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## Overcoming Barriers in Communities

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## OVERCOMING BARRIERS IN COMMUNITIES

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\* \* \*

[Videotaped Testimony:]

BLACK WOMAN: You know, when he put that gun to my head, I knew that was it. The reason I knew it was it is because the girls were there. The girls saw everything. And that night, we were just so crazy trying to get out of that small apartment, running around from this crazy man. We were screaming. We were hysterical. And I said that would never happen again.

But you know what is really weird? I did not do it for me; I did it for them. I did not do it for me. But what they saw that day was fifteen years of abuse and ugliness that I had always tried to hide. I said I would not do it any more.

You know, the girls are the most important thing in my life. They are the things I love most. They are the priority. They are the good and the bad of me. But I am really fearful of doing what the lawyer I saw told me to do.

You see, I am afraid of losing him. When I went to talk to that lawyer, I was trying to let her know I do not know this system. It just doesn't feel right.

You know, at one point I was on welfare, and that was tough, trying to figure out that whole system. Now I am working and do not have to deal with that. I talked to the kids' teachers. But I will tell you, this legal system, these lawyers, these judges, the social workers—I am not sure I can do this.

So I consulted you because somebody suggested I should. But as I look at you, you look like me. Your skin color is the same as mine. Your hair texture is the same as mine. You speak to me in a language I understand, but do not understand. I do not know if you get what I am saying to you. You see, my experiences have

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1. Evelyn Cardona is the executive director of the North Brooklyn Coalition Against Family Violence. A survivor of domestic violence, Ms. Cardona is the co-founder of Alternatives for Women. She works closely with the New York City Police Department and provides domestic abuse training.

2. The North Brooklyn Coalition Against Family Violence offers domestic violence victims in northern Brooklyn a range of support services. Specifically, the organization offers compensation claim assistance, criminal justice advocacy, support groups, shelter placement, and relocation assistance. New York State Crime Victims Resource Directory, at <http://www.usaondny.org/cvb/manual2.html#nbcafv> (last visited Sept. 12, 2001).

been oppression in many ways. I have been raped. I have been sodomized.

I have dealt with racism and sexism in ways you could never understand. My womanhood, my womanhood itself, has been taking the place of that. I just do not think you can imagine. While I know you are trying to help me out, some of what you suggest does not work for me. I need you to understand that.

So, as you make a suggestion, the solution may not be good for me, or based on my experiences. My reality is different from yours. You are telling me to file for an order of protection. What is that really going to do for me?

I am thinking about going into a shelter. I put in my application. Won't that open up a whole can of worms that have been put to rest? You know, he said he would kill me if I went any further with this.

My mother said, "What is your problem? Black people do not call the police in Harlem. They do not do that. The police are not our friends." My sister says I am a traitor. She is not even talking to me.

What I wanted out of life was a family, children I could hug and love, and a relationship with someone who respects me. I did not get that. I absolutely did not get that. I am not sure about this order of protection; even though I can get child support, I do not know if it is worth it.

Do you get what I am saying? I am not sure.

Somehow I find myself in family court. Well, I will tell you. This is one heck of a place. I have been here since 9:30, and it is 4:00 now. My case was just heard. By the way, I had to look at him from across the way because he made bail. I did not realize, but I heard later from the guard downstairs. So, I have been sitting here looking at this man all day. If he could kill me, he would, as I sit here.

As I look at the people in the room, they look like me. The people who are sitting waiting for cases to be heard look like me. Their skin is brown and black. The people who are making decisions do not look like me at all. In fact, the court officers, I have watched them all day, have more control over that calendar than the judges. That is what I think.

I cannot do this. I do not want to do this. I do not ever want to come back to this place. And the court officers—which I think is really horrible—if you know them, you can get in. I am invisible. My life means nothing to them.

And so, I wait. The people look like they have been hit by bombs. They have blank stares and no looks on their face. When they come out of the room where they call the cases, they stumble out with bewildered looks on their faces. They usually huddle with their attorneys to figure out what just happened.

So as I stand in front of the judge, the judge does not look at me. She does not even know I exist. She is not even interested in why I am there. The only people the judge is talking to are the lawyers in the room. I am not quite sure I want to do this, because I have exposed myself in ways I never thought I could. Only worse. I did not get a chance to say what was on my mind.

So, I finally get a little yellow slip that tells me to come back to this God-awful, forsaken place, but I am not coming back here. I am not doing this. And as I stumble into the waiting room, I become one of the people who come out of the room looking confused and dazed with a blank stare, not knowing what happened.

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MS. CARDONA: Pretty deep, huh? Well, I want you to close your eyes for a minute and feel that darkness and silence. I was that woman. I was that victim seventeen years ago. I was that woman thrown out in the street without any clothing on because I wanted to study. And I outsmarted him when he unscrewed the light bulbs from the socket so I could not read. But that was not the worst thing he did to me. The worst was breaking my schoolbooks. I did not have financial aid to pay for them. How was I going to buy those schoolbooks again?

Today I am the executive director of the North Brooklyn Coalition Against Family Violence. I am taking a stand against domestic violence. The organization I represent is the hottest, the best, because I vowed to not let what happened to me happen to anyone else.

We hold domestic support groups in the same precinct where my batterer beat me up. Right in the same precinct. Not in the community, but in the precinct, with police officers sitting down next to us.

How did this happen? You think I left the first time? No. It was a hard eight years.<sup>3</sup> I was known to the triage nurse, the orthope-

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3. See generally DAWN BRADLEY BERRY, *THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SOURCEBOOK* 47-55 (3d ed. 2000) (discussing numerous reasons why battered women remain in the home with their batterer, including fear and perceived social pressures and noting that many women make multiple attempts before ultimately ending an abusive relationship).

dic doctor, and the emergency room staff. I was in there every other week. They stopped asking what happened because, of course, I fell down the stairs; I banged into the cabinets.<sup>4</sup>

When I started college, I did not want to study domestic violence. I figured I would help prevent teenage kids from becoming teenage moms like myself. But, I had to do a residency program—my internship. I was working in the south side of Williamsburg with formerly homeless families who had just been placed in special incentive programs.<sup>5</sup> I had to do outreach, so I was going to do a women's coffee hour and get to see their kids, but as we went door to door I saw the faces of physical abuse,<sup>6</sup> psychological abuse,<sup>7</sup> emotional abuse,<sup>8</sup> and sexual abuse.<sup>9</sup>

I returned to my supervisor and told her, "I don't think a coffee hour is going to make it." She said to me, "What are you talking about?" I said, "There is domestic violence in these buildings." She is like, "Are you kidding me? These women just got out of the shelter system. They have not been here more than two months. They do not even have relationships." I am like, "Well, you better get a grip."

I told her I did not know the first thing about domestic violence. She asked me, "Then how did you know they were going through domestic violence?" I said, "Because I recognize the faces, I was a

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4. See MARGI LAIRD McCUE, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE 123-24 (1995), for a discussion on the effectiveness of the health care system in detecting and responding to domestic violence. "One study found that in 40 percent of the cases in which physicians interacted with battered women in an emergency-room setting, the physicians made no response to the abuse. In another study, physicians attributed their failure to talk to women about violence to concerns about offending patients, to fear of opening a 'Pandora's box,' and to lack of time." *Id.* at 123 (citations omitted).

5. Many cities have created incentive programs for the poor to work toward financial independence. For example, homeless or formerly homeless families may be given subsidized housing in exchange for participating in job training programs. See generally David C. Anderson, *An Oasis in Brooklyn*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 11, 1993, at A16 (reporting that in addition to providing subsidized apartments to the working poor and formerly homeless, one program in Brooklyn offers free day care for welfare mothers who attend job training).

6. The National Clearinghouse on Domestic Violence estimated three to four million women a year suffer from physical or domestic abuse in the United States. McCUE, *supra* note 4, at 79.

7. "Twenty percent of the abused population evidence mental health problems in addition to physical injury. More than one-third carry a diagnosis of depression or another situational disorder, and one abused women in ten suffers a psychotic break." *Id.* at 123.

8. *Id.* at 81-82. A survey of 234 physically abused women reported that ninety-five percent also reported emotional abuse. *Id.* at 81.

9. *Id.* at 82-83. "Forty percent of battered women are forced into sex against their will by their partners or husbands." *Id.* at 83 (citations omitted).

victim.” I had closed that chapter of my life more than ten years ago, but she allowed me to reopen it in a safe way. In 1995, we started our first domestic violence program in the south side of Williamsburg, educating ten victims of domestic violence.

The program ran for eight weeks. We educated women. It was not a domestic violence support group. Everyone wants to say, “Oh, let’s put them in a support group, they can compare scars. Oh, I got one here. Hey, I got fifteen over here.”

No. I do not want to hear their stories. What I want to hear is, “What do you think domestic violence is? Give me examples.” They give us what they believe it is. Once they start to realize, “Wow, this is domestic violence. I am a victim,” it starts clicking for them. It starts becoming real.

We bring in a legal panel composed of the district attorney’s office and our judges. Judge D’Emic,<sup>10</sup> for example, has not missed a panel. The program used to run for eight weeks. Now it runs for twelve. Only the legal panel takes two separate sessions. We have to break it down into criminal court, family court, and supreme court.

These women actually ask judges, “How come my batterer did “a,” “b,” and “c,” yet he came out? How come the DA forgot to do this, and then the case was 30-30?”<sup>11</sup> How come I never got my order of protection?”<sup>12</sup> All these “how comes” are turned into concrete answers that are given back to our victims. If all these committed lawyers cannot answer them, trust me, they are on the Internet the next day giving us the answers.

It gives women back a sense of power and control. Look at my terminology—a *sense*. If not the actual power and control, then at least a sense.

Of these first ten women that graduated back in 1995, six have gone on to complete bachelor’s degrees in human services and currently sit on our board of directors. The other two are still in college, because they could not even read.

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10. Judge Matthew J. D’Emic is a graduate of Fordham University and Brooklyn Law School. In 1996, he was appointed to the New York State Court of Claims by Governor Pataki. He is currently assigned to Brooklyn Supreme Court and presides over a specialized felony domestic violence part. See Daniel Wise, *Domestic Violence Court Marks Fifth Anniversary*, N.Y. L.J., June 12, 2001, at 1 (discussing Judge D’Emic’s commitment to hearing domestic violence cases).

11. N.Y. CRIM. PROC. LAW § 30.30 (Gould 2000) (listing the time periods under which a motion to dismiss must be granted to defendant if the people are not ready for trial).

12. See McCUE, *supra* note 4, at 130-32 (discussing different types of protection orders).

In the program we provide escort services; advocacy services, entitlement benefits, emergency housing transfers, home visits, safety planning, counseling, information and referral services and group work. We do it because I remember sitting in the precinct, my dress torn apart, telling the police, "The batterer is coming right behind me." They said, "He is not going to dare come into a precinct." Lo and behold, he jumped through the little window and beat me up in front of the cops.

He was arrested. Yes, he was. But three days later, he was out. I went back to him, and that is the first time I realized I was a victim of domestic violence. I had to become creative in saving my life. I opened the door when I saw him because I figured, "If I run two steps back, the floor is going to creak. He is going to hear me. If I grab the phone, what if he already cut off the wires—he has done it before so many times. He will break the door down, and I will just infuriate him that much more."

So, I opened up the door and hugged him and I said, "Honey, you are home." He says, "Are you going to drop the charges?" I said, "Yes I am." I never pressed charges.

Lo and behold, I did stand in front of judges. Looking at them, I told them, "I love my husband. He did not do anything to me. It was just a big misunderstanding." In front of all those judges I pleaded, "Please go with what the DA says." I was trying to make eye contact, though, conveying, "He is going to kill me." It did not work.

What do we do at the North Brooklyn Coalition Against Family Violence?

We provide a safe haven for women to stay in their communities.

We collaborate with the NYPD, giving women police protection. Why should they have to leave and go into shelters? We have local shelters that work with us. Why should victims be placed in Connecticut or Harlem if they live in the South Side community?

- We work with our elected officials to take on domestic violence.
- We are in local schools. Why? Because if the principal has not yet received that order of protection, he could lead the kids to the batterer. But if they know who the Coalition Against Family Violence is—and we have an unstained reputation—I can call up and say, "It is Evelyn; it is everlasting Evelyn. Do not let that kid go, because I am going to be there by 3:00 with an order of protection."
- We work with drug rehabilitation programs.



- We work with colleges, giving our women priority entrances.
- We work with local merchants' associations. You might say why. Because these women find that when we lock up the batterers they need public assistance.<sup>13</sup> What about education? What about jobs? The women in our community get first dibs at the jobs in the community. If we know of a job that is opening up and our girls do not get it, there are issues these merchants have to deal with.

**Nechama Wolfson<sup>14</sup>**

*President,  
Shalom Task Force<sup>15</sup>*

MS. WOLFSON: I would like to tell you about the work Shalom Task Force, a grassroots group of Orthodox Jewish women, is doing inside the Jewish community. In terms of community barriers, the Jewish community historically has turned inside, rather than outside, for their services. We have Jewish hospitals,<sup>16</sup> a Hebrew free loan society,<sup>17</sup> a burial society,<sup>18</sup> a Jewish Family Service,<sup>19</sup> an ambulance group,<sup>20</sup> Jewish schools,<sup>21</sup> and Jewish courts.<sup>22</sup> It is a

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13. See generally BERRY, *supra* note 3, at 51 (discussing some solutions for women facing drastic changes in their financial situations when batterers are taken from the home).

14. Nechama Wolfson is the founder and president of the Shalom Task Force.

15. The Shalom Task Force was founded in 1992 to provide a telephone hotline for victims of abuse. A group of trained volunteers, supervised by a clinical social worker, offers callers a compassionate ear along with referrals to mental health professionals, rabbis, legal counselors, job placement agencies and other victim services as needed. American Jewish Congress, Violence in Our Community, at <http://www.ajcongress-ne.org/issues/violence.htm> (last visited Sept. 12, 2001).

16. One such hospital is the Long Island Jewish Medical Center, "[a] 829 bed voluntary, non-profit tertiary care teaching hospital serving the greater metropolitan New York area, Queens and Long Island." Long Island Jewish Medical Center at <http://www.lij.edu> (last visited Aug. 29, 2001).

17. The Hebrew Free Loan Association was started to allow Jews to make interest-free loans to fellow Jews in need. Hebrew Free Loan Association, at <http://www.hflasf.org/hfla-history.html> (last visited Sept. 17, 2001).

18. "[T]he Jewish Burial Society, Inc. is a 501c(3) not-for-profit community service organization . . . [that] helps bereaved Jewish families obtain complete dignified funerals that conform to Jewish law at a low fixed price." Jewish Burial Society, Inc., at <http://www.jewishburial.org> (last visited Sept. 17, 2001).

19. See generally The Jewish Federation, Jewish Family Services (stating the organization is a "multi-service social agency dedicated to the preservation of Jewish Family Life which provides such services as informational and referral services, counseling and refugee resettlement"), at <http://www.thejf.org/jfamserv.html> (last visited Aug. 23, 2001).

20. See Amy Wallace, *If You're Thinking of Living in Borough Park*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 19, 1986, at 9.

system that tries to take care of the needs of the community.<sup>23</sup> We turn inside. We do not particularly go outside.

There was no system inside of our community to deal with domestic abuse.<sup>24</sup> There were no institutions. There is a story, actually a true story. The woman who tells it is Hanna Weinberg from Baltimore.<sup>25</sup> Her late father was the head of a very important yeshiva in Baltimore.<sup>26</sup> She was one of the first Orthodox women to be involved in domestic abuse.<sup>27</sup> She asked her father, "What did they do in Europe?" and he said, "We closed the shutters."

There was no place to go. There was no one to deal with it. In a certain sense, we are talking about denial. It was a private issue. Nine years ago, certainly, if you looked in the Jewish newspapers, there would never be an article about domestic violence. You would never see an advertisement for services, places to go, places to call. There was no public discussion.<sup>28</sup>

There are a bunch of S words that apply to domestic violence. The first is silence—silence in the community.<sup>29</sup> If nobody is talk-

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21. See generally Janet Aviad, *Education*, in CONTEMPORARY JEWISH RELIGIOUS THOUGHT 155 (Arthur. A. Cohen & Paul Mendes-Flohr eds., 1987) (discussing the importance of Jewish education in conjunction with secular education).

22. See generally 4 ENCYCLOPAEDIA JUDAICA 719-27 (Cecil Roth ed., 1971) (providing an historical oversight of *bet din*, the Jewish judicial system).

23. See Everett Gendler, *Community*, in CONTEMPORARY JEWISH RELIGIOUS THOUGHT, *supra* note 21, at 81-85 (discussing the idea of Jewish community).

24. Beverly Horsburgh, *Lifting the Veil of Secrecy: Domestic Violence in the Jewish Community*, 18 HARV. WOMEN'S L.J. 171, 176 (1995) (citing an anecdotal account of an Orthodox woman's inability to find support within the Jewish community).

25. "Hanna Weinberg [is] founder and coordinator of Bikor Cholim of Baltimore and a task force member of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Weinberg, who convened the first conference under Jewish auspices of professionals and volunteers related to domestic violence, has established safe houses and an 'underground' system to provide travel assistance and refuge to victims of domestic violence." METROWEST J., Apr. 27, 2000 *available at*, [http://www.njewishnews.com/issues/4\\_27\\_00/mw/loc/text/story7.html](http://www.njewishnews.com/issues/4_27_00/mw/loc/text/story7.html) (last visited Sept. 17, 2001).

26. Ms. Weinberg's father, HaRav Shmuel Yaakov Weinberg, was the Rosh Yeshiva (Talmud and Torah instructor) for *N'er Yisroel* of Baltimore. Information and Insight *at* <http://www.shemayisrael.com/chareidi/archives5759/matos-masei/arwinbrg.htm> (July 7, 1999).

27. METROWEST J., *supra* note 25.

28. See generally Horsburgh, *supra* note 24, at 177 (noting the lack of public interest or discussion regarding domestic violence in the Jewish community). See also Domestic Violence, Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence *at* <http://www.cpsdv.org/DV/domestic.htm> (last visited Sept. 17, 2001) (noting that "Jewish women may feel pressure to not bring shame to their community by revealing the abuse in their marriage.").

29. Horsburgh argues that fear of perpetuating anti-Semitic sentiments is a major reason why the Jewish community is relatively silent about domestic violence problems within the community. Horsburgh, *supra* note 24, at 211. She contends that

ing about it, I do not want to be the first one, because if nobody is talking about it, nobody knows about it. It does not exist; it must be my personal problem.<sup>30</sup> It certainly is not outside of my family.

The second S is secrecy—not wanting to come forward, because if you do come forward and you think nobody else is, you do not want it to be known about you and your family.

The third S is shame—the feeling of shame that it is happening to you and your children, that it must be your fault.<sup>31</sup> Which leads to the next S, *shalom bayit*,<sup>32</sup> the issue of maintaining and preserving peace and harmony in the family. This is erroneously often thought to be a woman's sole job.<sup>33</sup> In reality it is a shared responsibility. The family is the foundation; the idea is to keep it together at all costs. If you do leave the family, it is another S. It is called a *shonda*.<sup>34</sup> *Shonda* is a Yiddish word close to the word shame. It means shame not on a personal level, but on a communal level. You will be bringing shame to the community—another reason to keep quiet.<sup>35</sup>

Another of the S words is a *sheedookh*, a match.<sup>36</sup> You always are looking for one. "You will ruin your chances. We found a good match. You had a great match." A woman worried about a marriage for her children will certainly want to keep domestic violence under wraps.<sup>37</sup> "I am certainly not going to tell about this in my family. What will it do for my children and their chances to marry, and marry well?"

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in an effort to protect the so-called "romanticism" of traditional Jewish law, leaders and community members are very hesitant to publicize any social problems that might be associated with, or caused by, adherence to firmly held traditions. *Id.*

30. See, e.g., Mimi Scarf, *Marriages Made in Heaven? Battered Jewish Wives*, in ON BEING A JEWISH FEMINIST 56 (Susannah Heschel ed., 1995) (noting that many Jewish women feel they are the only ones to whom this is happening and that the battering is their fault).

31. *Id.* at 56, 60-61.

32. *Shalom bayit* literally means "peace in the home." Horsburgh, *supra* note 24, at 179.

33. Scarf, *supra* note 30, at 61.

34. *Shonda* means scandal in Yiddish. ON BEING A JEWISH FEMINIST, *supra* note 30, at 287.

35. Horsburgh, *supra* note 24, at 177.

36. A *sheedookh* is defined as "a (good) match." WEBSTER'S NEW WORLD HEBREW DICTIONARY (Hayim Balstan ed., 1992).

37. See generally DONNA M. MOORE, BATTERED WOMEN 23 (9th ed. 1979) (highlighting three fears of negative social stigma attached to Jewish female victims of domestic violence—embarrassment over a perception of a "bad" marriage, guilt that the abuse was deserved, and embarrassment that they have stayed in the abusive situation for so long).

Another S is social. In Jewish families, Jewish life, there is always some kind of social event—a bar mitzvah,<sup>38</sup> a wedding, a holiday—times when the whole family gets together. It is not a time when you want to leave.

In 1992, my pediatrician came to me and said, “Mrs. Wolfson, I am seeing a serious problem in our community. Women and children are being abused.” He was seeing Jewish women, Orthodox women, who were in a shelter in the Rockaways. And he said, “We have to do something.” I was naive. I knew nothing about domestic violence. It was not my world.

After a lot of badgering, I called together a group of people. We were not under pressure, but we decided to do something. We became educated, and felt we would take the silence out of domestic violence in our community.

We have done a number of things. We established the first hotline to focus on Orthodox Jewish women.<sup>39</sup> It services Jewish women and anyone else who calls. Our goal is to reach people who would not use other social service opportunities. We have fifty women trained to answer the line, and Julie Domonkos<sup>40</sup> has come a number of times to train our women in civil legal issues they need to be aware of.<sup>41</sup> It is a confidential line. It is anonymous. We do not take names. We do not have caller i.d. We have the endorse-

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38. Literally, *bar mitzvah* means “son of the commandment,” but this word refers both to a person who has attained religious and legal maturity (age thirteen for boys), as well as to the occasion at which this status is formally assumed. ON BEING A JEWISH FEMINIST, *supra* note 30, at 283.

39. See generally AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS, VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITY, at <http://www.ajcongress-nyc.org/issues/violence.htm> (last visited Sept. 17, 2001). The Shalom Task Force established a telephone hotline for victims of domestic violence within New York City’s Jewish community in 1992. Trained volunteers and a clinical social worker staff the hotline. The volunteers provide the caller with referral services to mental health professionals, rabbis, legal counselors, job placement agencies and other victim services. *Id.*

40. Julie Domonkos is the executive director of My Sister’s Place, a leading domestic violence services and advocacy organization in Westchester County. She co-edited the third edition of *The Lawyer’s Manual on Domestic Violence*, published by the Appellate Division, First Department of the New York State Supreme Court. Ms. Domonkos speaks regularly at community gatherings and through the media about domestic violence and the need for systematic reform and social change to end family violence.

41. Mark Francis Cohen, *Orthodox Jews Confront Domestic Violence*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 3, 1996, at B10 (“Orthodox Jewish volunteers must walk a fine line between protecting the victims and honoring traditions like Shalom Bayit—peace in the home.”)

ment of leading rabbis, which is very, very important in our community.<sup>42</sup>

We spend about twenty percent of our budget on advertising—about \$50,000 a year. It is critical. If you do not have customers, you do not have a business. If we do not advertise, we cannot let people know about available services.

In Yiddish papers, newspapers, magazines—we are everywhere. I was getting my coat after a wedding and I met a friend who said, “What are you doing nowadays?” I said, “I am involved with Shalom Task Force. Have you heard about the organization?” She said, “Oh yeah, I know, ‘It hurts to call a domestic abuse hotline; it hurts more not to.’” That is our headline. People can just rattle it off because they have seen it everywhere.

We spend our money every week, so it is in the paper and they will know. They may not need it this week or next month, but we are there and they know it. When they are ready, we are there.

The second thing we have done is involve the rabbinic community.<sup>43</sup> Again, they had no training. It is like going into psychiatry or alcoholism, having never been trained. Well, when you become a rabbi you certainly have no training in domestic abuse counseling.

We sponsored the first conference in domestic violence in 1996 at the Fifth Avenue Synagogue.<sup>44</sup> It was an all-star gathering. There were close to 200 rabbis from the whole community, the whole rainbow—Orthodox, Modern Orthodox, Hasidic, Russians, Syrians, Munsey, Williamsburg, Lakewood. Everyone was represented.

The Bukharan<sup>45</sup> rabbi looked around as the crowd gathered and saw everybody had different stripes: long beards, short beards, no beards; long coats, short coats; colored yarmulke and black yarmulke.<sup>46</sup> He said to me, “You know, I thought it was just in my community. Because we were immigrants, we lived in a culture in central Asia where there was a lot of violence. I thought it was just

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42. *Id.*

43. Jeanie Silver, *Taking Domestic Violence to Task*, JEWISH ACTION, Spring 1998, at 39.

44. *Id.*

45. The Bukharan Jews comprise a community of Jews from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, two central Asian countries formerly part of the U.S.S.R. These Jews are now concentrated in Israel, central Asia, and the United States. ENCYCLOPAEDIA JUDAICA, *supra* note 22, at 1470-76.

46. A *yarmulke* is “a skullcap worn in public by Orthodox Jewish men or during prayer by other Jewish men.” OXFORD CONCISE ENGLISH DICTIONARY 1657 (10th ed. 1999).

our problem.” And principals who had foreign students, Israelis and immigrants, said, “I thought it was just my school.” And each one looked around to the other one. It was like the “Emperor Who Wore No Clothes.”

It was a very big success. That was the first. We followed it up with another conference the next year—a women’s conference.<sup>47</sup> We did one for the men, but what about the women? So we had a conference for the women in 1998. Our target population was not the general population. It was women on the front lines. That means rabbi’s wives, teachers of brides,<sup>48</sup> mikvah attendant from the ritual bath,<sup>49</sup> teachers, principals, and guidance counselors. It was a big success. Over 300 women were there.

We have been approached by communities around the country who have heard about our work with the Orthodox community and the Jewish community. They do not want to reinvent the wheel. It is expensive to run a hotline, to maintain anonymity and the confidentiality, especially in a small community. You can do it in New York. There are a lot of Jews.<sup>50</sup> There are a lot of people. But we now have affiliates around the country. We go to cities and help them organize—grassroots organizing—and we train them.

We are working in the immigrant community, in the Bukharan community, helping them deal with their problem.<sup>51</sup> There are

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47. Silver, *supra* note 43 at 39. This conference was entitled “A Halachic Symposium for Rabbanim on Domestic Violence.” *Id.*

48. See Paula Hyman, *The Other Half: Women in the Jewish Tradition*, in *THE JEWISH WOMEN: NEW PERSPECTIVES* 106 (Elizabeth Koltun ed., 1976) (explaining that women must learn the qualities that make them “useful in the serving, nurturing, and homemaking”).

49. The *mikvah* is a pool of water designated for the rite of purification, primarily used by married women after menstruating and following childbirth. *ON BEING A JEWISH FEMINIST*, *supra* note 30, at 286.

50. According to the U.S. Census Bureau *2000 Statistical Abstract of the United States* there are 1,652,000 people in New York who have identified themselves as Jewish, either as a religion or as a culture. U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, *2000 Statistical Abstract of the U.S.*, available at [www.census.gov/prod/20001pubs/statab/secol.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/20001pubs/statab/secol.pdf) (last visited Aug. 20, 2001).

51. The Bukharan Jews immigrated to Israel and Queens, New York after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In both countries, Bukharan Jews have had trouble preserving a Jewish identity that had survived first Muslim domination and then Soviet oppression. Specifically, the stresses of immigration has caused problems including unemployment, domestic violence, and lessened control over Bukharan youth. Yigal Schleifer, *Another Life*, JERUSALEM REP., Mar. 12, 2001, at 32. For insight on the traditionally subservient role of Bukharan women, and the reaction of the modern immigrant community, see Yossi Klein Halevi, *Tiger Women*, JERUSALEM REP., Apr. 20, 1995, at 22.

40,000 Bukharan Jews from central Asia in Queens.<sup>52</sup> The women have been very successful and appreciate our support.

The biggest revolution in the community is the recognition that a hotline is only a band-aid. You can only stop the blood from gushing out for so long. The biggest key is preventive education. We have a preventive education program for young women in high schools and seminars in college.<sup>53</sup> We have been in thirty schools in the past year.

Thank you for this opportunity.

**Angela Lee<sup>54</sup>**

*Associate Director,  
New York Asian Women's Center<sup>55</sup>*

MS. LEE: At the New York Asian Women's Center we work primarily with Asian battered women. What we mean by Asian is Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese. Ten years ago, when I started working at the New York Asian Women's Center, I was an advocate. Only a few days after I joined the staff, I had to accompany a woman to court. I was really afraid. Chinese people—believe me—do not go to court, do not go to police, do not want to deal with authority.<sup>56</sup> But I was told by my supervisor, "You have to go with this woman to court. You have to be there with her, and really hold her hand." So I said, "Don't worry, I am going to help her. I am going to go in."

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52. Emily Wax, *Faith Invigorated By Freedom: Russian Jews, Long Repressed, Bring Passion To New York Synagogues*, *NEWSDAY*, Sept. 20, 1998, at G1.

53. The Bertha Kausman Awareness Program is a national program dedicated to educating high school and college level students about domestic violence issues within the Jewish community.

54. Angela Lee is the associate director of the New York Asian Women's Center. She has a long history of activism within the Asian American community. Since 1989, Ms. Lee has been involved in efforts to provide shelter and support services to battered women and children in the Asian community.

55. The New York Asian Women's Center's goal is to enable women and children affected by domestic violence to live safe and independent lives. It is the first domestic violence organization to serve Asian communities in New York City, and one of the first in the nation. The New York Asian Women's Center wants to place the concerns of Asian women and children on the agenda for community change. New York Asian Women's Center, About Us, at <http://www.nyawc.org/about.html> (last visited Sept. 12, 2001).

56. See generally Susan Chan & Cynthia W. Leong, *Chinese Families in Transition: Cultural Conflicts and Adjustment Problems*, in *DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT* 85-103 (Rafael Art. Javier ed., 1996) (discussing the attributes of the Chinese-American family).

So I went in and noticed the judges do not look at you. I was swearing in my name and saying where I came from. This was a return court day. I had the husband on one side of me and my client on my other side.

The judge asked the abuser, the husband, "Sir, can you tell me what you did to your wife?" The man said, "Oh, I used a flashlight to hit her head because she did not let me have sex with her." The judge was really furious. She said, "Excuse me, sir. Let me tell you, in America if a woman says no, it is no. Even though it is your wife, you cannot force her to have sex with you. This is the law."<sup>57</sup>

I was really happy. I said, "Really, that is the law?" You can say no! The man said, "No, she is my wife. I can do what I want." Then the judge became even louder, began yelling at him, and said, "No, Sir, I am going to give her an order of protection. You cannot force her to have sex. If she said no, it is no. From now on, you cannot go near her." We walked out of the courtroom with the order of protection in our hand.

Now, do you know who that judge is? Do you know who she is? It is the famous Judge Judy.<sup>58</sup> I was really happy to know that we have a judge, a Judge Judy, on our side helping women. That was how we started our collaboration with the court.

We got a space in Manhattan Family Court and started our first court project in 1992.<sup>59</sup> Even though a lot of advocates say, "Oh, the judge did not really pay attention," or "The lawyer is not really helping the women," from my experience, I think all the judges, lawyers, advocates, and court personnel are extremely nice to us. I do not know why, but I think it is because we advocate for our

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57. *People v. Prudent*, 539 N.Y.S.2d 651 (1989) (abolishing the marital exception from other sexual offenses); *People v. Liberta*, 474 N.E.2d 567 (N.Y. Ct. App 1984) (abolishing the marital rape exception from section 130.35 of the New York Penal Law (rape in the first degree) and section 130.50 of the New York Penal Law (sodomy in the first degree)). See generally Jill Elaine Hasday, *Contest And Consent: A Legal History Of Marital Rape*, 88 CAL. L. REV. 1373 (2000) (discussing the history of woman's legal status pertaining to marital rape in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries).

58. Judge Judy, a former family court judge named Judith Sheindlin, who former Mayor Ed Koch appointed to the bench in 1982, now has a popular television courtroom show. She is known for her "no-baloney, common-sense approach to the law," and wrote a book on the family courts, *Don't Pee on My Leg and Tell Me It's Raining*. Marc Gunther, *The Little Judge Who Kicked Oprah's Butt; Daytime Television's Hottest Property*, FORTUNE, May 10, 1999, at 32.

59. The New York Asian Women's Center established a Court Advocacy Project in 1991, assisting battered women with their court cases in 1991. New York Asian Women's Center, NYAWC Timeline, at <http://www.nyawc.org/timeline.html> (last visited Sept. 6, 2001).



women. You really have to do your best to help them deal with the system and make sure that they are heard.

I remember another time I was accompanying a woman to Supreme Court. In Supreme Court if you are not a lawyer or a party, you cannot talk with the judge.<sup>60</sup> I was out of my mind at that time. I ran up to the judge, saying, "Judge, excuse me, Your Honor, I want to say something for my client," and he let me talk.

We really have to be true advocates for our women. From what I see right now, the legal system has lots of changes and new laws helping women,<sup>61</sup> and the family court and supreme court judges are all working to help women. Everybody collaborates together.

Yet I still feel supreme court judges have to be trained and educated. I am really naive, but I have heard from our advocates, "Oh, you know, this woman is in supreme court and then she lost her custody and she did not get an order of protection. The judge still granted the husband custody of the children." So I said, "You know, we really have to educate them and do more trainings for them." I hope we can collaborate more on this aspect.

The New York Asian Women's Center has a 24-hour multi-lingual hotline. We have counseling services and a shelter. We just expanded our shelter to twenty beds. We do a lot of advocacy with welfare centers, police precincts, and government organizations. We also have an extensive volunteer program and children's services. You can refer clients to us.

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60. N.Y. C.P.L.R. 321 (McKinney 2001) (providing that an appearance before a court may be made in person or by an attorney).

61. See generally BERRY, *supra* note 3, at 155-215 (describing the recent changes to and the current state of criminal and civil law governing domestic violence); Hasday, *supra* note 57 (discussing the history of marital exception to sexual offense crimes).

**Mircia Sanchez**<sup>62</sup>

*Director, COBRA,*<sup>63</sup>

*Coordinator for Specialized Victim Services,  
Harlem Dowling West Side Center for Children  
and Family Services*<sup>64</sup>

MS. SANCHEZ: Before telling you what I do at Harlem Dowling, I want to talk a little bit about assumptions. As you can see, I am a Latina woman. I was cleaning out my closet not too long ago. I was pulling hangers out and scratched my face. Everybody thinks it is a smudge. I went to a meeting and one of my colleagues says to me, "You have a smudge." She goes like this [indicating], and then said, "Oh my God, that is a scar. Did your husband do that? Oh, I am sorry. Did I touch on something difficult? I know you Latina women do not like to talk about that. You are always defending your man." She is a social worker, but by the grace of God does not work with domestic violence victims.

I did not dignify her comment by explaining what happened. I just had a blank look on my face. But we Latina women, or women of color, or African-American women, encounter assumptions like that on a regular basis. So we like to endure and defend and hold onto secrets.<sup>65</sup>

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62. Mircia Sanchez is the director of the COBRA Intensive Case Management Program for Individuals with HIV/AIDS, as well as the Coordinator for Specialized Services for Harlem Dowling West Side Center for Children and Family Services in central Harlem. Ms. Sanchez has worked with survivors of gender-based violence and abuse for the past nineteen years. Harlem Dowling has worked in partnership with Harlem Legal Services through the STOP Violence Against Women project to provide services to battered women.

63. C.O.B.R.A. Case Management, History and Mission, at <http://www.aidsnyc.org/help-psi/page4.html> (last visited Sept. 6, 2001). H.E.L.P. Project Samaritan Inc.'s C.O.B.R.A. Case Management Program seeks to help victims of HIV/AIDS and their families receive the services they need to remain healthy and independent. The C.O.B.R.A. program offers comprehensive Medicaid case management and referrals along with concrete supportive services including primary medical care, counseling, housing services and legal services. *Id.*

64. Harlem Dowling West Side Center for Children and Family Services is a "neighborhood-based organization" in central Harlem that seeks to "offer families a range of comprehensive, accessible, innovative and culturally sensitive programs and services." Harlem Dowling—West Side Center for Children and Family Services, Message from the President and Executive Director, at <http://www.harlemdowling.org/message.shtml> (last visited Sept. 12, 2001).

65. See generally Zanita E. Fenton, *Domestic Violence in Black and White: Racialized Gender Stereotypes in Gender Violence*, 8 COLUM. J. GENDER & L. 1 (1998) (discussing how stereotypes of race and gender reinforce one another and perpetuate violence).

I work for Harlem Dowling West Side Center for Children and Family Services. We provide foster care and preventive services for children and families in distress in central Harlem and northern Manhattan.

We realized many children were coming into foster care because of domestic violence and so a partnership came about via Harlem Legal Services and the need to collaborate with other service providers within central Harlem. Harlem Dowling is one of those service providers.

My role in the "STOP! Domestic Violence Project"<sup>66</sup> was as the coordinator of that program. The program started in 1997. The lack of communication between service providers was a barrier, and women that came into the program did not stay. They would come get an order of protection, but they would not come back and see the order of protection through. They would not come back for classes or support groups. There was a lack of communication. We found our conversations needed to be more candid and we needed to stop over-protecting clients.

When I came to Harlem Dowling, I encountered social workers who were afraid and unwilling to talk to lawyers. The attorneys at Harlem Legal Services were frustrated because they were not getting the information they needed to advocate effectively in family court. I decided to have a clearer, more candid conversation with the attorneys. I needed to explain to the woman I was representing and advocating for, that it was necessary we trust this attorney. The attorney was there to protect her and to look out for her rights and her children's rights.

Case conferences became a lot less formal. We had case conferences where we talked about what was going on in the woman's mind while she was standing there with her lawyer and not knowing.

Sometimes victims walked into family court and come out not knowing what had happened, because the legalese was not everyday English. Our intakes were in collaboration with the social worker and the attorney. They were on-site at Harlem Legal Services, and were in English or Spanish. The people that did the in-

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66. The STOP! Domestic Violence Project provides legal services for battered women as a special service program at the Harlem Dowling—West Side Center for Children and Family Services, in conjunction with Harlem Legal Services. Harlem Dowling—West Side Center for Children and Family Services, The Specialized Services Department, at <http://www.harlemdowling.org/sp.shtml> (last visited Sept. 16, 2001).

takes looked like me and spoke like me and understood where a survivor or victim of domestic violence was coming from.

One of the greatest things that came out of the partnership was "one-stop shopping." Domestic violence victims complain about having to tell their story over and over again.<sup>67</sup> They have to tell it to me, then they go to the court clerk and tell it again, then they go to the attorney and tell it again, then they go to housing and tell it again—and again and again. What we try to avoid is having them rehash this painful event over and over. So we do intakes at Harlem Legal Services. A woman tells her story once and we relate that story to everyone else who provides services to this woman. We escort them to court, because getting an order of protection is really scary.

A lot of women that came to me were saying, "You know what? I do not know if you understand where I am coming from. I do not know if you understand how difficult it is for me. I have been working all my life. I have never been on public assistance. I have always lived with my parents. I do not even have a pair of shoes. I have to go to the shelter, and now I have to go on public assistance. And I have to deal with people that are looking at me like this was my fault. I do not think you understand."

My answer was, "Check it out. I do understand. I am not only the coordinator, I am a survivor, and I do understand what you are going through." It is important I impart to other service providers the need to share with compassion, to nurture the women that come to us, and to make them feel comfortable and safe.

That is what happens in our collaboration of Harlem Legal Services. The partnership is not only so we can make more money; it is a partnership so we are all united in favor of this woman.

Latina women and African-American women are not big on letting the community know what is going on in the house.<sup>68</sup> But if they trust you and know you understand, they will be more willing to talk to you and tell you, "You know what? I do not want visitations unless they are supervised." They may not tell the attorney.

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67. Jennifer Howars, *Learning to "Think Like a Lawyer" Through Experience*, 2 CLINICAL L. REV. 167, 189-90 (1995) (discussing the experience of domestic violence victims having to repeat their stories to several lawyers and other professionals).

68. But see Jenny Rivera, *Domestic Violence Against Latinas by Latino Males: An Analysis of Race, National Origin, and Gender Differentials*, 14 B.C. THIRD WORLD L.J. 231, 256 (1994) (concluding that politicizing this "private" issue is important to ensuring that Latina domestic violence concerns are addressed in the feminist discourse on domestic violence).

One of the biggest fears of women that come to us is, "They are going to take my kids away. They are going to take my kids away and I am never going to be able to get them back." It is my responsibility to tell them, "But if you trust your attorney, maybe you will not lose your children. These are steps that need to happen. It is difficult. You have to look at him, but it will end one day."

But the attorneys need to understand if you do not have the compassion and understanding, your message is going to come across as judgmental. The last thing we need is to be judged again.<sup>69</sup>

The interdisciplinary case conferences happen between the attorney, the paralegal, the social worker, a lot of times the DA's office, and the hospital. We collaborate with Harlem Hospital, and it is important we know the issues that brought the woman to Harlem Hospital. Harlem Hospital makes their referrals to us and explains to us, "This woman came to us and the man is arrested. It is in Criminal Court, and there is no one else. She needs you to place her in a shelter immediately."

So, the collaboration is more of a communication, to address all of the needs immediately, not after the woman is placed in the shelter and we cannot reach her. A lot of times we lose women after they make it to the shelter, and they wind up going back to the batterer because there is no one advocating. It is not easy to be in a domestic violence shelter. No shelter is easy, but domestic violence shelters are particularly difficult because there is anonymity for the safety of the women. Once the women enter the shelter their advocates need to be able to get back into communication with the women.

The partnership also facilitates the sharing of documentation. When we shared documentation, we were able to tell the attorney this woman actually was collaborating, she was coming to the domestic violence classes, attending therapy, attending all the things that the law guardian or the court was telling her to attend so she could get her children back or avoid losing her children.

The attorney was better equipped to advocate, because if the visitation in the home—or wherever it had to be, whether they had to

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69. See generally Kathleen Waits, *The Criminal Justice System's Response to Battering: Understanding the Problem, Forging the Solutions*, 60 WASH. L. REV. 267, 282-85, 322 (1985) (describing a battered woman's judgment of herself as well as the possibility of friends or family hurting the battered woman by being judgmental or disbelieving, describing battered women's tendencies to blame themselves, and advocating support and encouragement of victims by prosecutors).

pick up the children at the police department, or if it was not working and the woman was continuing to feel like she was being intimidated and all her movements were still being controlled by this man—then we were able to impart that to the attorney. The attorney could then come back and say, “You know what? These visitations are not working. Maybe they need to be supervised. Maybe something else needs to happen.”

It is extremely important when looking at developing a collaboration in your community, that you take a look at the people you are planning to provide services for. Your workers should understand the culture and needs of that community. They should be warm and welcoming, and look like members of the community, and speak the community’s language.

A Korean woman come to my agency two weeks ago and I could not understand a word she said. I was able to understand her frustration because I was frustrated as well. A lot of us come to an agency expecting help because we do not know where else to go. If you are not able to communicate with victims, at least try to get the message across that they are in a safe place, and you are willing to help.

Consistency and honesty is the greatest tool you can use. If you cannot give them something, do not promise it. If you do not know if something is going to happen, do not promise it. If you are not sure that the batterer is never going to be able to get to her, do not promise it. But teach her how to stay safe.

**Maria Arias<sup>70</sup>**

*Supervising Attorney,  
Main Street Legal Services,  
Battered Women’s Rights Clinic<sup>71</sup>*

MS. ARIAS: The place where women experience violence—their home—intersects with all the other forms of violence we are talking about. Poverty affects so many of the clients we work with. In addition to that are racism, sexism, homophobia, able-body-

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70. Maria Arias is the clinical supervisor of the Main Street Legal Services Battered Women’s Rights Clinic at CUNY Law School at Queens College. Ms. Arias supervises students who provide legal services to victims of domestic violence.

71. For an explanation of the creation of this clinic, see Susan Bryant & Maria Arias, *Case Study: A Battered Women’s Rights Clinic: Designing a Clinical Program Which Encourages a Problem Solving Vision of Lawyering That Empowers Clients and Community*, 42 WASH. U. J. URB. & CONTEMP. L. 207 (1992).

ism—the different affronts immigrants, women of color and women from different communities face.<sup>72</sup>

The challenge for us right now is to make sure we address the problems of battered women in a way that really looks at these other issues, too. We need to address not only violence in the home, but also the fact that it is not isolated. It is a violence occurring alongside a number of other kinds of violence.

One of the things I am confronted with a lot is the violence of the legal system. A lot of times I feel marginalized in terms of my own efforts and work inside the legal system. We advocates talk frequently about challenges we face dealing with the judges and the situations in the courtrooms that we have to confront.

A lot of times we walk this very fine line. We want to use the courts, the law, and law enforcement to help protect our clients. Yet when we use those resources we wind up putting clients in situations where they are abused again and re-victimized.

Our clients often do not fit into neat legal categories. Their lives are a lot more complex, a lot more textured, so we have to negotiate that.

So, how do we honor the stories our clients are sharing and, at the same time, figure out, “Does what she is raising fit into that legal box under Article VIII about what constitutes a family offense?”<sup>73</sup> We are always trying to figure out how to negotiate those two places, and that is a big challenge.

Some of the collaborative work is a really important piece. As hard as it gets at times, we have to continue to figure out ways to claim spaces for our clients, to enable clients to tell their stories, to be able to get to the judges. Sometimes judges are willing to be open and sensitive to the issues we raise, and to at least get a foot in the door so we can start to share the issues presented.

But we are always in there pushing and stretching and trying to expand on the legal culture and structure that exists.<sup>74</sup>

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72. See generally, *Revolutions Within Communities: The Fifth Annual Domestic Violence Conference*, 29 FORDHAM URB. L.J. 1 (2001) (concerning the affects of domestic violence on immigrant women as well as gay and lesbian partners).

73. N.Y. FAM. CT. ACT § 812 (McKinney 2000).

74. See, e.g., Symposium, *Women, Children and Domestic Violence: Current Tensions and Emerging Issues*, 27 FORDHAM URB. L.J. 565 (2000) (outlining new trends and new concerns); Kerry Murphy Healey & Christine Smith, *Batterer Programs: What Criminal Justice Agencies Need to Know*, National Institute of Justice Research in Action (July 1998), at <http://www.ncjrs.org/txtfiles/171683.txt> (discussing the development of batterer intervention programs and the need for criminal justice system support in order to further deter domestic violence (last visited Sept. 16, 2001)).

In my experience, a lot of clients get caught inside legal processes because they have no understanding of the issues. Clients wind up thinking that the Administration for Children's Services worker<sup>75</sup> that comes to their house to do an investigation, who is writing a report on behalf of the court, is somehow their legal confidant or advocate. So they have a conversation with that person that really does not help them in terms of what is going to happen. They share information with that person that then is used by the court to make a decision that goes against them. And they sit there looking shocked.

We have big information and education work to do with clients, so that clients understand who is who—who these players are, what their roles are, and what they are doing—so they can make informed choices about what information to share, how they share it, and what is going to happen when they go into the courtroom.

So much of the time they think the same thing: "Oh, the judge is gonna do 'x' because this is how I feel." So one of our tasks is to inform and work with clients. It is a really time-consuming effort, and that is why so much of that effort has to be collaboration between the community-based groups with the advocates. This idea that we are going to fight all the battles in the courtroom, we know what that is like. Forget about that; that is not the way it is going to happen.

We need to do a lot of community work. We are not only in the courtroom; I have students that make sure on the day of the visitation, we can go with our client to make sure the visitation is going to work out okay.

It involves a lot of the tasks we do to pull together this effort in a meaningful and safe way for our client, so our clients feel we are working in partnership with them, that we are really their allies, that we are really trying to help them.

Sometimes there are ways we can work with our clients so that even if we do not get the legal outcome we want in the courtroom—and I know that that is a big part of what we are fighting for—that our clients really feel heard, respected, and like we have done something in the way we have worked with them.

Even if we do not win the courtroom battle, it is valuable to relate to people that they are human beings and have value. We recognize that. We are going to work with people in a way that really validates that.

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75. For information about the New York City Administration for Children's Services, see <http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/acs/home.html> (last visited Sept. 7, 2001).



We also have to take care of ourselves. There is so much to do, and the need is really great. Sometimes part of the ways we do not do our best in terms of our work with our clients is that we are violent with ourselves. We push ourselves to the highest limit, and work the twelve, fifteen, twenty-hour day. We are not really doing a service to ourselves or to our clients when we push ourselves that way.

We need to continue to provide services in a way that is meaningful. I know there is a tension there, so we are always inside of that challenge. And I think we have to find support from each other, and also from the community-based groups that we are working with, about how to do this work in a way that continues to really transform the places that we are working.

**Anuradha Sharma<sup>76</sup>**

*Executive Director,  
SAKHI for South Asian Women<sup>77</sup>*

MS. SHARMA: I am going to tell you a little bit about SAKHI. We were founded in 1989. I am going to tell you about the women we see at SAKHI, the kinds of abuse and violence South Asian women may experience—some of which come from South Asia—and some of the barriers that women face, as well as the work we do as SAKHI.

We are a small organization. We have four staff members and many volunteers who help with our work.

SAKHI is a community-based organization in New York committed to ending violence against women of South Asian origin, recognizing oppression based on class, immigration status, religion, age, ability and sexual orientation. We work to empower women, particularly survivors of domestic violence. SAKHI strives to create a voice, a safe environment for all South Asian women through outreach, advocacy, leadership, development, and organizing.

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76. Anuradha Sharma is the executive director of SAKHI for South Asian Women. Prior to coming to SAKHI, she was a founding member of the Asian and Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence. She has worked at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, a project of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

77. SAKHI is an organization created to “empower women, particularly survivors of domestic violence, and to build a society where women can live without fear and abuse . . . through a strategy that combines service-provision, advocacy, leadership development, community education and organizing.” SAKHI, About Sakhi, at <http://www.sakhi.com/aboutus.cfm> (last visited Sept. 12, 2001).

I feel it is always helpful to go back to our mission. We outreach to South Asian women—women from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh and the Indo-Caribbean. We average about twenty to twenty-five new calls per month. We have worked with about 252 women in 1999 and 315 in 2000.

Within South Asia, abuse of women begins at the time of conception, with female feticide<sup>78</sup> or sex-selective abortions.<sup>79</sup> It continues after birth with female infanticide,<sup>80</sup> sexual abuse, and incest of the girl child. The preferential feeding, clothing and educating of male children from an early age sends a clear message to both sexes about who is more valued by family, community, and society.

In India, abuse is found in practices of dowry, domestic violence, marital rape, and dowry death—the burning alive of young brides by their spouses and in-laws due to unmet demands for gifts and money from the bride's family of origin. In Pakistan, there are honor killings, whereby any alleged impropriety of a girl can result in her death for dishonoring her family. These are the forms and threats of violence women in South Asia can face, and these attitudes do, to some extent, translate into the communities we work with here.

Finally, Indian society's abusive attitude towards widows, which harkens back to the days when widows were expected to perform *Sati*<sup>81</sup>—jump into the funeral pyre with their husband—reinforces the belief that a woman's worth is defined primarily in relation to being married.

These attitudes influence our diaphoretic communities, and to some extent form the basis of where women stand in the South Asian culture. Often, if women are in an abusive relationship, they cannot go back to their home countries. One woman in particular said to me recently, "My parents would rather I die here than go back. That can affect the family's honor." People may question the girls in the family. It may influence her siblings' ability to get married. We are still struggling with a lot of different forms of oppression within the community's beliefs.

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78. Vijayashri Sripati, *India's National Human Rights Commission: A Shackled Commission?*, 18 B.U. INT'L L.J. 1, 41 (2000) (citing NHRC, India Ann. Rep. 27 (1995-1996)) (explaining feticide and infanticide to be two social evils that harm and violate the rights of female children in India).

79. *Id.* ("The deep and pervasive bias against the birth of female children has resulted in the wide misuse of sex-determination tests to abort female fetuses.")

80. *Id.*

81. Leti Volpp, *Feminism Versus Multiculturalism*, 101 COLUM. L. REV. 1181, 1206 (2001).

In addition to that, here in the United States, South Asian women survivors are often unaware of their rights. They face extreme isolation. They have barriers to access in terms of the courts, police, public assistance, health care, immigration and other forms of relief. This may have to do with language barriers, racism, sexism, or anti-immigrant sentiments. These are all ways various forms of oppression work against women in this country.

So, when you combine these complex realities together, it becomes challenging for survivors and their children to leave these situations. At SAKHI, we try to work with women who come to us. We work individually with women. We have a very well attended monthly support group. Women form a sort of community and family. They form bonds of friendship and help each other through stages of the healing process.

Integrated into these groups, we also have health presentations and legal advice. In my own work, we have crisis counseling, safety planning, suicide prevention, and a lot of local and national systems of advocacy.

We have also expanded our volunteer training. A number of people have participated in that and are helping us make connections to the broader legal community, health community, and so on.

We have four program areas at SAKHI. The domestic violence program area is the main area where we do our support for individuals and our trainings.

We have a woman's health initiative where we educate survivors on health issues. We are developing a network of physicians to help present physicians and other health care providers who provide access to our clients.

We have also worked on illiteracy, and are developing a program for computer skills for our survivors.

Our outreach presentations unit offers outreach within our community, where just voicing the issues around domestic violence is, to some extent, revolutionary.

We are also now addressing child sexual abuse.

We have also, to obtain some more legitimacy, reached out to some of the more conservative members of the community. We now have a book, the first book ever on domestic violence within our community, called *Speaking the Unspeakable*,<sup>82</sup> and a film

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82. MARGARET ABRAHAM, *SPEAKING THE UNSPEAKABLE: MARITAL VIOLENCE AMONG SOUTH ASIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES* (2000).

called "The Children We Sacrifice,"<sup>83</sup> on child sexual abuse within our community.

These are great resources because they provide some evidence for the people within our community. There is a myth that needs to be broken with members of our community who continue to silence the issues. We have been working a great deal to end the silence within our communities about domestic violence, sexual violence, and child sexual abuse.

Revolutions begin from the moment a woman makes a call, comes to a support group, or exhibits some form of resistance to the violence. Recently we had, at our volunteer training, a survivor who spoke out for the first time. She told me afterwards it was a positive experience for her to have done that and to have felt it was a safe space to share her story. We do not have many women who want to do that, or feel they can do that, given all the constraints with the way our community views violence.

I was working with a survivor who told her story to the *Washington Post*.<sup>84</sup> Afterwards I showed her a poster of South Asian women from around the country who had been in the news. She said she felt she had joined the league of women who have started speaking out and breaking the silence within our community. And seeing that transformation was, I believe, also in some ways revolutionary. So, revolutions within communities I believe are within individuals, but also within groups.

In our support group in December, we asked women to think about their hopes for the women of the next millennium. We created a whole list of visions for women's rights and strength and peace for the next millennium, which again, I believe, was another act of revolutionary change within our community.

Each year we also do a march against violence.<sup>85</sup> I have left some of our newsletters down here. On the cover of this one is a young boy. He is the son of one of our survivors. He says, "Only

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83. *THE CHILDREN WE SACRIFICE* (Grace Poore 2000). For information on this film, see <http://www.wmm.com/catalog/pages/C486.htm> (last visited Sept. 16, 2001).

84. Lena H. Sun, *Battered Immigrants Gain Ally Against Abusers: New INS Rule Lets Spouses, Children Seek U.S. Residence Status on Their Own*, WASH. POST, Mar. 27, 1996, at A3.

85. The fourth annual March Against Violence was held on June 9, 2001 in Jackson Heights, Queens, New York. *March To Raise Awareness Of Domestic Violence*, INDIA ABROAD (June 22, 2001), at <http://www.indiaabroadonline.com/communityaffairs/jun2001/march.shtml>; see also SAKHI, Join Sakhi, at <http://www.sakhi.com/job.cfm> (explaining Sakhi's involvement) (last visited Sept. 24, 2001).

weak men abuse women. Strong men support SAKHI.” It is very sweet.

We ask people to take a pledge against violence, which is to:

- communicate without verbal or physical abuse;
- teach our children to play without violence;
- support all survivors of abuse without blame or judgment;
- respect a survivor’s right to choose her own path;
- act with courage;
- challenge an abuser’s behavior;
- take responsibility; and
- stop the violence whenever we can.

I was looking through some of our donations the other day, and someone had actually signed the pledge against violence, and sent it back with a check. It was very sweet. So, we have people who really do listen. We try to have people internalize it, take a pledge. I believe some of that work, again, is revolutionary.

One thing that stands out in SAKHI’s history is one batterer, in particular, who had doused his wife with gasoline and set her ablaze. He is now incarcerated for attempted murder. But we staged, with the survivor’s consent, a protest outside his house condemning his violence. That’s a form of revolution or protest that comes from some of our sisters back in South Asia.

In terms of coalition building, we have some national and local coalition-building efforts that are taking the revolutions within our individuals and groups and programs and communities to a larger forum. We work with other South Asian programs and women and advocates around the country to problem solve, to share our strategies, and to understand the work and challenges we face.

In New York, we work with other South Asian groups, as well as the battered women’s advocates and sexual assault advocates here, to address how the many issues—gender, health, sexuality, labor rights, racial justice, immigration rights, economic development and so forth—intersect. We also help do capacity-building skills training, sharing around fund raising advocacy, media advocacy, research, grassroots organizing, and so forth.

A lot of this work is about change. We are reaching out, sharing with each other and growing stronger.