

BUILDING COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTIONS TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Increasing Economic Opportunity for Battered Women

National Resource Center on Domestic Violence

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BCS is excited to announce the *Connecting to Build Comprehensive Solutions Institute*. This 12-month process, designed for up to 25 State Domestic Violence Coalition-selected teams, will kick off with an advanced advocacy skills and strategies working seminar November 10-12, 2004 in Tampa, Florida. State Domestic Violence Coalitions received the *Connecting Institute* announcement and application in late July 2004. Coalition teams will hear in early September if they will be invited to participate. Contact your State Domestic Violence Coalition or Andrea Farney, NRCDV Policy Analyst, @ 1-800-537-2238 if you have questions.

Over the course of the 12-month process, the *Connecting Institute* will work with state teams to strengthen advocacy skills, provide opportunities to learn from other advocates, and build leadership that will increase capacity to meet battered women's needs. Beyond the Tampa Seminar, Coalition teams involved in the *Connecting Institute* will receive training, support and assistance from BCS staff and consultants, led by Jill Davies, Sujata Warriar and Day Piercy. NRCDV technical assistance will also provide customized information based on coalition-defined issues. The initial stages of the Institute will conclude with a 1-1/2 day seminar in May or June 2005.

A goal of the *Connecting Institute* is to serve as a catalyst for state and local movement toward more comprehensive solutions advocacy. In this newsletter we feature an example of such advocacy – **Her Will, Inc. of Chicago, Illinois.**

-- Jill Davies, BCS Project Director & Bonnie Fowler, NRCDV Director

ECONOMIC RESOURCE CONNECTIONS FOR BATTERED WOMEN: A COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY APPROACH

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A halfway decent 2-bedroom apartment in Chicago costs at least \$800/month – more than many women can afford. Like many cities, Chicago offers wide-ranging social services designed to help with housing and employment needs. **However, if assistance is not timely, accessible, and responsive to each battered woman's unique needs, it may be of no help at all.** This is where *Her Will, Inc.* steps in.

Her Will, Inc. is a community-based, direct service advocacy program in Chicago that **partners with participants as they journey from family crisis, to stability, to self-sufficiency.** Survivors of domestic and sexual violence, women with children, and parenting teens receive special consideration for services.

Residence services are available through partner organizations for up to 10 families for 6 months to 2 years. Residents do not pay rent. Rather, they save a minimum of one-third of their monthly income. Savings are used to assist with future permanent housing and employment related necessities, such as rental deposits, car payments or credit repair.

Her Will, Inc. **features intensive direct services**, for residents and non-residents, involving support, education, resource connections, and follow up. Services are designed to address each woman's particular needs. Working with women to achieve financial stability through goal setting and capacity building is a central focus of

individual advocacy. Voluntary education sessions and support groups offer information about credit and budgeting topics, as well as job readiness skills. In addition, *Her Will* volunteers have built strong community connections that help provide housing, childcare, job training, medical care, education and counseling for battered women.

Her Will relies solely on private donations and volunteers. Former and current program participants are an active part of this dynamic effort. The program hopes to be able to pay staff in the near future.

Keisha Keith, Executive Director and Co-founder of *Her Will*, firmly believes that women and their families need advocacy to access the help that is available. As her agency's name suggests, the women themselves define that advocacy. She emphasizes that "you can't do it all," and therefore her program reaches out to and collaborates with other local agencies in order to help battered women find the resources and options they need to be safe and financially stable.

LESSONS LEARNED:

1. Meaningful referrals are established through the deliberate building of relationships. Advocates know that referring a battered woman to community resources unable to address her specific needs can waste the woman's time, discourage her from seeking help, and may compromise her safety. *Her Will* avoids such ineffective referrals by

carefully selecting resource connections and deliberately establishing partnerships with potential referral organizations and services. *Her Will* meets face-to-face with prospective and ongoing collaborative partners and enters into mutual agreements. Women are only referred to organizations with which *Her Will* has established personal and institutionalized relationships.

2. Many battered women need help with credit repair and getting a good job before they can maintain adequate housing. Past due utility bills and rental deposits are often key barriers to women's access to housing. *Her Will*, realizing this pervasive problem, focuses its services and advocacy on these areas. The best strategies are often practical ones. For example, when women use *Her Will's* residence services they are given the opportunity to save money and pay off their debts. Financial literacy sessions build confidence and the capacity to plan for the future. Community resource connections are also used to hook up participants with job training or place them in jobs with sufficient income and benefits. One collaboration involves a community organization that provides full-time, 8 to 12 week, employment readiness training. Program graduates have a better chance to work for businesses offering living wage jobs. *Her Will* refers both residents and non-residents to the program and continues to offer advocacy during a battered woman's transition to the work place.

--Andrea Farney, NRC DV Policy Analyst

The following BCS papers provide additional information on job opportunities and job training for battered women:

Publication #9: Strategies to Expand Battered Women's Economic Opportunities

Publication #11: The Workforce Investment Act: The Law and its Implications for Battered Women and Their Advocates

These papers are available on the Internet at www.vawnet.org or www.nrcdv.org and also by calling the NRC DV at 800-537-2238.

Building Comprehensive Solutions to Domestic Violence is an ongoing initiative to help domestic violence organizations collaborate more effectively in their communities and build visions, policies, and practices that respond to the current realities facing battered women and their families, especially those living in poverty. The BCS Newsletter serves as a forum for sharing economic advocacy-related projects involving domestic violence programs. Let us know what you think of this newsletter. We want to hear from you. Send an email to acf@pcadv.org or call 1-800-537-2238 and ask for Andrea Farney, BCS Newsletter Editor.