anybody who listens, we talk.”

The earliest meetings of these five founders brought the programs to life, but the Center did not yet have a home or functioning staff. Securing a site was vital, but there were limited resources - a few early donations and some limited funding from the federal Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). The group did not want a clinical or office-like space, but rather a warmer, more welcome environment in part of a home.

While the search for quarters continued, Beyers and Pas took training offered by the federal Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program to prepare themselves to staff the program when it could begin in earnest, receiving a small stipend for this early work. In the meantime, Kathie Kueht searched throughout Waukesha for a suitable site, finally finding a small set of rooms in an old home on North Grand Avenue. She signed the lease for the first floor suite at 419 North Grand, with Bemmann donating money for the first month’s rent of $400 and the others also pitching in for start-up costs. The Women’s Center had a home at last!

**At Home on North Grand Avenue**

The official opening of this home base for The Women’s Center was celebrated on May 15, 1977 – a dream come true. However, so many women came to its doors for help that the staff had to utilize any available space or even a small corner to meet with clients. One day as they were all scrubbing floors and painting walls, a woman walked in and asked a few questions. Phillips told her about the Center and the woman burst into tears. She had a terrible problem and needed to talk. Looking around, Phillips realized that the only available space was the bathroom, so they retired there for a counseling session, with the woman perched on the toilet lid and Phillips on the rim of the bathtub.
"How It All Began"
by Gerry Pas, Founding Mother

It was Anne’s (Beyers Houston) idea, having already achieved the founding of Everywoman’s Place in Muskegon, MI. She told us about that during a NOW meeting, in the context of working on the task force for sexual assault and domestic abuse. Kathie Kueht had ideas about organizing and getting public funding. Jerry Phillips and Anne had images of the counseling and child care components. Kathy Bennmann started making a list of her doctor friends who could make contributions. My role was administrative; I put information together that could be morphed into funding proposals, budgets, organization charts, publicity/promotion, news releases, and so forth.

I think we were in Anne’s living room when we made a list of things we would need: a place, a source of money, legal nonprofit status, workers, promotion, community contacts, etc. Kathie K found the first site, the building on Grand Ave, that had first floor space available. Kathy B wrote the first rent check. Charlie Phillips did the legal work to make the organization a 501(c)3 corporation. We all wrote checks for a checking account. Kathie K came up with the first logo and utilized resources at Carroll College for printing. We also obtained a lot of office furniture from Carroll.

We found a wonderful resource in Margaret Brandt; she was familiar with government funding and foundations; she coached us on how to dress when meeting with foundation people (not jeans or denim skirts - hence our joke about needing “foundation garments”) and even how to choose a table in a restaurant if we were meeting for lunch. Over a number of visits with her she coached us through our first VISTA Volunteer grant proposal.

At first the focus was on crisis counseling and support groups, with child care available on site. We also offered classes or events that would engage all women, not just victims of abuse. We had classes in car maintenance, money management and book groups. In the early years, I was on the program and services committee, and was instrumental in putting such programs together, and in promoting the programs in the community.

At the first board meeting, it was agreed that Gerry Pas would serve as program coordinator and de facto part-time director until sufficient funding could be secured. A beginning grant of $20,000 from CETA provided for the first year’s rent and salaries for one full-time counselor, Peg Grimm, and an office manager, Judy Keller. Pas took on the position of director with only a small office used by Pas and Beyers, a sun porch that later became the director’s office, a small child care room off of the kitchen, and a space for Judy Keller, the first receptionist.

The Center’s budget for the first three months, on top of rent, included $61 for new stationery; $20 for supplies, brochures and mailing; and $12 to continue a membership with VISTA for its volunteers and for ongoing funding support. As the day of the open house approached, the tasks multiplied and the Men’s Auxiliary agreed to handle all of the refreshments for the August 26th event.

The Center was always busy with counseling sessions and group meetings, although the telephone was restricted for crisis calls and scheduling sessions. At first counselors had to supply their own insurance since the Center budget could not provide coverage for malpractice. Volunteer homes were secured so that a woman in danger from abuse could find safety and shelter with a volunteer who would take her in. These first “home volunteers” were true heroines who opened their homes and hearts to victims and even provided emergency transportation in the middle of the night to pick up a woman and her children who were in danger.

The first open house was a huge success with many members of the Waukesha community visiting the rooms and hearing about the programs being offered. At one point the family nature of the Center was vividly illustrated as a young toddler (Beyer’s son) came into the room clad only in a diaper with an empty diaper box on his head. He had walked happily out of the child care room to see where the party was! “It certainly broke the ice,” recalled one participant.

The open house showed off the Center’s six rooms, which included a large living room for client meetings and welcoming, an office used by Pas and Beyers, a sun porch that later became the director’s office, a small child care room off of the kitchen, and a space for Judy Keller, the first receptionist. The Century Fence Company (through Tony and Andrea Bryant) donated a fence so that the outdoor yard could be safely used for child care play time. The Center’s

She knew she couldn’t pay anything for the help she needed, but had brought a basket of eggs to try to compensate the Center. She disclosed that she had been abused for all of her married life and only now saw a way to get help. The new Board of Directors of The Women’s Center held its first official meeting on May 19, 1977 with the five founders joined by Kaye Lorraine, Sylvia Garcia and Sandy Villa. By the June meeting, the Board had added members with special skills, such as Lisa Sommers. Treasurer Beyers reported at that meeting that the bank account had $165 on hand and that $125 in new donations had been received the first month.

It was decided to hold an official “open house” to publicize the Center’s existence and to recruit volunteers and, hopefully, interest additional individual and corporate donors. Pas and Garcia began to work on a logo so that invitations could go out to many in the community to join the effort.

By the end of June, a brochure of program offerings was ready for distribution and a proposal for assistance from United Way was being readied for submission. The recruitment of new board members also topped the list as the tasks of staffing were becoming almost overwhelming for the small group.

Volunteers furnished the small suite of rooms, even sewing curtains for the child care room. The green metal desks came from unused stock at nearby Carroll College through Kueht’s efforts as a counselor there. The Center’s budget for the first three months, on top of rent, included $61 for new stationery; $20 for supplies, brochures and mailing; and $12 to continue a membership with VISTA for its volunteers and for ongoing funding support. As the day of the open house approached, the tasks multiplied and the Men’s Auxiliary agreed to handle all of the refreshments for the August 26th event.

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neighbors got used to seeing the children enjoying the out of doors, and a nearby dentist even began to purchase play things, such as a large ball, to offer to them.

By the end of August more donations had come in, and the treasury had grown to $1006, with $900 in new donations. Happily, the Board voted to pay the $75 monthly telephone bill, the rent of $400, and $65 for miscellaneous supplies. The new Women’s Center had survived its first nine months as a legal entity and its first three months in its new home.

At the close of its first seven months, The Women’s Center had served more than three dozen women each month and had a backlog of needs to address. The vision had taken shape in the shabby but comfortable rooms where donated chairs and sofas provided a haven of support and security. One client sat on the drab sofa, stretched out her arms and said with great happiness, “At last we have a place of our own!”

By the fall of 1977, the new Women’s Center was settling in to the home on North Grand Avenue and expanding its program offerings.

The Board outlined several key goals for the months ahead, namely, to hire an executive director and to achieve financial stability by soliciting private donors, in addition to the grants from the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) that had sustained the programs in the start up phase.

In late August of 1977, Kathie Kueht replaced Gerry Pas as President of the Board. At a brainstorming session, the Board looked ahead to future program expansions, specifically a full day care program, more complete counseling services for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence, and treatment for abused children. Additional counselors were hired, including Susan Bundy and Jan Schroeder, “fresh from Carroll College.”

The issues of program staffing, however, remained difficult. The first person hired to provide day care never showed up, and a number of volunteers carried the load instead. A wonderful elderly volunteer walked into the Center one day saying, “I think you girls need some help.” She then proceeded to paint the child care room and volunteered to help there whenever needed. Other valuable volunteer assistance was provided by John Cooney, a friend of the Center, who helped with the first budget preparation.

An increase in the number of assault victims requiring assistance meant that the very small staff could not carry out other duties, so even more volunteers were recruited. By November, it was clear that until more money could be raised the next position which had to be filled was that of a Volunteer Coordinator to oversee all of the helpers and recruit even more.

The new Board treasurer, Lisa Sommers, noted that CETA would help to pay for several additional positions and that The Women’s Center should begin an aggressive campaign to secure funding from key charitable foundations such as the Cudahy Fund in Milwaukee and the Milwaukee Foundation. Moreover, the Board decided to prepare a needs statement to submit to the local Waukesha County United Way Board for support. Several women leaders of other non-profit groups in the Waukesha area provided much-needed advice on the preparation of a budget to
submit to United Way and even how to approach its allocation panel. However, the results were far from certain.

November Emergency

At an emergency meeting of the Board called for November 29th, 1977, it was reported that the treasury was almost empty. There was a balance on hand of only $175, with monthly bills due at more than six times that amount. The other disheartening news was that United Way had rejected The Women's Center initial application with the statement that there was a “duplication of service” and that the problems it targeted were not that severe in Waukesha County. Even more discouraging was the feedback from community leaders that the problems of rape and sexual assault didn’t exist in affluent Waukesha County and that the feminist highlighting of them was “just a trend.”

Boldness was the only answer to this series of setbacks, and the Board bravely voted to begin a $20,000 fund appeal to private donors. The decision to send what they called a “begging letter” just before the 1977 holidays was unanimously approved, and the plan was quickly put into effect. Fortunately, the Mental Health Association of the State of Wisconsin decided to continue its support of the proposed day-care program and set aside the $6,000 it had just donated a used copier to The Women’s Center office and these letters had just donated a used copier to The Women’s Center office and these letters

The need for steady leadership

With Gerry Pas, interim director, out for maternity leave in early 1978, Lisa Sommers assumed the temporary director’s position in April, and Judy Helling replaced Kueht as Board president. The newly created Board Development Committee needed to find a paid consultant and ultimately decided against it. They would go it alone!

An additional grant of $3,600 from CETA and $1,100 from private donations in early 1978 ensured that at least the rent, small staff, and supply budget could be met. Yet, there were still many hurdles and heartbreaking setbacks. The City of Waukesha’s Planning Office did not include The Women’s Center in its yearly request for support money from the federal HUD (Housing & Urban Development) grants program, despite numerous pleas from the Board. Undaunted, the Board voted in June 1978 to hire a full-time executive director at a salary of $12,000. It was an act of pure faith, but one that would set a precedent of taking courageous steps in the face of discouraging news. Spirits were also lifted with the decision to plan a gala first anniversary celebration for August 1978 which would highlight the Center’s achievements as well as raise much-needed money.

Also in June 1978, the Board expanded with the addition of Mark Gempler, George Lorenz, Ralph Magnus, Sandy Villa (who returned) and Judy Mawdsley, who joined the stalwart original group. Interviews were scheduled with the seven finalists from more than 50 applicants for the Executive Director position.

One top candidate, Pat Baker, came to her interview and was invited by the screening committee to be seated. As Baker

"An Early Controversy ~ Counseling Versus Social Change"

by Jeri Phillips, Founding Mother (from a taped interview with her daughter, Sarah, on 2-14-04)

Sarah: “Was there a distinction between your work in NOW and your work with The Women’s Center?”

Jeri: “There was ultimately not only a distinction, but a controversy. One of the program committees in NOW developed a Sexual Assault Counseling Program in Waukesha – again, because many of us as therapists were seeing clients in our offices who had been sexually assaulted. They were not given any sensitivity if they chose to go through the legal system. Victims were being blamed all the time. The court system did nothing to empower victims. As we learned more about this, we decided to not only take action, train emergency room workers and police officers, but provide a 24-hour anonymous hotline for sexual assault victims going through the system. One could volunteer as a rape counseling advocate and carry a beep, which is now part of the Women’s Center’s programs. So, if it was my week on, I could get a call from an emergency room worker because ER were the first personnel we trained. I’d meet the victim at the emergency room. If they wanted me in the room during the exam, I would be there. If they wanted an advocate while going through the system, someone would be assigned. Many of us who were in helping professions and in NOW were attracted to that issue, even though we were also working on affirmative action and equal rights.

There were some in our chapter who felt this was inappropriate for NOW to be doing. They felt quite clearly that this was counseling and not change, and what were we really doing to change the system? So, as we started to talk about developing The Women’s Center, we were putting a lot of time into discussing this. The controversy was over where our energies would go. Waukesha NOW had been a pretty small chapter and there weren’t enough people taking on the political meetings and projects. And I will admit I was one of them . . . it became more difficult to do it all. My energies shifted, but surely, went into The Women’s Center, which I believed, and still believe, has been an enormous change agent in this community.”
Finding Our Voice
by Kathie Knaehn
Founding Member

We came together from apparently privileged backgrounds and lived. We were well-educated, professionals with some experience and years of working with women and their families. We were contributing members of our community in many of the traditional ways of being and fitting in. Yet, we were drawn to each other by the hope that things could be different. The collective despair of the women we met in our practices and daily lives as those with whom they shared their stories, demanded our attention. We often heard them speak their truth for the first time and we wept silently. In our compassion and rage, we wanted to protect them, lash out and make it all go away.

Then someone once said to me, “Why bother? You might be doing the best that you can and you need to accept that as a possibility”. Yet, we knew and dreamed that life could be different if we had faith and conviction. And we put our purposes together and found our voices along with all the other women. And it made a difference. Yet, we are not complacent, thinking we have done our best.

sank into a chair in the meeting room, it collapsed and dumped her unceremoniously onto the floor. The committee later said that it was her apropo at this setback, as well as her excellent credentials, that earned her the job offer. Baker herself remembered that she was met by a “powerful group of strong, funny, smart and dedicated women… who helped her to link with new realities.”

Baker also recalled that on her first day at the Center she was informed by the receptionist that “they needed at least $1,000 a month to stay afloat…and that there was no real source of that money.” A huge piece of her job, she noted, was to try to “secure funding to make sure that the doors stayed open.”

Stepping up to provide the first several months’ salary support for Baker, Kathy Bemman and Judy Helling paid the bill until Baker herself could raise sufficient extra funds to make it all work out. As she later recalled, “The Center is a perfect example of how the whole is so much better than the sum of its parts. Each of the women and men who touched the Center brought passion and pain and were part of something greater than a building - rather they helped define women’s reality in our community and then went about the business of changing that reality. None of us could have done it alone; it took all of us combined.”

Much to Celebrate: August 1978

With the announcement in early August that Pat Baker would take over as a full-time Executive Director, the Board and staff felt that a new level of permanence and success had been achieved. In the month of July, more than 210 clients were served in the growing variety of programs, and the Board decided to reapply to United Way showing these statistics and making a better case for support. To this end, they enlisted the assistance of local leader, Leon Janssen, whose ties to the community and to United Way would prove crucial.

Also important was the rather fevered preparation for the second United Way appeal. The key founding mothers, who were to be the presenters, were cautioned not to wear any casual clothing such as jeans, or even denim skirts, but rather to “dress up” in very stylish clothing. This advice, while well-heeded and sound, led several of them to joke for years thereafter about the need to wear “foundation garments” whenever they were engaged in serious fundraising efforts!

With this reinvigorated spirit, the first anniversary celebration was launched on Saturday, August 26, 1978 featuring a small ticket charge, refreshments, an art auction, and the performance of a play called “The Many Faces of Women.” Many families attended and enjoyed the children’s fair and clowns, as well as several “mini-workshops” and special information booths. Co-sponsored by the YWCA, Waukesha NOW, the Waukesha’s own brand of “working feminism.”

The event yielded a net profit of $936. Board members were determined to build upon this outpouring of community support and to add a special corporate solicitation to the fall fund drive.

Attendees also learned about the ever-expanding programs which now included counseling for displaced homemakers and specific divorce information; child care and counseling; teen groups for victims; assertiveness training sessions; single parent support groups; vocational planning and training; as well as the original array of services to victims of abuse and rape. The ongoing employment program at the Center was co-sponsored with the Women’s Development Center at the Waukesha County Technical College, a successful collaboration both in funding and in program efforts.

Appearing at her first Board meeting in September 1978, Baker led the way to expanding space for the growing programs and services. The second floor rooms at 419 North Grand had become available for an additional monthly rent of $575, and the luxury of having two floors was too good to pass up. Fortuitously, additional funding from CETA helped to underwrite additional staff positions as well contribute to this increased rent.

The Board also realized that with Wisconsin’s new “no fault” divorce law, the books the number of displaced homemakers needing assistance would greatly increase. Fortunately for Women’s Center clients, the combined efforts of Barb Tierney and Sue Broad resulted in marked success for this program. As Pat Baker noted, “They skillfully created something out of nothing” and brought a very meaningful and constructive set of workshops and counseling offerings to women suffering from the displacement of divorce.

Federal Victims Assistance Funding

On the federal level, legal advocacy for crime victims was receiving increased attention in the late 1970s, and funding was available through grants from the Law Enforcement Assistance Act. A new national support group, the Victims’ Assistance Legal Organization (VALOR), was organized in Washington, D.C., to “promote victims’ rights in the civil and criminal system.” In early 1979, the Center learned that the federal program Law Enforcement Assistance Act, LEAA, had approved its grant request for funding in the area of victim assistance. It was a vital and exciting shot in the arm.

In March, the newly rented quarters on the second floor were reconfigured to house the new program and accommodate its first director Gerry Wuerslin. Working in cooperation with the Wisconsin Correctional Services, the grant to The
Women's Center established Wuerslin as the leader of the newly created Victim Assistance Support Program (VASP), first housed above a bar on West Main Street in Waukesha.

The program provided legal assistance and counseling for victims of both property crime and sexual assault. The multitude of services included sessions with the Center's regular counselors, as well as specific legal assistance from Wuerslin. Additionally, the program called for a cooperative relationship between The Women's Center and the district attorney's office, the police department and county social workers. It was a highly effective cooperative program for The Women's Center and the first of many more in the years to come.

Out of this new VASP program came many new “firsts,” including specific referrals from the police department to the Center, a small office at the courthouse for victim services, and a new respect for the Center's value in the offices of the district attorney. This heightened visibility also increased success in individual fundraising, and the LEAA grant grew to provide additional counseling staff members.

By the fall of 1979, the Center had six counselors working on this VASP program and other related services. Outreach efforts also took the staff to the emergency room at Waukesha Memorial Hospital where posters and flyers highlighted Center services. Nursing staff and doctors began more active referrals there as female victims of violent crimes often entered the system through the doors of the hospital.

Responding to changing legal demands, the Center staff began to learn about how to shepherd a victim through the legal system and provide advice and emotional support. These “advisors” encouraged women who had been the targets of physical and sexual violence to go to court and testify against the perpetrator - often a very difficult task. Women had to appear as witnesses against a former or current spouse or boyfriend when protection was weak and exposure was great.

This legal aspect of the VASP program was named the “Victim-Witness Assistance Program” and became one of the most valuable new initiatives in the Center's early years. Wuerslin even succeeded in getting the witness appearance fee raised from $5 a day to $16 which helped encourage witnesses to come forward and testify against a violent perpetrator. As she summarized the impact of these services, she noted that it was essential to “make people know that they counted.” Women victims were no longer silent and invisible.

INTO THE THIRD YEAR

Under the leadership of Pat Baker and new Board president Lynne Ketchum, the Center entered 1980 full of optimism. The staff had grown to ten full-time positions, with a complement of more than sixty regular volunteers. CETA added $65,000 to its funding package, VISTA money supported two staff positions, and the two-year grant of $89,000 from LEAA was also crucial.

The Center's budget had grown from just a “wish and a prayer” only three years earlier to a budget of $215,000 in the spring of 1980. Moreover, the renewed appeal to United Way had proven successful as the Center received its first stipend of $7,000 in early 1980. Although the amount was less than requested, George Lorenz reminded the Board that this first grant was a vital recognition of the Center's value and an assurance that its work would receive ongoing support. As one Board member recalled, “It was a breakthrough...we were no longer going to be referred to as ‘the Women's Club.’ We had finally begun to overcome the very negative connotation that the word ‘feminist’ had in those days.”

Also in 1980, Wisconsin Governor Lee Dreyfus signed into law a pioneer program of domestic violence legislation. One chapter of this new legislation created legal options for women which included stiffer domestic violence restraining orders and injunctions. It also established the state's first Council on Domestic Violence with a budget of $1 million to be appropriated in grants to agencies working with the problem.

This growing statewide recognition was matched by an ever-increasing need for Center services. More than 60 crisis calls were received each month, and counseling sessions for six to eight clients were scheduled daily. Baker's steady and inspiring leadership, coupled with the dedicated staff and a growing Board, demonstrated an amazing story, not just of survival but of remarkable success in three short years. New Board members Ann Vrakas, Sue Andrews and Carol Starr, among others, brought increased energy to the meetings.

In an ongoing effort to reach donors, the Board decided to begin a periodic newsletter called “Center Point.” Copies were mailed to all donors who then were encouraged to become “members” of The Women's Center as well as to continue both their volunteer and financial support. The motto on the masthead of the newsletter reflected the newly-stated mission: “Dedicated to helping women attain their full humanity.”

The first issue featured stories about the “Turning Point” program in partnership with the Waukesha County Technical College. This program provided displaced homemakers with an array of services from divorce counseling, child care, job training, to interviewing techniques and group support sessions. Many of these programs were run in partnership with the Waukesha YWCA or the Mental Health Center. Donors also responded favorably to the “Center Point” updates, and support continued to increase.

The quality and warmth of the growing child care program owed much of its success and spirit to the ongoing direction of founding mother Anne Beyers. Her previous experience with a Center in Muskegon, Michigan, strengthened her understanding of the crucial importance of this component of the program. Beyers expressed the hope that the Center's free day care program might serve as a model in the community for individuals and businesses. “The children get used to it and enjoy being with each other,” she noted. “Mothers and children can be together for parts of the day…. It serves both their needs and purposes.”

At the dawn of the day care revolution in the United States, the Center's program was a pioneering one. Beyers added, “There are many on-site child care centers in Europe. It just hasn't caught on yet in the U.S.”

Center staff also reached out to women students at nearby Carroll College. Counselor Jan Schroeder provided...

In August 1980, the Center’s rooms were so full that it was decided to cancel the anniversary event and hold a fundraising raffle instead. In just three short years, the house at 419 North Grand Avenue was becoming too small for the Center’s burgeoning programs and growing clientele.

THE NEED FOR SHELTER

Baker also noted that the need for shelter had become increasingly acute. Volunteers had secured five homes where victims of violent and dangerous abuse could be housed and protected, but the need was growing as crisis calls continued to come in. Volunteer drivers with emergency beepers would pick up women (often with their children in tow) and drive them to one of these volunteer’s homes, but many were full.

One of the main challenges was to secure additional homes and train the owners and emergency drivers in safety and support protocols for these crisis situations. Baker recalled that these volunteers were women “unselfish enough to open their homes to victims of domestic abuse...a very special kind of person. It takes a big heart, people who really care and want to help others and are willing to open their homes to a stranger in crisis.”

Both the shelter homeowner and the victim had to sign an agreement to guarantee this confidentiality, so crucial to the safety of the abused woman and her children.

In the winter of 1980-1981, the Board responded to the growing need for safe havens for families victimized by domestic violence and voted to seek a separate facility, preferably a home setting, as a shelter. Once again, the decision was made before any actual funding support was secured, but, as in the past (and often in the future), the choice rested on the question of “what is right” and “what is an essential need” rather than “what can we easily afford to do.”

While one Board committee began to scout the Waukesha market to find a large home that might serve as a shelter, another committee worked with Baker to look into possible sources of funding for such a program. One hopeful sign was the development of a new federal “block grant” program, administered on the county level, that might be tapped for help in purchasing and operating such a shelter.

Not yet four years old, The Women’s Center was poised to launch yet another bold initiative - to provide safe housing, food and support for victims of violence and their families on a 24-hour, 7-days-a-week basis. The decision would also take the Center, for the first time, from the monthly obligation of renting to the much larger obligation of property ownership. While there were many legal and financial hurdles to conquer, this courageous effort would prove successful within just five months of the decision to go forward. Another dream would be realized.

Staff, board members, and friends of TWC gather on the Grand Avenue front lawn to celebrate an early contribution from the community, 1979.

Mary Hennis, Director of Counseling Services, Marie Kingsbury, and Judy Mies, Respite Child Care Specialist, admire the award TWC had just received for being named Nonprofit Agency of the Year by the County Executive’s office, 1999.

The five founding mothers celebrate The Women’s Center’s fifteenth anniversary in 1992; from left to right Kathie Kueht, Kathryn Bemmann, Anne Beyers, Jeri Phillips, and Gerry Pas.

The first home for TWC, from 1977 to 1984, located at 419 N. Grand Avenue.


Julie DeSmith, Executive Director from 1983 to 1988.

Marie Kingsbury, Executive Director from 1988 to the present.


Founding mother Jeri Phillips preparing for an August 1977 Open House – their jobs encompassed all in those days!

“Sister House” on Wright Street, TWC’s shelter for twenty-two years (1981-2003).
TWC staff pose with Marie Kingsbury on the day she was honored as YWCA Woman of Distinction, 1993.

TWC Associate Director Lynne Ketchum, County Executive Dan Finley (1991-2005), Marie Kingsbury, Adult Sexual Assault Counselor Jean Lahti, and Child Sexual Abuse Counselor Faith Holley-Beal proclaim April 18-25, 1992, sexual assault awareness week.

Lynne Ketchum and Faith Holley-Beal meet with Captain Chris Connolly, 2001, as they plan the domestic violence and sexual assault training programs that TWC provides for the City of Waukesha Police Department.

This historic house, located at 726 N. East Avenue and bought by TWC in 1984, was used as the counseling center and administration building until the new facility opened in 2003.

Board members Phylis Flores and Joyce Bailey admire the tee-shirt held by Development Director Phyllis Pemberton commemorating TWC’s tenth anniversary, 1987.

Ness Flores, current board president, Ellen Langill, author of this book as well as current and past board member, and Ross Langill socialize at the 1982 annual meeting.

Lynne Ketchum and Faith Holley-Beal meet with Captain Chris Connolly, 2001, as they plan the domestic violence and sexual assault training programs that TWC provides for the City of Waukesha Police Department.


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In late 1980, the Board received word that The Women’s Center would receive a $75,000 grant from the State of Wisconsin to be used for a shelter for battered women. By that date, the Center’s total budget exceeded $215,000, a tremendous growth in only three and a half years of existence. It was time to expand the vitally needed services.

United Way also increased its yearly allotment to The Women’s Center to support the shelter idea, increasing its funding from $21,000 to $29,000 for 1981. Encouraged by these signs of support, Kathie Kueht located a large older home on Wright Street just four blocks southeast of the offices on North Grand Avenue. The home was adjacent to the Carroll College campus and had been owned by a former professor, his wife and their large family.

PURCHASING SISTER HOUSE

Board member Lynne Ketchum remembered looking at the rambling old home and thinking that it might be the perfect place for a shelter. However, it was a daunting challenge. “At that point, The Women’s Center did not own any property, so this was a huge step for Board members,” she recalled. “I’m still in awe...but, as usual, the Board moved forward with great faith, confidence and vision.”

In placing an offer on the house, the Board realized that there were two immediate hurdles to overcome. First, they had to appear before the local Board of Zoning Appeals to get permission to operate a “group home/shelter” in the residential area. Second, they needed to make sure that the owners of the elegant home next to the proposed shelter were amenable to its new use. To this end, staff approached the elderly twosome, the Wolf sisters, who lived in the tudor home on Wright Street which shared a driveway with the shelter. While cautious at first about the proposal, the Wolfs agreed not to oppose the zoning change when staff promised that residents would not impinge on them and that staff would see that the driveway was shoveled throughout the winter. Soon they became wonderful neighbors to the Shelter occupants, even offering treats or toys to residents from time to time. With any potential opposition overcome, the proposed conditional use permit sailed through the Zoning Appeals Board, and the offer to purchase was activated.

Celebrating the zoning approval after the meeting, staff and Board gathered to discuss naming the Shelter. One humorous suggestion was the “Carrie Chapman Shelter Home at Last.”
Catt-house.” However, that was quickly rejected for obvious reasons, and the title “Sister House” received unanimous approval because it evoked a welcoming and warmth that symbolized the spirit of The Women’s Center. Moreover, a book group of Center members had recently finished reading Sisterhood is Powerful, by Robin Morgan, and the concept of sisterhood represented the ideal of the Center – women helping women. So Sister House it became.

With the help of volunteers the Shelter was painted inside, and beds were hauled in so that occupancy could occur as soon as possible. It was one of the earliest such shelters in Wisconsin as well as in the Midwest.

The remodeling resulted in a fresh look for the four bedrooms, large shower room, and two bathrooms on the upper floor, and the two counseling rooms. Besides the Community Development Block Grant and United Way funding, Sister House received generous donations from the Milwaukee Foundation and $10,000 from the Waukesha Service Club so that the doors could be opened immediately.

In addition to the bedrooms and gathering space, the house had a large, enclosed front porch which was used to collect donations. Donors could drop off items there without having to go through the locked security doors. Donations of all kinds were desperately needed - from diapers and baby food, to blankets, sheets, toys, children’s and other clothing, and, of course, all kinds of non-perishable food.

The Shelter also staffed a 24-hour crisis line so that women could reach assistance in emergency situations. Volunteer drivers (and later policemen) continued to provide emergency transportation to the Shelter, often in the middle of the night. Many residents came to shelter with only the clothes on their backs, as they had left a dangerous home in great haste. The Waukesha community responded to this need, and even the local food pantry began to share food with Sister House.

The zoning permit allowed up to twenty residents to occupy Sister House at one time, plus at least one staff member (24/7) to be on the premises. At the grand opening on June 4, 1981, the Shelter immediately took in twelve residents - the need was so great.

Ongoing funding for women and children at Sister House came through a federal program at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) which provided money for food and support based on occupancy. By the end of the first year, HUD funds had contributed $65,000 for this sustenance. While Shelter care was designed as a short-term emergency protection, women and children often stayed for a period of several weeks before moving on to other safe housing. Money for food, staff, counseling services, and utilities was vital.

The Importance of Safety

Newly-hired Shelter Director, Roz Read, brought her experience in a battered women’s program in Milwaukee. Read and the rest of the Shelter staff were aware of the high priority need for safety and anonymity. “The address of the house is being kept a secret,” noted staff member Lisa Sommers. “The city police know where the building is and it has its own security system in place, but the Center does not want to reveal the address because men might come after their wives.”

One early volunteer recalled having to drive a woman back to her house to pick up clothing and a few vital supplies. As she waited out in her car, she was approached in a very threatening way by the abusive spouse. Fortunately, the police came to the scene, and the driver and woman victim got away safely. Shelter workers also received threatening telephone calls from spouses seeking the return of their abused wives. “They would beg and cry and threaten. One time a counselor was run off the road by one of these men and Sister House had to get a restraining order against him.”

The safety of the resident children was also a great concern. A Shelter counselor recalled ushering a four-year-old boy from a supervised visitation session with his abusive father. As they left, the boy held out his hand and said, “My Daddy told me to give you this.” In his hand was a bullet.

One of the most positive aspects of Shelter residency for the women was the ability to talk to each other and learn that they were not alone. Read reflected that “It is very important for battered women to have group support.... They feel very isolated and live in fear.” In order to take control of their lives, they have to feel “secure and out of harm’s way.” The Shelter provided that safety net of protection, support and security, as well as personal counseling and ultimately job training.
through the Turning Point Program.

Moreover, the new “Gentle Man” program brought in men as volunteers to interact with the children so that they could witness firsthand the fact that a male role model does not use fists or violence to deal with a family. One of its long-time volunteers, Bill Downham, valued his hours spent with the children in the Shelter, serving as a man who was “kind, caring and supportive.” Both Bill and his wife Patty often took the children on outings which included picnics, a pizza night, boat rides, or just staying at the Shelter playing checkers, making milkshakes, or shooting basketballs. This very successful program has continued for 25 years supplying vital reassurance and gentle companionship to Shelter children.

STRENGTH AND COMPASSION

Another key volunteer, Sandy Sommers, recalled starting at Sister House answering the telephone in 1982. “My first crisis call was from a woman whose husband was sexually abusing her six and seven-year-old children...I cried all the way home that night. I wasn’t sure I could do this, but I came back. I realized that if I stayed, I would have to become a stronger woman.”

As Sommers became a part of the staff, her volunteer experience and growing strength proved extremely valuable. “I heard the women talking about the beatings and humiliation...Many would have serious injuries and emotional scars that it seemed might never heal.” Other volunteers came forward and received training regarding safety and listening skills.

The Shelter’s proximity to Carroll College allowed students to volunteer their time to help with child care duties or even rake the leaves or shovel snow. As one worker remembered, “Jean Lahti was [later] an Adult Sexual Assault Counselor who arranged for three of her clients to come to the training session and tell their stories. “Listening to those brave survivors tell what happened to them during these brutal attacks vividly brought home to me how traumatic the experiences were and how incredible it was that they could put their lives back together!”

Counselor Lynne Ketchum also remembered the “sea change” that came about as a result of the Shelter. “There was no mandatory arrest law in Wisconsin until 1989,” she noted, “so the conventional law enforcement intervention was [to provide] advice such as ‘go stay at your mother’s tonight’ or ‘take a walk around the block and cool off.’ It was no wonder that women who were raped or battered felt isolated, guilty and ashamed.….It was hearing these horrors told out loud that propelled so many of us to shine the light on these issues and say ‘no more’.”

AN ALTERED AWARENESS

Sister House served women and children from across Waukesha County at virtually full occupancy from its very beginning. In addition, through a state funding contract, the Shelter was also available to women from nearby Walworth, Jefferson and Washington Counties where no such safe harbor existed. Social workers in those counties kept the emergency telephone number of the crisis line in Waukesha so that they could seek placement when the need arose.

As the women in Shelter began counseling sessions toward recovery, their children also received staff support and counseling. One of the most potent national studies on domestic violence had indicated that it was a repetitive cycle - young victims or witnesses of violence in the home often grew up to become perpetrators themselves. These counseling sessions, as well as the Gentle Man Program, sought to end this vicious cycle.

Soon the local Century Fence Company donated a chain link enclosure for a play yard outside the child care room. Children in the Shelter could safely play outside under staff guidance – a boon to their emotional health and eventual recovery from the traumas they had experienced before entering Sister House.

One very important change that accompanied the establishment of Sister House was an altered awareness in the Waukesha community regarding the problem of domestic violence. When first approached for assistance, several leaders in Waukesha did not believe that “wife beating” was a problem that occurred locally. “They told me that hitting a woman was a terrible thing,” recalled Baker, “but I had to understand that it just didn’t happen in Waukesha.” Yet within a few months of its founding, the relatively conservative community of Waukesha had come to embrace Sister House and to witness first-hand the great need for its services.

In a show of support, Waukesha Mayor Paul Vrakas proclaimed April 19-25, 1981, to be “Sexual Assault Awareness Week.” A large banner, painted by members of the Adolescent Sexual Abuse support group, was hung outside the Center on North Grand Avenue reading, “Sexual Assault is NEVER your fault!” A sea change for women and victims was in the air.

NEW LEADERS, NEW PROGRAMS

One month after the opening of Sister House in June 1981, Pat Baker was able to hire Barb Applegate as the new office manager. “I found someone who could help me keep the dots connected while taking care of the practical realities, paying bills, laying out brochures, organizing space, making sure people got paid, and so much more,” Baker stated. “The two of us were the administrative team. We laughed together and sometimes screamed at the antics we witnessed.”

Applegate had moved to the Waukesha area only three years earlier, just after The Women’s Center’s founding, and remembered being “most impressed that Waukesha had a women’s center.... It made me think this was a community I would enjoy becoming a part of.”

She “fell in love with TWC on my first day of work. It was a place filled with laughter and the feeling of like-minded people doing important work.” One had only to enter the doors at 419 N. Grand Avenue to feel a sense of sisterhood, support, and welcome.

Working conditions for Applegate and the staff, however, were less than perfect. Without air conditioning the house on Grand Avenue became an oven in summer, and staff wore sun dresses or skirts with tee shirts and absolutely “no panty hose.”

Moreover, the office equipment was extremely primitive - a somewhat effective electric typewriter and a small mimeograph machine that Applegate called “the bane of my existence.” Hands and clothing were covered in its “ubiquitous blue ink.”

Yet, the shabbiness of the furniture was also a testament to the Center’s core values, she noted. “I was proud of this because I knew that this organization put money where it counted - to hire staff to benefit clients!” At its very inception and for years afterward, The Women’s Center skimmed on hardware and equipment so that most of the donated dollars could go into better programming for women in need.

Fundraising efforts continued to be essential. After the first auction in 1977, others followed. Some events were just for
fun to allow Board and staff a humorous release from their duties. In 1982, the Center held a spaghetti dinner at The Loft, a local restaurant, for an admission price of $4.95. Raffle tickets went toward a drawing of a beautiful butterfly quilt handmade by Shelter leaders Lisa Sommers and Roz Read and won by Lynne Ketchum. Bidders purchased fine art prints, raising several thousand dollars in the effort. A growing number of community members lined up to show support, and private donations increased accordingly.

GROWING INTO THE 1980s

Other changes were “in the air” for American women by the early 1980s, changes which helped bring a heightened awareness of key issues such as domestic violence. In 1980, more than 51 per cent of women held jobs outside the home, and just three years later by 1984, the number grew to 54 per cent. In addition, the early 1980s witnessed a phenomenal growth in academic courses relating to women’s history and social issues. One study estimated that in 1980 there were over thirty thousand courses in the area of “women’s studies” offered by American colleges and universities.

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units and United Way.” It was a difficult time of transition for women’s organizations, creating a sense of displacement for some of the early leaders.

A FIFTH ANNIVERSARY - 1982

This debate over structure and organization was very much on the minds of the founding mothers as they gathered in the spring of 1982 to discuss the progress of The Women’s Center in its first five years. They reminisced about their original vision and realized that in just that short period of time they had moved from founding and developing the Center to a more peripheral role of support. Both Jeri Phillips and Anne Beyers had announced that they would leave the Board in 1982. No longer involved in the daily struggle for survival and the “nitty gritty” tasks of creation, they reflected that the staff had grown “from a volunteer group of women, with only three paid a small stipend, to a staff of twenty full- and part-time people.”

Phillips recognized these changes and the need for such institutional growth. Celebrating the accomplishments of the first five years, she was asked if the mission of the Center had also changed. Both she and Beyers responded with an emphatic “No,” adding, “Women are still helping women. The mission has not changed...only the methods of service have evolved. The Center is still responding to the different needs of women in this community.”

Acknowledging that the economy was weak by 1982 and that hard times might bring funding cuts, both women stated that “it is even more important that we continue to be a safe place in a crazy world.” Beyers added, “Although the times are difficult, women are getting stronger. Our initial belief in women helping women will continue to exist. It may mean our survival!”

Asked about their legacy after five years of direct service, both women reaffirmed their “overriding belief in the Center,” stating fervently that they had the opportunity “to see a dream become reality [and now] want to let it grow on its own the way it must.”

At the fifth anniversary celebration in May 1982, Director Pat Baker provided a brief history and statistical summary of services. In 1982 alone, the Center had served 450 displaced homemakers in its Turning Point and related programs; sheltered 300 women and children at Sister House, providing safety and support; and offered counseling on violence, rape and battery to 1,139 individuals in need including crisis calls. The continuing Victims’ Assistance Project (which had just become a separate entity and moved into other quarters) had assisted 400 women through the legal process of obtaining a restraining order or seeking redress for violent abuse.

In recognizing the contribution of the founding mothers, the evening ended with a heartfelt thank-you to everyone who had worked to bring the dream to reality. “The Women’s Center,” Baker noted, “is the sum total of these and many other people’s efforts. They have worked so hard to make sure there is a safe, healing place for women in Waukesha. Thank-you!” Another new era for Waukesha women had successfully begun.

By late 1982, the Shelter was operating at full capacity and other new initiatives were underway. Despite the dismal setback of the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment in June, local leaders began to embrace the need for The Women’s Center and also Sister House. Area churches began a fundraising program called “Sister House Sunday,” at which offerings were contributed to support the Shelter and its many services.

District Attorney Jerome Cahill endorsed the slogan “no right to batter,” as he led a team of local law enforcement officers, judges and the County Sheriff Edward O’Connor in meetings to discuss how best to deal with cases of battery and abuse. Their agreement to do better was embraced by the Battered Women’s Task Force of the local NOW chapter, as well as by Women’s Center staff.

FAMILY SUPPORT PROJECT

The dawn of 1983 witnessed renewed energy under the leadership of Joyce Bailey and new Board members Patty Downham, Ralph Magnus, Jane Ewens, Ellen Langill, Sue Dregne, Bob Doherty, Cynthia Stevens, Julie Baum-Shelley, Steven Tikalsky, Anna Pepelnjak, and Barb Sommer. Plans were finalized for a new program called the “Family Support Project,” which was officially launched on July 1 just after the celebration of the Center’s sixth birthday.

Led by staff member Kathy McCauley, the Family Support Project incorporated the previous respite care program to provide a full-service model of assistance and counseling for families as well as crisis intervention and shelter for women. The central focus of the program was the provision of the nurturing program for parents and their children ages birth to five years old.

This initiative received a further boost the following year when the State of Wisconsin passed the Child Support Enforcement Act to provide broader financial assistance to dependent minors. Former Vice Presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro became a voice on the national level for such assistance and against the crime of battery and family violence.

An additional support program, begun in 1983, was the Incest Support Group, which provided counseling sessions for those whose abuse had occurred from a close family member, often many years earlier. Such groups met in the small counseling room at the Grand Avenue house which was getting more and more crowded each month.
As programs and participant numbers continued to grow. At Pat Baker's invitation, former Board member Lynne Ketchum joined the staff as a part-time sexual assault counselor in 1984, drawing upon her past experience at the Milwaukee County District Attorney's office. She recalled the ever-growing sessions during her first few months: “I worked with young child victims as well as adults and can remember the Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse group was especially large. There were so few resources for people then, and society was only beginning to acknowledge that incest existed.”

Not only was the recognition of incest a new and disturbing wake-up call, the treatment of rape victims had slowly begun to change to include four degrees of sexual assault. As Ketchum described it, “The rape statutes were very archaic with women's sexual histories being brought up in court, and the burden rested on victims to prove that they had shown the utmost resistance.” As the awareness of the frequency of incest and sexual abuse grew, the counseling sessions swelled beyond the physical space at North Grand Avenue. It was time for another bold step.

In the early eighties, The Women’s Center worked with (and I chaired) the Childhood Sexual Abuse Task Force. This too, was a coordinating, multidisciplinary group who met together to look at how child sexual abuse cases were handled in the system and how we, as people providing intervention, could improve our practice. Out of this group a Model for intervention was written making numerous recommendations, many of which were put into place. Among these recommendations were that child victims should be jointly interviewed by law enforcement and Child Protective Service Workers together to minimize the number of times a child would have to repeat his/her story. Multidisciplinary staffings which have been facilitated by The Women's Center for many years were another recommendation from this group, as well as the development of support groups for non-offending parents and child victims. Although the group became inactive in the early nineties, it recurred in 2006 to again look at this zone, and out of those meetings Waukesha’s own Child Advocacy Center, The C.A.R.E. Center began. Over the years, The Center continued to join forces with other agencies and entities to improve responses to women, children and families.

A NEW HOME

At the end of the summer in 1983, the annual auction moved to Zorba's Restaurant in Brookfield where the ground floor banquet room held several hundred participants. National celebrities such as Robert Redford, Marlo Thomas, Elizabeth Taylor, Alan Alda and Meryl Streep donated items to the auction which raised the total to over $10,000 for the first time.

This money was vital as the Board began to plan for additional space. The house on North Grand was no longer sufficient, and a search for a new and larger home began in earnest. The owner of the North Grand Avenue house wanted to sell it, but The Women’s Center had already outgrown the space there and so was not interested in buying it. The counseling rooms were too small for the ever-growing group meetings, and there was little space left for the vital child care program and for individual counseling sessions.

Undaunted by the lack of funds for a down payment, the Board explored several options, researching all older homes near the center of Waukesha that could provide the same welcoming atmosphere and be reachable by bus service. By late fall, the perfect home was located at 726 North East Avenue, and the Board voted to put in an offer to purchase at $115,000.

Immediately, donors began to come forward to embrace the idea of The Women’s Center owning its own home. The five foundings mothers contributed $500 to kick off the campaign, and many others began to donate toward the purchase. United Way agreed to a $15,000 loan toward the down payment, repayable over time. Moreover, the cost of the move itself was estimated at $10,000 to $13,000. The Waukesha City Council generously voted to underwrite $13,000 for the move, and local corporate supporter the Wisconsin Centrifugal Company raised its yearly donation from $10,000 to $37,000 to underwrite the purchase.

Other donations continued to hearten the Board’s effort. Jennifer Franjevic and Sue Broad coordinated both fundraising and the move itself, receiving an additional $5,000 from Independence Bank and assistance from AT & T for the new telephones at the 726 home. The Waukesha State Bank provided financing for the mortgage at 9.9 per cent or $950 a month, a substantial financial commitment.

The historic home, in the classical revival style, had been built in 1871. Known as the Samuel D. James house, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Homes. It featured a large entry hall and four substantial rooms on the first floor, with four large offices, a child care area and counseling room on the second. Local artist Lynn Delzer made a sketch of the historic home which was a valuable asset in the ongoing fundraising efforts.

With the help of a $13,000 Block Grant, the required $24,000 down payment was raised by January 1984, and plans for the move began to take shape. New Board President Rebecca Sherrick of Carroll College led the fundraising efforts, as the staff packed and carried out a successful move to the new home on Saturday, March 10th. The Women’s Center now had two mortgages, a substantial program commitment, and strong United Way support which crossed the $49,000 mark in 1984.

The cost of providing free crisis housing and of feeding resident families in Shelter also continued to be a great financial challenge. In 1984, more than 3,000 “nights
of stay” were provided, as well as three meals a day for all residents. To assist with this effort, the local Waukesha Food Pantry made the commitment to provide $350 each month in food.

Yet, no matter how dire the need for money became, the leaders held fast to the Center’s vision. Ketchum recalled, “One of the things I’m most proud of about The Women’s Center is how closely it has followed its mission throughout the years. It would have been so easy (and tempting) to follow the dollars as waves of social concern (and concomitant funding) would shift and ebb and flow. We worked very hard to stay true to our core mission and continue to improve the services we knew we were experts at providing.”

This strength of purpose meant that even as the need for money was continual and often dire, the Center maintained its feminist philosophy and refused to accept aid from funders such as Playboy, although, as Ketchum noted, “That meant really challenging ourselves and each other.”

Further funds were generated by a St. Patrick’s Day gala at a downtown Irish pub, Rosie O’Neill’s on South Street, an event which provided both an opportunity to celebrate and a chance to blow off steam for staff, friends and Board. This event and an additional “sock hop dance” each spring were part of the fundraising and necessary bonding experience which was vitally needed.

By early 1985, the Center’s budget commitments had risen to more than $9,500 each month - a vast increase in financial obligations. Board President Patty Downham and Vice President Jane Euens understood the necessity of an organized year-round calendar of fundraising events, capped off by the annual auction/dinner in August. The annual rummage sale in June began the summer calendar, as the August dinner-auction at Zorba’s ended it.

The Board members knew that every month meant a renewed commitment to raise money, a commitment they faithfully kept.

**MILESTONES**

The yearly calendar was marked not just by momentous events such as home purchases, shelter openings and the massive move; it was also a series of events to commemorate and celebrate the Center’s ongoing efforts. An annual “Take Back the Night” march began in October 1981 and continued each fall thereafter. The annual meeting, held each January, featured program and budget updates, but also moments of celebration. In January 1984, the singer Gerri Gribi provided entertainment to supporters who came to the Country Inn to inaugurate the beginning of the Center’s seventh year.

At year’s end, in November 1984, the Center held an official Open House at its new home at 726 North East Avenue where a holiday mood reigned as supporters, Board, and staff celebrated the successful purchase of another “home of their own.” The responsibility of now paying two mortgages rested upon the Board, a group which always seemed to be able to rise to the occasion as the needs grew.

The Gentle Man Program received funding support from a run held by the Spring City Sprinters, and the Board sought to enlarge the circle of “membership” in the Center, with dues set at $5.00. The staff also reached out to Waukeha’s growing Hispanic community with the Center’s first Hispanic Coordinator, Anita Rodriguez, in early 1984. The professional staff now included dedicated leaders such as Barb Sommer, Barb Tierney, Roz Read, Jan Schroeder, Lynne Ketchum, Barb Applegate, Pat Baker, Sandy Sommers and Mary Prinz among others - a team committed to the newly rewritten vision of the Center - “to provide safety and support for women and their families and to facilitate empowerment and personal growth.”

Moreover, a new Advisory Committee served as fund advisors, offering support for the Center’s Board and suggestions on the purchase of property. The first members included the five founding mothers, as well as Sandy Villa, Martin Frank, George Lorenz, Charlie Phillips, and Dave Helling. Thereafter, many retiring Board members who didn’t want to lose touch joined the Advisory Board upon the expiration of their terms.

Despite all of these positive achievements, Board members were reminded that much work lay ahead. President Sherrick noted that women in America still earned only 59 cents for every dollar earned by men. Additionally, two-thirds of the poor in America were women or families headed by women.

Equally sobering, Pat Baker added, was the...
fact that each year more than six million American women were battered. Many challenges lay ahead and Baker's dream - that one day programs for victims of abuse and battery would not be necessary - seemed a very long way off.

The Parents' Place Initiative

As more and more government agencies began to awaken to these many challenges, funding support grew. In early 1985, the State of Wisconsin announced an additional $12,800 from the Children's Trust Fund in support of the Center's sexual abuse and counseling program. With increased financial assistance from the state, The Women's Center joined with Children's Service Society in the creation of a cooperative program called Parents' Place in the fall of 1985.

The idea was first discussed among staff members, including Lynne Ketchum, who realized that many families in crisis needed a specialized program in a separate facility. Mary Lou Riedy, from the County Department of Health and Human Services, worked with Children's Social Services and the Center's staff to establish what became known as Parents' Place. This new collaborative program, which opened officially in 1986, first occupied a small home on Wisconsin Avenue across from Cutler Park and later moved to the corner of Arcadian and Hartwell Avenues. Families could come there to receive assistance with many issues, getting counseling from Women's Center staff, as well as from other agencies such as Children's Social Service and the program called the Prevention and Protection of Abused Children.

Riedy, later a Board member at The Women's Center, recalled that The Women's Center was a “perfect agency to work with women in crisis, [because it was] non-judgmental and understanding about the challenges of parenting.” In addition to the Family Support Project of The Women's Center, another new initiative, called the Nurturing Program, also used Parents' Place as its base. Of course, additional commitments, like the shared costs for Parents' Place, involved further financial demands.

A New Director

As the Center celebrated its eighth birthday in the spring of 1985, Pat Baker announced plans to step aside as Director at the end of the summer. A search committee of Board and Advisory Committee members immediately began to seek a replacement.

They reviewed dozens of resumes and interviewed a number of women from across Southeastern Wisconsin before hiring Julie DeSmith, who had worked as a leader in the Greater Milwaukee Girl Scout organization. DeSmith prepared to begin her tenure in Waukesha in September 1985, as Center staff and Board prepared to say goodbye to Baker after her seven outstanding years of leadership.

Years of Growth

Under DeSmith's leadership, a strong staff of second-tier positions was created, each member heading a program team. A volunteer coordinator continued to work with the more than 250 volunteers who helped at the Shelter or Center each year. Other programs evolved in 1986, including the very successful “Changing Paces” outreach (formerly Turning Point) which provided job training, counseling, and placement assistance for displaced homemakers as part of the Center's employment program, funded in part by the Private Industry Council.

Participants received assistance in basic issues of career planning, resume writing, and interview techniques as they were encouraged to think about not just getting a job, but preparing for a career. These efforts were focused on stemming the abysmal statistic that one out of three employed women in America worked for less than $7,000 a year.

In addition, 1986 witnessed an expansion of crisis line calls. Well-trained volunteers helped in staffing these calls for assistance on a 24-7 basis, including all weekends. Calls came in regarding domestic violence situations which had to be referred and handled immediately, as well as calls for help due to abuse, sexual assault cases, rape, and calls for counseling assistance. An article on “Date Rape” published in the summer of 1986, calculated that as many as 25 per cent of college women were victims of violent sexual assaults.

Early in 1986, Wisconsin's new Domestic Abuse Law went into effect, providing the necessary legal support for a woman to obtain a restraining order or a permanent injunction against a husband or abuser. Supportive of the Center's efforts to assist families faced with such abuse, the Milwaukee Foundation provided a new $25,000 grant for parent counseling programs and child care and counseling support.

In preparation for this new law and increased support, the Center launched its Legal Advocacy Project late in 1985, providing advocacy, support and technical assistance to battered women who sought these restraining orders. These legal advocates were able to confer orally or in writing with clients and also appear with them in a supporting role in court. An adjacent program, the Waukesha Intervention Project, brought together counselors from The Women's Center with professionals from law enforcement, the district attorney's office, Probation and Parole services, Victim/Witness Assistance, judges, and court commissioners so that this new level of support and protection for abused women could be implemented smoothly. One of its most successful efforts was the implementation of a “Pro Arrest” policy for domestic abuse cases, a policy that was put into effect even prior to the state's mandatory arrest law.

Deputy District Attorney Mike Bundy recalled that the main effort behind this Intervention Project came from Shelter Director Roz Read who had made repeated trips to the D.A.'s office to urge its implementation. John Fryatt, then District Attorney, endorsed the concept and worked with local police chiefs to support it. The next vital step was to get the cooperation of the street officers on the beat.

Victims too needed lots of support. Bundy remembered that the D.A.'s office had initially sent out “cooling off” letters to victims telling them to “think about this” and cautioning them that they would have to appear in court and testify against the perpetrator - “no changing your mind.” These were “not so subtle attempts to dissuade the victim from following through.”

Another successful result of the cooperative Intervention Project was the fact that the D.A.'s office refused to prosecute Shelter staff on charges of “obstruction of justice” when they would not reveal the identity of victims residing there. The D.A.'s office was gradually able to work with patrolmen and educate the force about the way domestic violence should be handled.

A Tenth Birthday Celebration

In recognition of the combined efforts
of Board, staff and volunteers, The Women’s Center prepared for a joyous celebration of its tenth anniversary in May 1987. A team, led by Joyce Bailey, began to work on the event. Held at Carroll College’s Shattuck Auditorium on May 16th, the evening featured Honorary Chair Jo Ann Faletta, from the Milwaukee Symphony, and comedienne Lori Noelle, singer Judy Gorman-Jacobs, and the feminist chorus the “Maiden Voyage” in an outstanding program, followed by a gala reception in the lower hall, chaired by new Board member Phyliss Flores.

In its tenth year, 1987, the statistics of the Center’s astounding growth were made public. Members and staff gathered at the annual meeting to learn that the total budget surpassed $400,000, with 68 per cent coming from federal and state funds. However, by the mid-1980s some of these federal programs were being cut, meaning that a greater portion of operational funds would have to come from local foundations, the United Way, and private donors.

In 1987, the Center received $58,000 from United Way, $19,000 from private contributions, $18,000 from foundations, and $12,000 from corporate donors. This money was budgeted for expenditures which supported the Shelter ($160,000); three employment programs (Turning Point, Job Placement and Hispanic Outreach - $90,000); Child Care ($70,000); Education ($55,000); Volunteer Support ($18,000); and Counseling ($60,000), as well as other programs at the Center.

Maintaining this level of program funding entailed professional management and a serious ongoing commitment from all of the Center’s dedicated Board members and donors. In 1986 alone, the Center received more than twelve thousand hours of volunteer support to make this success possible. A year-end Board tradition, begun in December 1985 at the Langill home, gathered Board and staff in a meeting to appraise the annual achievements and enjoy reflecting on successes and survival in the holiday season.

TOWARD THE SECOND DECADE

With the annual budget nearing the half-million mark by the end of 1987, the Board undertook a Long Range Planning process to enhance the vision and the financial well-being of the Center. A government program, the Victims of Crimes Act or VOCA, provided an additional $40,000 in support. The Board also created a new Financial Advisory Committee to assist with both budgeting and fundraising efforts, and local accountant Bob Kabitzke undertook a complete audit to assist with the Long Range Plan.

Staff turnovers continued to be a challenge as Roz Read left the Shelter, replaced by new Director Kathy Rippon. The staff further added Jeri Shryock as Victim Services Director and Phyllis Pemberton as Fund Raiser. Prior to stepping aside for a short time, counselor Lynne Ketchum used a newly-created educational film, “Better Safe than Sorry,” to teach elementary school students about assault awareness. After it received approval from the Waukesha School Board, Center staff travelled to many district schools, showing the film to more than 5,000 elementary school students and holding discussion sessions afterward.

At year’s end, issues of programming and technology needs were on the Board’s agenda. Interest in a Lesbian Support Group led to Board debate and a resolution to support, but not advertise, the program offering. In addition, the office staff and fundraising team desperately needed a computer or two. The Board, which now included new members Don Wiens and Pat Denning, finally secured a new computer and also began a program of liability insurance to protect its members.

Property management had also become a vital concern, with The Women’s Center owning two houses and occupying partial space at the Parents’ Place House as well. A fourth house across South Street from the 726 N. East Avenue building was used for the Legal Advocacy Program which had expanded beyond the space available. Meeting above the Gray Mare Nursery in rent-free rooms provided by the adjacent First Presbyterian Church, the new LAP offices could look out at the Center’s main building. Fortunately, the funding for LAP also grew dramatically in late 1987 with the addition of a $16,000 grant from the State of Wisconsin for victim/witness protection and legal counseling.

Further property concerns before year’s end included the desperate need for a new roof at Sister House and an air-conditioning system, which was received through a corporate donation and personal contribution of Board member Pat Denning. Fortunately, individual generosity continued to bolster and support the Center’s growing program and facilities budget. New fund raising Director Amy Stone announced volunteer efforts to completely redecorate the child care room at the Center, as well as the receipt of $25,000 from the Faye McBeath Foundation to remodel and modernize the kitchen at Sister House.

As the Board gathered once again in the Langill living room in December 1987, the tenth anniversary glow continued. New members Anne Schambreg, Barb Bache-Wiig, and Al Nichols joined the rest of the Board in celebrating the success of the Holiday Appeal, which had balanced the books by year’s end. Retiring Board President Jane Ewens received
congratulations on her year of service and
passed the gavel to new President Ellen
Langill with the wish that “your year of
service might be just a little bit calmer!”
Such would not be the case.

Following the celebration of the tenth
anniversary in the spring of 1987, The
Women’s Center Board met to establish
goals for the organization’s second decade.
Under the leadership of President Jane
Ewens, the Fundraising Committee had
closed the year with a 42 per cent increase in
donations - a shot in the arm to make new
dreams come true.

New Board President Ellen Langill
reported on the budget planning process.
Fully 65 per cent of the Center’s funding was
derived from government grants, with 11 per
cent from United Way, 10 per cent from
contributions, 7 per cent from foundations,
and 5-7 per cent from special events. The
Center was thus heavily dependent on the
political support and program funding of the
county, state, and federal governments to
keep its doors open.

Expenditure budgets told a different
story. Almost 40 per cent of the Center’s
costs went to shelter, 18 per cent for the
Family Support Project, 16 per cent for
counseling, 15 for the Employment
Program, 11 for support services, and one
per cent for education. As the Board
scrutinized the budget breakdown, a new
vision emerged early in 1988 and took shape
very quickly - the idea of transitional living.

The Board listened to a presentation by
shelter staff about the transitional living
concept, a program which was designed
to take women and families from the
emergency services of shelter to a longer-
term program, with safe housing (for up to
24 months) subsidized by HUD (the federal
Housing and Urban Development Agency).
During this transitional period, families
would receive continued counseling and
employment training to enable them to
become independent within the community.
Transitional living was designed to prevent
the frequent return of abused women and
children to emergency shelter because they
had no alternative but to go back home. It
would provide the tools for independence
and an end to the cycle of abuse.

As the Board continued to study the
idea, the annual meeting in January 1988
was held at the University of Wisconsin,
Waukesha campus and featured Art
Professor Mary Ellen Young’s slide show on
women’s struggles, entitled “You’re in a Bad
Way, Baby.” There was a great deal of
women’s history to mull over in the show, a
fitting prologue to a year of many challenges.

MERGING GOOD NEWS WITH BAD NEWS
Real babies became part of Board
“We did this in Lynne’s bedroom at her desk…teaching ourselves how to prepare a Lotus spreadsheet, strictly by trial and error.” They plugged in the computer, looked at the blinking cursor, and thought “now what?” Fortunately, they kept at the task and conquered the Lotus system – a professional looking budget emerged, and United Way later used it as a model for other non-profits! Amid all the stress, the wheels kept turning. Incredible dedication (and a vital sense of humor) allowed everyone to meet commitments.

THE NATIONAL MILIEU

Keeping an eye on national developments was also essential. The “Reagan rollbacks” in funding during the 1980s created deficits in many social programs. However, 1988 - the final year of his presidency - brought heartening news. In an ongoing struggle to combat the weakening of women’s rights and especially Title IX, Congress passed the “Civil Rights Restoration Act.”

After a presidential veto, the act was overwhelmingly re-passed by more than the required two-thirds of Congress and became law. Both Republicans and Democrats had witnessed the gradual erosion of civil rights and Title IX and finally took action to stop it. After the override, House Speaker Jim Wright declared the new law “a step forward in making America truly a land of equal opportunity for all.” Many hoped that this action would mean a brighter future for programs for women and families and an end to the decline in federal dollars.

HOLDING ON

Despite the absence of an Executive Director at the Center and the sudden death in April of the Family Support Director, the Board and staff continued to pursue the dream of establishing a transitional living program. Families in crisis needed an alternative to returning to their previous, still dangerous homes.

As a study team progressed, the entire Shelter staff and all Shelter residents relocated smoothly to a temporary home south of Waukesha at the Vernon Presbyterian Church where they were warmly welcomed. The vacant Sister House underwent an extensive overhaul in their absence. Part of the remodeling was designed to refurbish not just the bedrooms, offices and kitchen at Sister House, but to extend the area for child care and the outside play yard as well. The Children’s Trust Fund had recently endorsed a new child care program called “Yes, I Can” to provide more extensive counseling to children in crisis.

Further morale boosters during this difficult period came with the news that more than 20 applicants had responded with interest in the Director position. The Search Committee was busily screening the applications to narrow the number down. Further morale boosters during this difficult period came with the news that more than 20 applicants had responded with interest in the Director position. The Search Committee was busily screening the applications to narrow the number down. Further morale boosters during this difficult period came with the news that more than 20 applicants had responded with interest in the Director position. The Search Committee was busily screening the applications to narrow the number down.


Minooka Park for a cookout and picnic in May. The celebration was blessed by a beautiful Wisconsin spring day full of sunshine and promise. All who were there drew a breath of fresh air and vowed to dedicate themselves to the “tasks remaining before us.” The most pressing task was to make a final decision about transitional living.

**TRANSACTIONAL LIVING**

Immediately in June, the study committee engaged in consultations with two experts on transitional living programs. Jim Tarantino and Bill Bode were knowledgeable about these programs and particularly informed about how to fund them. Two local realtors, Jean Batha and Sue Dregne (a former Board member), began a search for potential transitional living housing as the Board voted to move ahead. Typical of Women’s Center Boards, the fact that they did not yet have a new director in place, nor any staff, nor any earmarked funding for such a transitional living program was not seen as a reason to defer the dream.

Within just a few weeks, four suitable homes were found along East Avenue and Barnev Streets, just two blocks south of the Center offices at 726 North East Avenue. The four homes were back to back so that their yards touched, and the property was being offered as a package. It seemed an opportunity not to be passed by.

At another special meeting, the Board decided to make an offer to purchase these four homes, even though no money was available for a down payment. Taking heart in hand, and on the sage advice of attorney and Board member Steve Tikalsky, Langill in hand, and on the sage advice of attorney and Board member Steve Tikalsky, Langill signed the offer to purchase all four homes for $215,000. Reverend Al Nichols, another Board member, stated with certainty that another “miracle” would occur to make it all work out.

**A NEW DIRECTOR**

Meeting at the home of Patty and Bill Downham on August 10, 1988, plans for further fundraising and grant applications were approved. Making the Transitional Living program a reality would take a Herculean effort in the next eight months. At this same meeting, Sherrick announced that the Search Committee was recommending a candidate who had risen far above the field. The Board voted to hire Marie Kingsbury as the new Director, and she was officially introduced.

Kingsbury brought valuable experience as a leader at the MilwaukeeYWCA and a former director of a 40-bed shelter in Indianapolis, Indiana. She was also prepared to take the lead in the new Transitional Living initiative. Reflecting back on her first days as Director, Kingsbury recalled “walking up the front steps of the 726 building and being greeted by Barb Applegate. I credit Barb with really teaching me my job,” she noted. It was the beginning of a great partnership and friendship.

Other good news at this August meeting included the announcement that United Way had agreed to assist with support for a Transitional Living program, a powerful endorsement which raised the total agency funding from United Way to over $101,000 for the coming year.

Ending the meeting with champagne toasts, the Board also heard calls to finalize plans for the annual auction which was only two weeks away. The message was “Enjoy a celebratory drink, catch your breath, and gear up for a great fundraising auction!”

**FUNDING THE TL DREAM**

Revenues from the auction were vital to underwrite the ongoing programs at the Shelter and the Center. Fortunately, the 1988 auction broke all previous records, bringing in almost $30,000 through its $10 duck pond, silent and verbal auctions - all at the Student Center of UW-Waukesha. One of the attendees, Mark Johnson Director of United Way, successfully bid on a parachute jump donated by a sponsor - a jump which almost went away when his chute caught on power lines. Luckily, Johnson landed safely - to everyone’s relief - and United Way remained a stalwart backer of both traditional programs and the new initiative.

Kicking off the fund drive to purchase the four transitional living homes, the team embraced all of Waukesha with the slogan “Campaign for Community.” By the fall of 1988, the drive witnessed heartening success as donors - both longtime and new - stepped forward to contribute. The Waukesha Service Club pledged strong support, United Way offered an additional $30,000, and the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) pledged sustaining funds.

At a candlelight vigil in October, it was announced that sufficient funds had been collected to plan for a closing on the four properties early in 1989. Al Nichols’ “miracle” seemed to be coming true! As Barb Applegate stated, “I think The Women’s Center is a miracle. I read that the average life of a women’s center is only four years. I am incredibly proud to be a part of a center that has lasted so long and provided such wonderful services.”

Lynne Ketchum returned to the Center staff to lead the Family Support Project and to assist with counseling programs as Family Empowerment Coordinator. Kingsbury hit
The shelter was in a house inside the Carroll College campus. It was in an undisclosed location for safety reasons. Anyone who knew about it was sworn to secrecy. Two priorities for everyone to follow were confidentiality of the shelter and the residents. The best thing about the shelter was what the women gave to each other. So many women kept what was happening to them a secret and now are learning this has happened to others. Besides (one on one) counseling and groups the families who stayed there needed to find a way to coexist together. Many families who had come to the shelter were not poor. They were just not given access to their money or property. Of course this was one way to get them to come home.

Sometimes abusers would find the shelter. I was at my desk one morning when a man showed up and wanted his wife. He wanted to know what kind of place and organization this was. I told him I was sure he had the wrong place. The porch at the shelter was always filled with donations such as clothes and shoes. I pointed to the stuff and said, “I don’t know what you are talking about, I just moved in, look.” He was confused and walked away.

The women in the shelter would take turns doing dishes, cleaning and cooking. For the most part everyone would work together. Many would leave their homes with plastic bags filled with clothes and very little else. Many would have lost their jobs because of the abuse or were told they couldn’t have one by him. Many had no support from families and friends because she would take him back. And none of them had access to money. Some went back. It was hard to look at a future without a job, no money, and in some cases children to care for. Some would come in and out of the shelter for a long time before they could move on without violence.

The best time at the shelter was in the evening. The kids were in bed and everyone would sit around talking. Most evenings were very relaxing and many would say they had never felt that relaxed before.

The shelter had many fun times too. Sometimes staff would play music and dance around the kitchen table with the kids and women. The staff would put on parties for birthdays, Christmas, etc. Christmas would be the time staff would invite past residents to a party. Staff would even bring much of the food and decorations. This party got so big after awhile it could not be held at the shelter anymore. Everyone would call and advocate for families at the shelter – Social Services, police, housing, job, and any place needed. The difference today is we have more of a relationship with services in the community.

the ground running, and the dimensions of the newest dream began to become reality.

Shelter residents returned from the temporary lodging at the end of November with a joyous ribbon-cutting ceremony at the beautifully remodeled Sister House on Wright Street. At year’s end in December 1988, the Board gathered to have the traditional brunch and breathe many sighs of relief that the Center that they loved appeared to be stronger than ever and poised to open the doors of even greater opportunity to women and families in the year ahead.

1989 - THE CHALLENGES CONTINUE

New Board President Anna Pepelnjak prepared for the closing on the four new houses set for the first half of 1989. Renovation costs of $193,000 were added to the purchase price. Fortunately, a grant from the Wisconsin Housing Partnership and a CDBG Block Grant helped to underwrite the additional amount. New Board members Judith Moore, Sally Nantell and Jan Schroeder plunged into the planning process as staff trained for a Transitional Living program expansion.

However, the Board also had to face an immediate challenge. The desire to join a union had led to a non-management staff vote of 17 to 3 to affiliate with the Service Employees International Union in early 1989.

Kingsbury and the Board made a policy decision to try to work with the Union on a cooperative basis, but relations during the first year, 1989, were difficult at best. The Board and management staff had to retain outside legal counsel - at considerable cost - to carry out negotiations.

Part of the trouble stemmed from the disruptions of the previous year between DeSmith’s departure and the hiring of Kingsbury. In these months of uncertainty the Board decided to make some changes in organizational structure which would lead to better salaries and more efficient management. As Applegate later reflected, “It was a period of tremendous change, growth, staff turnover, unrest and struggles for territory and power - a situation that frequently causes employees to turn to a union.”

Attorney David Hertel, from the Milwaukee law firm of Whyte, Hirshboeck, & Dudek, helped and a settlement was finally reached. Raiser were very small since the total budget of The Women’s Center was already strained, and the necessary $17,000 in legal fees were an additional cost (the generosity of the law firm allowed for a write off of $7,000). Adjusting to the union was difficult, but within two years, the Center’s employees began to question its advantages and decided to “decertify” the union in early 1993.

The period of unionization was a strain on everyone. As Applegate remembered, “It was one of the darkest periods in the history of The Women’s Center…. We were working against each other, instead of together as a team.” Kingsbury received a veritable baptism of fire in her first year as Director, but remained calm and professional. The experience also provided a valuable lesson in the importance of keeping communication flowing between management and staff as well as between personnel at the different Center sites. It led to a heightened awareness of team building in years to come.

ADVANCING THE CAUSE

President Pepelnjak signed the official purchase agreement for the four Transitional Living homes in July 1989, as the Center awaited the final approval from HUD for program support money. Extensive renovation on the 501 and 503 North East Avenue and 502 and 504 Barney Street houses began immediately. It was hoped that these TL houses could be ready for occupancy just after the holidays. New staff for Transitional Living included Holly Peterson who worked to gather donated furniture and household supplies.

More good news came in the form of an announced year-end surplus for 1988. Through the generosity of a growing list of donors and foundations, The Women’s Center had ended the year more than $8,000 in the black, a figure that grew by $10,000 in the first months of 1989. This surplus
allowed the Center to create an emergency fund for the first time in its history. New Fund Development Director, Joan Fecteau, planned for another year-end appeal which would keep the surplus intact.

Support for key programs at The Women's Center was also available through state funding. Wisconsin's new Mandatory Arrest Law went into effect in the spring of 1989, along with additional victims' assistance money. In Waukesha, the collaborative Waukesha Intervention Project had brought a policy of mandatory arrests five years prior to the change in state law, a tribute to Center staff, the District Attorney's office, and the local police force.

Across the state and the nation, the 1980s had witnessed many setbacks for women's equality and family protection, but powerful forces did not give up. The alarming statistics on domestic violence resulted in a groundswell of support for new laws, despite continuing political resistance. One report estimated that fully one-third of American women had suffered some form of physical abuse between the ages of 15 and 44, and a total of almost one million had sought care in an emergency room in 1989.

Class action lawsuits against police departments finally resulted in mandatory arrest laws whereby patrolmen had no choice but to arrest an abuser. Successful prosecution and the ultimate incarceration of offenders, however, remained problematic. Complete assurance of safety and protection for women was still far off.

ENDING ON A HIGH NOTE

Instead of the traditional auction in the summer of 1989, Women's Center supporters gathered for a dinner ride, with tickets at $100 each, on the Scenic Rail Dining train. It was a glamorous evening, complete with auction items, although the train’s engine malfunctioned and the passengers enjoyed only a short backwards ride. Most of those in attendance refused an offered refund and took the setback in good spirits. The net profit still exceeded $14,000.

Each year, the calendar at the Center highlighted many meaningful traditions from the annual meeting in January, to the birthday celebration in May, to the auction in August, the candlelight march in October for domestic violence awareness, and the holiday celebrations. Adding to these events in 1989 was the joyous ribbon-cutting on the four new homes which was celebrated on December 1st. The remodeling of the Shelter, a rehab of the Center’s living room, and a new group room all added to the accomplishments to cheer. An unexpected Christmas gift of $5,000 from local activist Harriet Steele boosted the Holiday Appeal.

At the year-end brunch, held at the Pepelnjak-Buerstatte home in December, Board members were treated to tee shirts which stated simply, “I survived 1989 at The Women’s Center.” With new Board members Sylvia Aldrich, David Helling, Laura Loving, Larry Nelson, and Betty Arndt joining the team, other Board members faced the first mandatory term limit requirements to step aside. Not wanting to lose all touch with the cause which they loved, these retiring Board members joined the Advisory Board (later called the Friends’ Committee), continuing a tradition of dedication and service.

INTO THE 90’S

New Board president and founding mother Gerry Pas began 1990 with a series of happy announcements. The first three families had moved into the East Avenue Transitional Living houses just before Christmas, and the Barney Street houses would be ready by the end of January. Money from the Milwaukee Foundation, the Windemere Foundation and the Quadracci family boosted support at the beginning of 1990, and the recent holiday appeal had broken all records at $36,000. Moreover, news arrived that local donor Margaret Shallitz had listed The Women’s Center in her estate.

By July the Shelter had completed handicap accessible renovation, and Faith Holley-Beal (who had recently joined the staff) became the new Sexual Abuse and Children’s Counselor. Instead of another train ride or annual auction, a donor appeal was mailed to more than 5,000 past supporters with a year-end goal of $40,000 to balance the books.

The management of six properties kept the staff very busy, but opportunities for holiday celebrations were still important. Hard as it was to believe, Sister House planned to commemorate its first ten years of service with a ceremony set for June 1991. The Women’s Center’s expanding mission, number of clients, and diversity of programs at the end of 1990 was nothing short of phenomenal. An increase in United Way funding to $122,000 and in County funding to $162,000 was a sign of the growing recognition of the value of these programs and services. For the first time in its short 13-year history, the Center’s budget exceeded one-half million dollars, closing the year at $529,000.

The annual year-end brunch in December 1990 brought in new Board member Carol Peck and new President Sally Nantell. The extraordinary dedication of staff and Board would carry the torch for women’s safety, empowerment and equality into the decade ahead.
Bonnie Bark and Dave Helling, 2003, longtime volunteers and hardworking co-chairs of the 2001-2003 capital campaign.

Sarah Phillips offers a spirited remembrance of her mother, Jeri, while her father, Charlie, sits near by. This took place at the first annual “Jeri’s Walk on the Wild Side,” October 9, 2004, a fund-raising event that also celebrates the life of Jeri Phillips. The “Peace Garden” behind Sarah and Charlie was also dedicated this day as a tribute to Jeri and her dream of family peace and harmony.

Barb Applegate (right), longtime staff and now longtime volunteer, presents the “Employee Excellence Award” to Shelter Program Assistant Barb Anderson, 2001. Barb Applegate established this award in 1995 to honor those “who see beyond their job description and realize their real job is to do anything and everything they can to make The Center run smoothly and to carry out the mission of the organization.”

Former board member Jane Evans, Mary McBride, and longtime friend of TWC Betty Quadacci gather at the anniversary luncheon in 2002.

TWC staff gather for a picture with featured speaker Jackson Katz at the 2004 anniversary luncheon.

Nancy Richards, former board member and outstanding volunteer, visits with Dave Schultz, fundraising consultant for the 2001-2003 capital campaign, 2002.

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Current board member Bruce Paul Goodman and Mary Kingsbury at the Fall Fashion Show, 2003. Bruce has orchestrated the fashion show for five years, creating one of TWC’s most popular fund-raising events.

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A Volunteer Recognition event is held every year to honor the many dedicated volunteers who add immeasurably to the success of TWC. Here Mary Hennis (front) poses with members of the group Bikers Against Child Abuse, who are being honored for their financial support as well as for their kind interaction with children at TWC, 2004.

Legal Advocates Margaret Keoben and Sandy Sommers work on one of the 15 to 20 restraining orders they help file, on average, every month, 2004.

Every October, which is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, these purple life-size figures – each figure a silent witness bearing a date of death due to family violence – are displayed to honor the memory of those who have died as well as to offer a stark reminder of the presence of domestic violence in our communities.

Mayor (and former board member) Larry Nelson joins with TWC staff and friends to observe Sexual Assault Awareness Month, April 2006.

The new building at 505 N. East Avenue, constructed in 2002-2003, houses counseling programs on the first floor; the shelter on the second, and on the third floor, five transitional living apartments. It is surrounded by five older homes owned by TWC – four used for transitional living and one for administration – forming a campus-like setting that enhances safety and efficiency.

Friends Committee (formerly the Advisory Board) members Sandy Villa, Barb Applegate, Gerry Pas and Linda Rounseville pay tribute to TWC employees at a 2005 staff appreciation event.

George and Emily Lorenz visit with Jane Delzer at an event in 2003; all three are former board members.

A Volunteer Recognition event is held every year to honor the many dedicated volunteers who add immeasurably to the success of TWC. Here Mary Hennis (front) poses with members of the group Bikers Against Child Abuse, who are being honored for their financial support as well as for their kind interaction with children at TWC, 2004.
National events continued to provide a dramatic background for issues relating to women and families during the 1990s. At the 1991 annual meeting in January, the Board observed a moment of silence for the soldiers who were in harm’s way during the Gulf War. For the first time, these soldiers included women in the line of fire. The next year, 1992, the Battered Women’s Testimony Act passed Congress, allowing the testimony of expert witnesses in cases involving battery. Twenty-eight states passed anti-stalking legislation.

Equally significant, Congress added a provision in the 1992 Higher Education Bill which included a Sexual Assault Victims’ Bill of Rights for the first time. Under new President Clinton in 1993, reform legislation addressed issues such as the Child Abuse Registry, increases to the federal Crime Victims Fund, and inclusion of the Violence Against Women Act in enforcement legislation.

New Supreme Court appointee Ruth Bader Ginsburg (the court’s second woman justice in 1993) gave credit to the ongoing struggle for equal rights, saying, “I surely would not be in this room today without the determined efforts of men and women who kept the dreams alive - dreams of equal citizenship in the days when few would listen… I stand on the shoulders of these brave people.”

Wisconsin strengthened its protection program when it passed its own constitutional amendment for victim’s rights in 1993. The next year, 1994, the Family Violence Prevention Fund launched a nationwide media effort against the code of silence about domestic abuse, with the motto, “There’s No Excuse for Domestic Violence.” Two years later, in 1996, the National Domestic Violence Hotline was created to assist with crisis intervention, followed by passage of the Rape Prevention Act the same year.

In 1999, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence established its first clearinghouse on “Abuse in Later Life.” Times were beginning to change with a growing awareness of key issues affecting the safety and equality of women. On the local level, in Waukesha County, this awareness brought an increasing number of friends to join in support of The Women’s Center’s mission.
Generosity Continues

While the late 1980s had brought tremendous challenges for The Women’s Center, both organizational and financial, the 1990s were calmer years with wider governmental support. Despite the dire predictions, the Center continued to close its books at the end of each year with a small surplus, thanks to many foundations, individual donors, and successful special events. In August 1991, a new fundraising event—a “cut-a-thon”—was held at the Harry Nick & Friends Salon in Brookfield. In its first year, the event featured both Paul Molitor, a Brewers’ baseball star, and Ally Mills, the T.V. mother on a hit show “The Wonder Years.” The generous stylists and owner Harry Nick donated the profits from the full day of haircuts to benefit The Women’s Center in an event that continued for several years thereafter.

Continued funding of the CDBG Block grant program undertook a new roof for the Center and other ongoing building repairs. Moreover, the more than $50,000 income from the Margaret Shallitz estate was used to pay off a substantial part of the mortgage on the 726 N. East Avenue headquarters building—a huge aid in lowering monthly payments.

Celebrating all of this good news and for the 10th Anniversary of Sister House, the Board gave a picnic at Minooka Park on June 29th, 1991. In commemoration of the anniversary, Marie Kingsbury noted that “the success of Sister House was due to the dedicated staff, volunteers and donors.” She added, “We all share the same dream—that one day there will not be a need for families to leave their homes to be safe. Through advocacy, education, and outreach, we work for this vision to become reality.”

Also in June, news was received that Women’s Center programs which met at Parents’ Place would have to be moved, along with all other programs, to a new location at the corner of Hartwell and Arcadian Avenue. Shifting real estate locations, however, was less a problem now that the Center owned six out of seven of its homes.

However, just when national events seemed to turn positive for women in crisis, another setback occurred. In the fall of 1991, law professor Anita Hill reluctantly agreed to come to Washington to testify regarding her alleged abuse at the hands of Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. Congress opposed hearing her testimony until October 8th, when Democratic Congresswomen marched from the House to the Senate demanding a full investigation. Although many members on the Judiciary Committee refused to believe the sexual harassment charge (and although Thomas was approved), the three days of televised hearings and Hill’s quiet dignity “ignited a new wave of women’s activism.”

The following year, a record number of women ran for seats in Congress, and a new fund called “Emily’s List” (which stands for “early money is like yeast—it rises!”) was created to support their campaigns. Contributors to this list grew in just six months from 3,000 to 23,000 nationally.

Continued Commitment

President Sally Nantell announced in early 1991 that a loan to The Women’s Center for the purchase of the Transitional Living homes would be forgiven. A New York friend of the Reverend Al Nichols had decided to turn his $33,000 loan into a donation, and the mortgage on the four homes was further reduced. With this good news came another opportunity. A home adjacent to the Transitional Living houses on East Avenue, at 507, was available for sale for only $57,000. The Board voted to make an offer to purchase based on the continued growth of the Center’s needs and the fact that such adjacent property would hold potential for future growth.

New Board members Marty Boyd, Linda Caldart-Olson, and Mary Roberts joined in time to celebrate Women’s Equality Day in August, hearing speaker Genny McBride’s talk on the History of Wisconsin Women. That October, before the 1991 Holiday Appeal, the Board was alerted to a projected budget deficit, and, as in other years, members redoubled their efforts to erase it. The appeal, plus the sale of Christmas cards drawn by children at the Shelter, brought in $38,000. Loyal donors once again responded.

New Funding Ideas

As Sally Nantell handed over the leadership gavel to Barbara Foye early in 1992, plans were afoot for a new fundraising idea—a Tour of Homes in Waukesha. Scheduled to take place in May to coincide with the Center’s anniversary, the ‘Tour took place on Broadway and was a great success. Artist Lynn Delzer drew sketches of the homes which were used on the program, along with a short historical sketch. The homeowners received a copy of the sketch as a thank you for opening their homes to the hundreds of visitors. The following year, 1993, the tour was repeated with “The Royal Homes of Windsor,” and a new tradition began.

The same month, May 1992, brought the 15th anniversary of The Women’s Center and featured a panel of the founding mothers remembering about the ups and downs of its birth and earliest days. The formal 15th anniversary celebration, called the “Quincineara,” took place on November 22nd at the Country Inn featuring artist Robert Olson sponsored by Gallery I and an auction of art and other fine items. The official 15th anniversary sweatshirt, designed by Bart Flores, featured the faces of famous women including Eleanor Roosevelt, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Delores Huerta, Billie Jean King, Billie Holiday, Gloria Steinem, Susan B. Anthony, Amelia Earhart,
Harriet Tubman, Jane Addams, Sojourner Truth, Shirley Chisholm, Georgia O'Keeffe, Barbara Jordan, and Marilyn Monroe.

Other community groups held events to benefit the Center and heartfelt thanks went out to “Women of the Wind” - a motorcycle club, the Sunset Rotary Club (now the Elmbrook Sunset Rotary) for its annual run/walk, the Waukesha Noon Kiwanis, the Pewaukee Ministerium, and the Harry Schwartz Bookstore Give Back Program. Other groups joined the effort as well, including employees of G.E. Medical, the Waukesha Junior Women's Club, employees and leadership at Quadratics, the Target Corporation, the Harnischfeger Company, the Stackner Foundation, Cooper Industries, Wisconsin Coach Lines, the Northwestern Mutual Insurance Corporation, and the Waukesha State Bank among others. Moreover, Harriet Steele continued her generous support, donating an additional $20,000 in 1992, a gift which came at a crucial time when funds were low.

On one occasion in early 1995, the community's generosity was demonstrated by the receipt at Sister House of 30 boxes of donated goods after an article in “Center Point” highlighted the many items needed. Donations to the Shelter also came from the G.E. Medical Women's Initiative Network, the Waukesha Early Risers' Kiwanis (who set up a new playground at the Shelter), the Noon Kiwanis (who provided all new bedding, with 17 new mattresses and new cribs), and the Lake Country Quilters who made quilts for beds at Sister House.

New Board members Carol Kay, Holly Warner and Nancy Bartelt joined the team at the year-end brunch at President Barbara Foye's home, where Judith Moore was elected as the new president and retiring President Barbara Warner and Nancy Bartelt joined the team. The Board was further reinforced with members Scott Hansen, Laura Lau, Cindy Liburdi and Pat Rosas. The energy and commitment continued unabated.

**Stability in the 1990s**

The mid-1990s were years of consolidation and continued success. The leadership mantle passed from Judith Moore to Emily Lorenz, David Helling, and to Linda Caltart-Olson by 1997. The staff, too, remained relatively stable under the leadership of Marie Kingsbury, Barb Applegate (to 1995), and Lynne Ketchum.

Phone-a-thons brought in ever more friends and supporters, and the generosity of foundations and individuals continued to underwrite crucial programs as the need for The Women's Center crisis and transitional housing, employment, and counseling services grew. The Child Abuse Prevention Fund, United Way, WHEDA, HUD, VOCA grants, and Waukesha County funding were the staples as the budget surged over the $800,000 mark by the mid-1990s.

A new Valentine's Day event began in 1993 with a concert at the Knights of Columbus Hall by feminist women singers Connie Grauer and Kim Zick, known as “Mrs. Fun,” which was not only fun but raised both spirits and money. The event was so successful that it was repeated for several years at Sunset Bowl and later at the Venice Club, raising as much as $6,000. While seeking money and supporting the vital programs were at the forefront of Board demands, an esprit d’ corps developed as members were reminded of the vital necessity of the Center's services. Staff were willing to give additional time to come to early evening Board meetings to share stories (keeping client names anonymous) which demonstrated the work being done and the continuing need to do even more.

As the 1993 year came to an end, staff reported on the volume of service in the busy year just ending. The Women's Center had fielded 4,000 crisis calls, served 268 women and children at Sister House, provided legal advocacy assistance for 900 women, aided 279 women in the Employment Program, worked with 227 families in the Nurturing and Family Support services, provided child care for 561 children, offered counseling for 400 clients, and served 92 women and children in the Transitional Living program.

**A Fresh Coat of Paint**

One reminder came in the form of a safety warning when an abuser threatened residents and staff at the Center. Even with the assistance of off-duty police officers, the staff was aware of the need for more security.

When threats continued, United Way agreed to help purchase a new security system through its emergency funds. Less crucial, but also necessary, was the need to repaint the old home at 726 North East Avenue which was soon to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

A CDBG grant of $42,000 paid for part of the painting cost, but as the project went forward it was discovered that the old lead paint might contaminate the soil as it was stripped away. All work was stopped until examiners tested the area and a special cleaning process was initiated to protect the environment – a costly and time-delaying procedure.

During the decontamination and painting process, staff moved out of the headquarters building and set up shop at the Chamber of Commerce offices on Wisconsin Avenue for six weeks. The Board also met off site - sometimes at the Waukesha Public Library, the Chamber of Commerce offices, or at St. Luke's Lutheran Church.

The three-color Victorian paint scheme received approval from the local Landmarks Commission, and the entire project, finally completed in 1995, showcased the elegant and welcoming home.

However, reoccupancy did not end the difficulties because one of the painting contractors - who had not proceeded according to Wisconsin code - nevertheless demanded payment for his work. Legal hassles ensued until the question was ultimately settled in The Women's Center's favor with the assistance of longtime Center supporter Attorney Steven Tikalsky and assistance from the Wisconsin Department of Justice.

Weathering this new crisis with her usual equanimity, Kingsbury was recognized as an outstanding woman leader in the spring of 1993 at the YWCA's “Woman of Distinction” luncheon, a richly deserved award. Two years later in 1995, the five founding mothers also received recognition as leaders in combating family violence and were named “Peacemakers” of the year by the YWCA. Further positive recognition came when the Center was featured on a local television newscast saluting its employment program.

Mercedes Cajina worked to expand the Center's Hispanic outreach effort through the use of a Spanish newsletter called “Unidas.” The Center also sponsored a new program called “PERK,” for Partners in English, Reading and Knowledge, a literacy program called “PERK,” for Partners in English, Reading and Knowledge, a literacy program. The mid-1990s were years of crucial, but also necessary, was the need to repaint the old home at 726 North East Avenue which was soon to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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Cajina provided a valuable link to these women. Tragically, Cajina’s tenure was all too short. In early 1994, she succumbed to cancer, and her loyal friends contributed to a fund so that her family could take her back to her homeland of Nicaragua for burial. Hortencia Marchan stepped forward to continue the outreach program which Cajina had led so splendidly.

**WIDER GOALS, NEW OUTREACH**

Under the leadership of Board President Dave Helling, The Women’s Center’s first male president, the years 1995 and 1996 witnessed further advances. The year 1995 was marked across the country as the 75th anniversary of women’s suffrage. While slogans like “You’ve come a long way, baby” were widely circulated, the event also served to remind women of how hard and long the fight for suffrage had been and how many key problems remained unsolved. Further evidence of that sad fact came in the same year at the trial of O.J. Simpson for the brutal murder of his former wife, Nicole.

The media coverage of the murder and subsequent trial highlighted the problem of domestic violence. The Center’s Legal Advocacy staff reported a significant increase in the number of calls from women requesting temporary restraining orders against abusive partners. In 1993, just prior to the Simpson case, staff had assisted with 67 calls. The following year, 1994, the number rose to 116, and in 1995 it increased again to 156. The perception of danger was more real.

In late 1995, AnnDee Allen became the new Fund Development Director, and the Board discussed the need for a capital campaign. Kicked off in the spring of 1996, the campaign was chaired by former president Sally Nantell, Sandy Villa, and Charlie Phillips, and had a goal of $350,000. This money would be used for an elevator at the Center and other improvements to make facilities fully accessible. Board member Carol Ann Kay, a leading advocate in the field of accessibility, raised awareness of this pressing need, which had been brought home to staff when a woman client had left her wheelchair on the East Avenue sidewalk and crawled up the front stairs to reach the Center.

Another reason for the campaign was to provide additional office space, since the Legal Advocacy Program (ten years old in 1996) would then be able to move into the 726 building from across South Street.

A wide array of groups continued to offer support acknowledging the great value of Women’s Center programs for the entire community. In 1996 alone, local playwright Carol Smart performed a drama about her Native American grandmother, Rosa Minoka Hill, and donated the proceeds. A group of Carroll College students held a candlelight walk in support of The Women’s Center, and four seniors at South High School (Brian Arreola, Sarah Williams, Erica Kritzer and Chris Ruck) gave a benefit concert, pooling their talents to help.

New board members in the mid-1990s included Pat Madden, Mary Iverson, Jane Delzer, Sarah McDonald, Sandy Chrostowski, Linda Rouseville, Samantha Ploof, Delia Sava, Dan Switalski, Barb Mathison, Mary Lou Riedy and Terry Sutter. As the campaign went forward, there was significant news that out of the E.B. Shurts bequest to the Waukesha Women’s Club, $80,000 would be passed forward to the Center for the vital renovation project. The local Spancrete Corporation also provided key support when it announced that it would donate the materials to construct the elevator shaft at the rear of the 726 building. Other success came with the news that the 1995 Holiday Appeal had broken all records raising just over $45,000, with the phrase, “It Takes a Whole Community to Wage Peace.”

The capital campaign continued into 1997, and new President Linda Caldart-Olson announced that the Waukesha State Bank had committed $20,000 and that the funding had reached 60 per cent of its goal. A dedication for the new elevator was scheduled for January 15th, 1997, as Cooper Industries and other companies came forward to enhance the funding.

Outreach efforts throughout the breadth of Waukesha County continued to be very important. The “Oconomowoc Enterprise newspaper highlighted the need for The Women’s Center in an article which reported 1,031 cases of domestic abuse in Waukesha County in 1995 and 43 domestic homicides in the State of Wisconsin. The Center’s Violence Against Women program responded by expanding outreach services to communities including Menomonee Falls, Oconomowoc, and Mukwonago.

In October 1995 during Domestic Violence Awareness month, statistics were published that nationally one out of three girls might experience a form of sexual abuse in childhood, one out of 25 elderly women reported having been victims of violence or domestic abuse, and one out of six women was beaten during pregnancy. This data heightened awareness across the country of the urgent and continuing problems.
kept the Center vital. Though not a staff member, Fred Meyer was one of the most dedicated volunteer workers, donating hundreds of hours to do any needed odd jobs – a handyman extraordinaire!

When Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson signed a new “Welfare to Work” (or W-2 bill) early in 1996, clients of the Center were affected by severe “back to work” measures. State Attorney General (and later Governor) Jim Doyle visited The Women’s Center to lend his support for their efforts in all areas - from victim assistance to abuse prevention.

The 20th Anniversary

As the Center’s 20th Anniversary approached in 1997, plans were made for a gala dinner and concert to be held in May at Carroll College, with a new logo designed by Joe Hause, a graphic artist from Milwaukee. Chaired by Barb Applegate and Anne Beyer, the event was a great success, with the Waukesha Area Symphonic Band dedicating a new composition in honor of the Center. The dinner featured a video presentation on the Center’s 20-year history, complete with taped interviews of the founding mothers and key early supporters.

In its first 20 years, The Women’s Center had served more than 100,000 women at no charge, had logged more than 10,000 volunteer hours, had purchased and renovated seven properties, and had grown to encompass 40 staff members in more than a dozen vital programs. The announcement of a new toll-free number for the crisis line, enabled women from across the area to reach the Center. In addition, new legislation extended the “no contact” provision of the temporary restraining orders from 24 to 72 hours. In one year alone, the Center assisted 313 women in obtaining these orders and securing legal protection. Nevertheless, the beating and killing of women continued. To highlight the continued tragedies, the Center created wooden silhouettes of women who had been killed in domestic violence incidents and placed them on the lawn at 726 North East Avenue as a vivid reminder of the continuing need for education and prevention.

Lunch with Gloria Steinem

The following year, 1998, brought a variety of new initiatives, beginning with the establishment of a brick “Pathway to Peace” sidewalk at 726 North East Avenue. Donors could “buy a brick” and commemorate their ongoing support. President Jane Delzer also announced that the Milwaukee Admirals professional hockey team would hold a fundraising event to honor the Center’s work.

As the budget continued to grow (passing the $1 million mark), ever-more creative special events were needed. At the May 16, 1999 Anniversary Luncheon, feminist leader Gloria Steinem was the featured speaker, inspiring the gathering of more than 700 supporters at the Italian Community Center in downtown Milwaukee. The location was chosen because the number of tickets for the event surpassed any previous effort, earning $40,000, with Steinem generously refusing her speaker’s fee. Further donations of $10,000 from G.E. Medical and $5,000 from ProHealth Care contributed to the success of the event.

Local journalist Lorayne Ritt featured the event in her article for The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel (4-25-99), calling it “the hottest ticket in town.” She further noted that Steinem had argued that The Women’s Center asked for too little in return for all of its good work, calling upon the audience and all of the Center’s supporters to “consider whether, if their lives were suddenly ended, their check stubs would reflect their true values. That gave everyone pause for thought.”

Bringing the Center into the circle of a worldwide women’s network became a new focus of Kingsbury’s private outreach. A trip to Beijing, China took her to the Non-Governmental Organizations’ showcase on efforts by women throughout the world to deal with the same key issues of domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault. On further trips, none paid out of Women’s Center funds, she visited women’s centers in Nepal and Singapore where relationships between the Waukesha women and other world centers were established. To discuss these efforts and to enhance communication, she began a series of “Munches with Marie,” in early 1998, through which Board members could come at 5:00 p.m. to share a salad or sandwich prior to the 6:00 meeting.

In May 1999, delegates from Waukesha’s Sister City, Kokshetau, Kazakhstan, came to view The Women’s Center. The visiting women and men represented a Center there which was working to establish a shelter. Following a tour of the Center, the Shelter and the Transitional Living houses, the group had an opportunity to discuss mutual concerns shared across distant borders and establish an ongoing relationship of mutual support.

New Landmarks at Century’s End

In the fall of 1998, the campaign for full accessibility exceeded expectations, raising more than the $350,000 goal. In recognition of its high quality historic paint job on the 726 building, the Waukesha Landmarks Commission awarded a certificate of excellence to The Women’s Center for “outstanding efforts with a historic property.”

Sadder news came with the announcement of the death of long-time staff member Delores Montalbano in 1998. A garden was established in her memory as many gathered to share recollections of her work. She had served hundreds of clients as their first welcoming face at the Center, always a professional with a very welcoming warmth.

In the same spirit, a new Waukesha Family Peace Initiative, begun in 1992, brought together representatives from The Women’s Center, the Waukesha School District, the police department, churches, health care institutions and community leaders. They met regularly to combat ongoing problems of family violence and assault. Once again the emphases were on education and prevention.

Additionally, a collaborative program between the Center and Family Service of Waukesha reached out to children who had themselves been abused at home or had witnessed the violent abuse of their mothers. Statistics revealed that 70 percent of batterers also abused their children. This Waukesha Intervention Project supported further efforts to prevent family violence throughout the community, and the local bus company agreed to feature postcards against domestic violence on the side of the buses.

This kind of collaborative team effort, so vital to the protection of victims, exemplified the growing ability of The Women’s Center to take a leading position within the Waukesha community. In recognition of this leadership, The Women’s Center received Waukesha County’s “Non-Profit of the Year” award at ceremonies in the spring of 1999.

The end of the 1990s saw a return to Board leadership by founding mother and new President Jeri Phillips and the entry of new Board members Mary Ignatowski, Ed Olson, Anna Schneider, Dick Boemer, Phil Hickman, Sue Herro and...
“Musings on Feminism”
by Lynne Ketchum, Associate Director

I think over thirty years the perception of feminism has gone through so many changes. It is somewhat ironic to me that it is our success as feminists that can sometimes hurt us. I am so amazed at the numbers of young accomplished women who had gained access to things like higher education, traditionally male careers (remember when doctors and lawyers were primarily men???) higher paid jobs, athletic scholarships for heavens sake!!! who not only did not identify with feminism but also actually had extremely negative perceptions about the feminist movement. (The mythical bra burnings have become such a crazy urban legend).

We still struggle to have language on our job descriptions which asks that people be familiar with the feminist perspective, and I always ask a question about a candidate’s understanding of what feminism is and their comfort level in working for a feminist organization. In the “old days” we actually asked “are you a feminist?” but we now shy away from that. Although this was never written down I’m quite sure if someone wasn’t a feminist they would not have been hired in the olden days. Now, so often I hear, “Well, I’m not a feminist, but I certainly believe women should be paid equally” or some such nonsense. I have been very ineffective in helping women recognize the relationship between their status today and the work of feminists yesterday and today. As we need more and more community support, this message has had to be tempered and softened. I worry that it may be muted all together. I worry that we could be losing our feminist roots and I think that would be a tragic loss.

Nancy Richards. These new Board members were inspired by the continuing leadership of past Board leaders, many of whom continued their support through the Advisory Committee.

Although 1999 witnessed the end of The Women’s Center presence at Parents’ Place, the staff’s ongoing commitment to the safety and protection of children was a key part of the 15-year-old Family Support Project and its work for non-violence toward women and children. Its continued emphasis on family non-violence was central to the Center’s mission.

In the same spirit, staff and Board participated in a walk in May 1999 called the “Community Peace Walk” and heard presentations by local women leaders Joanne Huesman, Margaret Farrow and Carol Lombardi about new funding available through Wisconsin’s new Violence Against Women Act.

The end of the twentieth century brought a renewed call for vision about the Center’s future. The creation of a strategic plan in 1999 looked ahead to future goals, including the possibility of a new Center building. To reinvigorate their understanding of the value of programs at The Women’s Center, the Board began sessions to hear from survivors of domestic abuse who were willing to tell their story.

One such survivor, a 78-year-old woman, told of coming to the Shelter after her husband of many decades threw her out of their long-time home by the ankles because dinner was 15 minutes late. Anyone who doubted the need to continue the mission and to meet new dreams of success was touched and inspired by her tale.

INTO THE NEW CENTURY

At the dawn of the 21st century, there were many significant changes ahead for The Women’s Center as it approached its 30th anniversary in 2007. Proposals for a new building were beginning to take shape under the leadership of Dave Helling and Bonnie Birk, in accordance with a new strategic plan developed after careful study. The results of the “Tell the Story” campaign brought a brand new three-story building to the Center in 2003, (see Chapter 7)

Board and staff also focused on preserving traditions as the new century dawned, including the annual Luncheon in May, the Summer Evening on the Lake each August, the Volunteer Recognition event and the Fall Fashion Show. Speakers at the spring luncheon included Dr. Mary Ann Hopkins, from Doctors Without Borders (2000); Eve Ensler, author of the “Vagina Monologues” (2001); Katherine Spillar, Director of the Feminist Majority Foundation (2002); Zainab Salbi, founder of Women for Women International (2003); Jackson Katz, leader of a Mentors in Violence Program (2004); Marlin Mosseau, founder of a violence prevention center for Ogala Sioux Indians (2005); and actress Andrea Thompson, herself a victim of abuse (2006).

The summer gatherings were held at elegant lake homes owned by supporters of The Women’s Center, including those of Ford and Bobbe Titus, Tom and Maripat Dulan, Nancy and Terry Anderson, Drs. Shaila and Sanjay Singh, Dave and Sherry Beck, Steve and Carol Millen, and Barbara and Jeff Farnham.

The traditional Candlelight March against domestic violence marked one of the Center’s longest and most moving rituals. In addition, a newer event, the elegant November fashion show, featured friends of The Women’s Center as models, showing off the latest fashions. The event was sponsored by Bruce Paul Goodman and his business “The Fashionable Clothier,” and was held at the Country Inn where hostess Nancy Richards, a staunch Women’s Center supporter and former Board member, made sure that every detail was perfect.

LOSSES AND COMMEMORATIONS

Early in the new century, The Women’s Center learned of the sudden death in an automobile accident of Kathryn Bemmann, one of the founding mothers, killed on Christmas Day 2000. As grateful friends and colleagues noted, “Dr. Bemmann was an inspiration to many people and a guiding light at the Center’s beginning. Her legacy will continue with every client who walks through our doors.”

Just three years later in early 2004, a second founding mother, Jeri Phillips, died after a long and courageous battle with cancer. In addition to serving as a key founder, Jeri had remained close to the Center as Board president, member of a capital campaign committee, and a constantly supporting presence. Along with her husband Charlie and daughter Sarah, Jeri’s commitment never wavered. She was the continuing conscience of the Center, always reaffirming its central vision and the spirit that had first inspired it. A Peace Garden, which Phillips herself had begun with Kay Boemer, was dedicated in her memory, and friends established a “Walk on the Wild Side” in her honor held each October.

The strong bonds among staff meant that other losses were felt very strongly. In January of 2002, a young counselor advocate in Shelter, Brandi Stinebaugh, was killed in an automobile accident in northern Wisconsin, and four years later the sudden death of Barbara Anderson in November 2006 hit everyone.

Staff bonds were also the occasion for celebration. In the spring of 2007, longtime...
staff leader Lynne Ketchum received the “Voices of Courage Lifetime Achievement” award from the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault. It was a richly deserved recognition.

Mary Hennis, another dedicated staff member brought the national model of a “Clothesline Project” to the Center. This project involved a visual, clothesline display of tee shirts with graphic messages on them developed by survivors of violence. The purpose of the project was “to increase the awareness of the impact of violence on a person, to celebrate a person’s strength to survive, and to courageously break the silence.”

Another major outreach effort in the new century was the Continuing Education Program begun in 2000, funded by a Sexual Assault Services grant, and staffed by Becky Wittig. Wittig made more than 180 presentations each year in local schools to help students learn the signs of dysfunctional relationships and to be vigilant about the problems of sexual assault.

TOWARDS THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY

Under the leadership of Board presidents Ed Olson, Sue Herro, Michelle Glumm-Moran, and Ness Flores, The Women’s Center entered the new century with innovative ideas. A new web site (www.twcwaukesha.org) and endowment funds at the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and the Waukesha County Community Foundation were several examples. These funds would support the ongoing mission of providing free services to victims of domestic and sexual violence in the years to come.

On the national level, a growing awareness of the problems of domestic violence and sexual abuse resulted in the renewal in 2001 of the “Violence Against Women Act,” and two years later, Congress voted to make the Office on Violence Against Women permanent. Additionally, a “Child Abuse Prevention Act” was passed in 2001, along with an Amber Alert program for emergency broadcast responses to child abduction. A 2004 “Justice for All” act mandated DNA testing in cases of violent crimes as heightened enforcement efforts tried to stem the tide of violence against women and children.

As the 30th anniversary approached in 2007, the Board, staff, and friends prepared for another exciting April luncheon at the Italian Community Center featuring actress Meg Tilly. A special History Celebration was scheduled for Sunday, June 24th, to bring together past and present friends of the Center in commemorating and reminiscing about the thirty years of trial and triumph.

The years between 1977 and 2007 had witnessed amazing growth in the scope and services of The Women's Center. Yet there was always a steadiness in holding to the original and vital mission—“to provide safety and support to women and their families.” Even with the many achievements toward fulfillment of the mission, the most important dream—that of completely eliminating domestic violence and sexual abuse—continued as the most significant guiding vision for the years to come.

Viewing the new building at 505 North East Avenue, staff member Jenny von Helms reflected, “This place is part of a larger feminist movement—full of history and stories. This place has changed lives—for clients, as well as staff, interns and volunteers.” The real dream at The Women's Center continues to be that some day such a shelter and services will no longer be needed, and violence toward women and children will be no more.

A most ambitious undertaking in the early years of the 21st century was the building of The Women's Center's new facility, a building project that not only demonstrated a bold and committed response by staff and Board to the growing needs in the community, but also showed so clearly that the community, in its generous support of this project, recognized and truly valued the critical work of The Women’s Center.

There were a number of reasons for the greatly-expanded need for The Women's Center services. For one, societal attitudes had changed markedly in the decades since The Women's Center had opened its doors. Domestic violence and sexual assault and abuse were now recognized as major problems, problems that many believed should be addressed with every means available. And many women, who in years past had fatalistically resigned themselves to living with abuse, seeing this as their “lot in life,” now knew it didn’t have to be this way; they could seek the help they needed to heal and grow, to build new lives of peace and productivity for themselves and their children.

Determining how to keep up with growing needs was, of course, always of greatest concern to The Women’s Center staff and Board, and they had known for quite some time that significant changes would have to be made. Certainly at the time of the remodeling of The Women's Center's building at 726 North East Avenue in 1997, with the construction of the elevator to provide wheelchair accessibility and the addition of offices in the basement, it was acknowledged by all concerned that more space and expanded capability would be needed in the near future. The need for a larger shelter was most pressing. The existing Sister House, an older home with no possibilities for expansion, had room for only 20 women and children, and this meant that two families might have to share a bedroom. Because of the lack of privacy driven by the relatively small space, teenage boys could not stay at the Shelter. But most problematic was the fact that too often the house was filled to capacity, and callers seeking shelter would have to look for other resources.

There was also the need to expand the Transitional Living program. The extended help offered in this program was so necessary as counselors would too often see women forced back into abusive situations because of financial concerns or lack of viable support systems. The existing
Transitional Living homes worked well for larger families, but there was a need for smaller apartments for single women and small families.

Staff, Board and other volunteers began to examine a variety of expansion options. Available buildings in the downtown area that would be convenient to the 726 building were looked at with an eye to converting them to a multi-use facility, but there was nothing suitable. The idea of selling the existing Transitional Living homes and the Shelter and buying land downtown to build on was also rejected. There was, however, land that The Women’s Center already owned – the land that made up of the combined back yards of the Transitional Living homes on East Avenue and Barney Street. By the fall of 1999, a committee with the help of CDBG funds implemented a planning study that determined that a building could indeed be constructed on that site, although not of the size needed to adequately house a full shelter, plus transitional living apartments and room for counseling services. But, very fortuitously, during this time another house became available on East Avenue, a house right next to The Women’s Center Transitional Living homes which, if bought, would add another back yard to the land under consideration for the new facility. The purchase of the property for this purpose made sense to long-time Center supporters Dave Helling and Bonnie Birk that they offered to provide the money to acquire it, and by early 2000, the house at 425 North East Avenue was owned by The Women’s Center.

With this added land, a facility could be built that would provide the space for the planned shelter, for five small Transitional Living apartments, and enough room for counseling and child care as well. Soon after this purchase, a feasibility study was conducted to gauge the extent to which the public would support such a project.

Concurrent with these discussions the very critical decision was made to situate the shelter at a location known to the public rather than at an undisclosed location, as it had been for almost twenty years. On a national level, many shelters were “going public” and The Women’s Center staff were quite impressed with the rationale for doing so and the results that were reported. Staff and volunteers visited public shelters in Green Bay, Oshkosh, Appleton, and Indianapolis and found the positive experiences of these shelters quite convincing. What these public shelters were observing was more community support and involvement as well as higher levels of awareness of the issues surrounding domestic violence because of the shelters’ greater visibility. Neighbors were more watchful and there was also an enhanced police presence because there was no longer a need to be inconspicuous. Also, quite obviously, those fleeing from abuse found it much easier to get to an emergency shelter when its location was known. When the shelter’s location is undisclosed, police have to be relied upon for transportation or arrangements have to be made to meet shelter staff at a neutral location. But most significant of all was the fact that clients reported feeling empowered by not having to hide. It is too often the case that having to hide reinforces old, highly inaccurate and harmful beliefs that the victims of domestic violence have done something wrong, something shameful. And having to cover in a shroud of secrecy has had the effect of adding to their sense of vulnerability and powerlessness. As Marie Kingsbury said at the time, a publicly-known location is also a way to tell the community: “Let’s all help to solve this problem.” Given all this, planners were satisfied that the decision to “go public” was truly the right thing to do.

With this decision made and with land to build on, planning forged ahead. An architect (Continuum) and builder (C.G.Schmidt) were selected, staff spent much time analyzing and revising building plans, the Waukesha Police Department offered advice regarding enhanced security, informational talks were held with neighbors, United Way indicated it would support future increased operating expenses, approval was sought from city planning personnel, the site was designated as a Planned Unit Development to offer greater flexibility in terms of size and placement, the feasibility study demonstrated significant community support, and the money-raising marathon began. Needed was $3,200,000 - $2,800,000 for the building, including furnishings, and $400,000 for increased operating expenses, campaign costs, and financing.

Dave Helling and Bonnie Birk agreed to be the capital campaign co-chairs, and they then gathered together a steering committee of truly wonderful community leaders: Betty Arndt, Andrea Bryant, Tony Bryant, Don Fundingsland, Ann Kavinsky-Saqr, Marie Kingsbury, Ellen Langill, Peter Lettenberger, Ron Martins, Michelle Glumm Moran, Al Nichols, Ed Olson, Jeri Phillips, Delia Sava, Terry Sutter, Betty Lou Tikalsky, and Lana Wiese. Board members, led throughout the campaign years by presidents Linda Rounseville, Delia Sava, and Ed Olson, provided encouragement and their own ideas on approaching prospective donors. Development staff procured, free of charge, the design services of advertising firm Kohnke-Henneken for eloquently graphic campaign folders as well as the video-producing talents of the GE in-house group C3 for a compelling campaign video. All of these resources combined to “Tell the Story” of The Women’s Center; to tell how, as a colleague said so well, “Every day some child is better off because of you, some mother stronger, some family able to smile.”

Dave Schultz served as the very knowledgeable fund-raising consultant, and over the next two and one half years, through the amazing support and generosity of the community and the hard work of the steering committee as well as many others, $3,500,000 was raised. This figure includes the many in-kind donations received. Highlights were a telephone call to Marie Kingsbury from Betty Quadraccei, made minutes before the February 2002 public-phase kick-off event, announcing that she and Harry would contribute $250,000 through their Windhover Foundation (this brought the campaign to its halfway mark!), and the great news in June of 2002 that the Kresge Foundation had awarded The Women’s Center a $100,000 challenge grant. Significantly, The Women’s Center was selected by Kresge as one of 165 out of 643 proposals submitted. It was very gratifying, too, to note that donations came from a wide variety of sources - individuals, churches, service clubs, businesses, corporations, government, and foundations - which clearly demonstrated that the community acknowledged and acclaimed the crucial role The Women’s Center plays in Waukesha County and beyond.

A ground breaking ceremony was held in August of 2002. The 24,600 square-foot fully-accessible building, designed to reflect the architectural style of the surrounding neighborhood, would house counseling and child care on the first floor, the emergency...
shelter accommodating up to 32 women and children on the second floor, and five one and two-bedroom transitional living apartments on the third floor. The basement would hold a large playroom, a food pantry, a volunteer workroom, as well as extra room for storage and possible expansion.

As would be expected, during the months of construction as the new facility took shape, quite a different perspective on how the configuration of buildings would actually look and feel was gained. It was much easier to see just how convenient this new campus-like setting was going to be.

With the Transitional Living homes and the recently purchased house at 425 North East Avenue surrounding the new building, it was clear that much more cohesiveness and ease of movement for both clients and staff would be possible. That provoked a dilemma, however. Up until that time there was never any doubt that the wonderful old building at 726 North East Avenue would continue to be used for administrative purposes as well as for client services not directly related to Transitional Living and Shelter residents. But, as some argued, the 425 building, which had adequate space for offices, could be used for these purposes just as well, and it would be right “on campus.” Board and staff were divided on the question of how and if the 726 building should continue to be used, with various uncertainties regarding both financial concerns and future needs to be considered. However, in 2003, administrative staff made the decision to move to the 425 building, while at the same time holding on to 726 and renting it out. It was truly difficult to think of selling it. There was a very satisfying resolution to this dilemma when Family Services of Waukesha was able to purchase the 726 building from The Women’s Center in 2005, for the new

Advocacy Center. The purpose of this center is to provide services to children who are victims of physical abuse - primarily sexual abuse - with all services provided on site, in one location, by all who intervene in these cases: child protection professionals, victim advocates, social workers, law enforcement, and medical and mental health professionals.

Lynne Ketchum of The Women’s Center was instrumental in bringing this service to Waukesha (previously children went to Milwaukee for forensic interviews and medical exams) so there is a very real sense of The Women’s Center’s work continuing in the 726 building.

By June 2003, the new facility at 505 North East Avenue was ready for occupancy, and an Open House was held on June 12th to thank the community for its wholehearted support. Staff member Jenny von Helms’ words reflected the sentiments of many that day when she mused, “As Jeri Phillips shared her recollections of the early days of The Women’s Center, I imagined the amount of strength and dedication it must have taken for the founding mothers to see their dream become reality. I was also struck by how bittersweet it must be to see this building open. First, what an amazing resource for the families in the community. And what a testament to the founding mothers that their dream and desire of helping others has grown exponentially into a staff of 40 housed in this huge, beautiful building. On the other hand, it’s very sad to see that there is such need in the community for a center like ours to exist.”

Later that month, Dave and Bonnie’s house on 726 and renting it out. It was truly difficult to think of selling it. There was a very satisfying resolution to this dilemma when Family Services of Waukesha was able to purchase the 726 building from The Women’s Center in 2005, for the new Child

brought our community together to build this place of shelter, safety and peace. The took our dream and found so many to believe in it.”

On June 27th, a “blessing ceremony” was held at the old Sister House, marking the day the shelter was transferred to the new building. Parish Nurse Sonya Turner expressed the poignancy of the moment in a poem which read in part: “We who leave this house behind give thanks for all it has done and for the many women and children who here sought shelter. This house has been a good house, a house of hope and of refuge, a house of new beginnings...Sisters listened to their stories and saw their strengths; sisters reached out to give comfort and counsel; sisters searched for new answers and new powers.” And with great energy and determination, the extraordinarily dedicated and caring staff of Sister House pledged to continue this good work in the new facility.

And the good work indeed continues. While staff at The Women’s Center deplore the fact that domestic violence and sexual assault and abuse continue to be so pervasive in our communities, there is a great sense of pride and satisfaction that all their planning and the very real risks involved in such an undertaking have resulted in the heightened visibility, wider community awareness, increased capacity, easier access, greater efficiency, and enhanced security that brings their ability to help to higher levels. In the months following the move to the new 505 building, there was an immediate and
significant increase in the number of women and families seeking the many services The Women’s Center provides. And clients as well as staff reported how much they appreciated having all services under one roof. No more would shelter clients have to walk the six blocks down East Avenue for counseling sessions - often fearing an encounter with their abuser. In addition to the privacy gained in having their own offices, counselors reported how beneficial it was to be able to walk a client down the hall to make appointments for other services such as employment help or parenting sessions. Close proximity meant that managers and staff could confer immediately when the inevitable daily problems arose. One staff member spoke for many when she remarked that she wished those whose donations made it all possible could actually see what their gifts have done. “The tears and hugs are given to staff,” she said, “but it would be great if everyone could have that moment.”

It would have been difficult in 1977 to predict what The Women’s Center would become 30 years later. An idea of five visionary women has blossomed into an organization that evolved through the years to become a mainstay, serving communities throughout Southeastern Wisconsin.

So, what now? What might the next 30 years bring? I have no doubt that The Women’s Center will continue to be on the cutting edge of providing needed services, advocacy and prevention education to our communities. I am certain that dedicated employees and volunteers will continue to emerge to take on the reins of leadership. I am sure that victims of sexual and domestic violence will take the courageous steps to seek help and justice through the services at The Women’s Center. I believe community support will increase as more and more individuals realize the necessity of these services and their responsibility to be part of the solution.

At The Women’s Center, we often talk about our long-term aim of putting ourselves out of business. This is a lofty goal, but one that we must continue to strive towards. Prevention education is a key to realizing this dream. We must increase our efforts to reach out to young and old, male and female. We must shout the message that no one deserves or “asks for” or “provokes” violence; the responsibility must be focused on the perpetrator’s behavior.

It is a privilege to be a part of this organization and its critical work; to be a part of a national and, indeed, an emerging international movement to put an end to gender violence. I believe we will not stop short of our goal of peace in our homes and peace in our communities. Nothing less is acceptable.
A Note on Sources

In a short historical work such as this, we decided against using intrusive endnote citations. Instead, this “Note on Sources” is designed to acknowledge the resources used for the book and point the way for further research.

The minutes of The Women’s Center Board meetings are collected in notebooks housed at the Center’s offices, along with a series of scrapbooks with newspaper stories and event brochures, assembled by Barb Applegate.


In addition, the three founding mothers provided assistance through written memories and interviews, as did key volunteers and staff members. These oral histories are being assembled and will also be archived with the existing records at the Center.