

*"The cop was at the door to  
serve papers. I was scared  
and didn't know what to do.*

*But then I turned around  
and saw every woman in the*

*shelter staring at me big-  
eyed. I knew if I let that cop*

*in that all the women would  
leave because they wouldn't*

*be able to believe that we  
could keep them safe. I took*

*a deep breath and told him  
our policy. "We don't give*

*out information."  
He threatened me with*

*contempt . . . jail.  
I was so scared. But I know*

*I did the right thing."  
— Shelter Advocate*

*Confidentiality*  
Cornerstone of Safety for Native Women who are Battered

## *We Don't Give Out Information*

*A little girl staying in our shelter just said, "Mommy, are we going home? I don't want to. I'm scared 'cause I think Daddy might kill you. Let's just stay here." How can we, as shelter advocates, keep her and her children safe?*

*Shelters for women who are battered are intended to provide a sense of sanctuary, support, and safety. When a native woman who is battered comes to the shelter, she should feel the same feelings of security as she does when she is sitting in the sweat lodge. It is said that when we are in the sweat lodge we are sitting in the middle of the universe. We can open our hearts to the Creator because there is absolute safety, nothing can harm us; we are suspended in a net of love and support.*

*How can we recreate this same feeling of absolute safety and support when a woman is in the shelter? How do we help a woman and her children feel like they are sitting in the middle of the universe where they are safe and cared for?*

*The cornerstone for safety is confidentiality. It is through our confidentiality policies and the strength we show in enforcing those policies, that women and their children feel a sense of sanctuary. Women, as sacred beings, have the right to expect a protective and safe atmosphere when they are in shelter.*

*Violence destroys trust and any sense of safety. This booklet is written to encourage advocates. Stand strong and show the same courage we expect her to have as she leaves the violence to make a new life with her children. Acknowledge her sacredness.*

*— Karen Artichoker, Director  
Sacred Circle & Cangleska, Inc.*

*There are three sacred elements within the Inukaga (sweat lodge). These elements are elders, children and women. The elements of the sweat lodge help us maintain balance in everyday life.*

*The fire-pit is where the elders, keepers of wisdom and knowledge are present. The pit is where Mother Earth (Uñci Maka) prepares the Grandfather Rock (Tunkasila) to share their ancient wisdom and knowledge. The Pipe alter is where the pipe is placed once it is prepared. It is prepared to ensure that life continues and is representative of the Child. The Child is the keeper of truth and honesty. We see this in children, who in their innocence speak the truth without thinking about whether that truth is polite or not.*

*Before entering the sweat lodge, we have already been touched by the Elders and Children. We enter into the womb of WOMAN, Mother Earth, who nurtures us. She is the keeper of values, virtues and Life. We acknowledge her sacredness.*

*— Wayne Weston, Resource  
Development & Specialist,  
Cangleska, Inc.*

## *An Advocate's Thoughts*

*I was so busy today. A couple of women and their children came to the shelter badly in need of safety and help.*

*I hurried about after hearing their stories and doing intake to help meet some of their basic needs: a bed, personal essentials and a good meal. They came here in a hurry with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Between doing this and answering the phone, my mind was in a whirl. I was feeling angry and frustrated. I was angry at the system: angry at the police, angry at the courts, and angry at the abusers who caused such pain and suffering for these women.*

*Feeling overwhelmed and exhausted, I finally sat down to catch my breath. I looked up, and there at the dining room table feeding their children, sat my sisters. Their arms, legs, faces, bore the visible bruises, cuts and bite marks inflicted on them by their abusive partners, the fathers of their children, the men who had professed to love them.*

*I stared and stared at them. Yes, there sat our sacred women feeding our sacred babies. They sat there, the visible scars testimony to what colonization has done to us a Lakota people.*

*As I continued to stare a lump of sorrow formed in my throat, making it hard to swallow as tears welled in my eyes. It seemed to me the room began to swell with a tangible evidence of their strength. I looked and saw the tattered, bruised, torn spirits of my sisters. Here, visibly, before me, was the reality. And this is what I will never forget: We can go to workshops, conferences, and meetings to discuss the "why's" and "should've's" and "could've's" of battered women all we want, but THIS is the reality! Here is the truth.*

*Here were my sisters, my daughters, my nieces, my granddaughters, my auntie, my mother: And yet, beyond all reason, and all despair, here they sat. Still going on. Tending to their children! What Strength! What Courage! What Perseverance Lakota women have!*

*Now I want to know, who is the real Lakota Warrior?*

*I honor them, I respect them - my sisters. And I know that is why I am here. I am here to help them, to persevere with them, and to use my frustrations and anger to help make a difference, so that we don't have to live like this anymore.*

*- Gloria Cournoyer - Shelter Coordinator, Cangleska, Inc.*