

July 10, 2008
5:15 pm

AVALON

On September 25, 2007, 1,346 domestic violence programs in the United States participated in the 2007 National Census of Domestic Violence Services. In one 24-hour period,

- 25,321 domestic violence victims found refuge in emergency shelters or transitional housing
- 27,882 adults and children received non-residential services, including individual counseling and legal advocacy
 - 20,582 Helpline calls were answered.
 - Sadly, there were 7,707 unmet requests for services. Programs across the country reported a critical shortage of funds and staff to assist victims in needs of services, such as housing and childcare

For 27 years, Avalon has provided resources and support to victims of domestic violence at no cost. It has been—and continues to be-- the only organization of its kind exclusively serving the Historic Triangle. Throughout its history, it has been Avalon's mission to improve the lives of women and their children by intervening in and reducing the incidence of domestic violence and sexual assault. The agency continuously evolves and improves to best suit the needs of its clients and Greater Williamsburg. Where at one time Avalon primarily offered short-term, life saving support, Avalon now also offers long-term, life-sustaining resources.

Among the many types of abuse that a batterer will use to gain power and control over his or her victim, economic abuse serves as the link between the issue of domestic violence and homelessness. Abusers may be in command of all finances, thus keeping his/her partner dependent upon them for money. For low-income women –and conservatively speaking, 90% of the clients whom Avalon serves are low income and/or working poor--and women with children, staying in an abusive relationship because of financial hardship becomes a compelling argument. Furthermore, for those individuals empowered enough to break the cycle of violence, the issue of affordable housing looms large. A 2006 survey from the U.S. Conference of Mayors¹ identifies domestic violence among the list of the eight most common cited reasons for homelessness; with a 9% yearly increase in requests for emergency shelter, one can conclude that the epidemic of homelessness in the United States will not abate. Yet, “for a domestic violence victim who is seeking to leave an abusive relationship, obtaining and maintaining housing independent from the abuser is a critical, often vital, step”.²

¹ U.S. Conference of Mayors, *An American Tragedy: Hunger, Homelessness in the Land of Plenty* 2006 Survey Released, December 2006

²*Housing, Homelessness and Domestic Violence*, 2004 available at http://www.nlchp.org/FA_DV/ABADV2004.pdf

In sum, unless the barriers to meaningful employment, adequate healthcare, and the ability to secure and keep permanent housing are eliminated, the cycle of abuse, poverty, and homelessness for victims of domestic violence will not end.

Avalon's approach to healing and personal reinvention, termed the Empowerment Walk, is an intensified, individualized process that takes a resident through recovery, to empowerment, and ultimately fiscal responsibility, employed at above minimum wage with the ability to secure permanent housing. Each step of the process is supported and assisted by highly trained and experienced staff that makes up the Empowerment Team. Team members accompany clients through a series of steps in each of Avalon's programs that foster and lead to personal, professional, and financial empowerment.

Having just completed fiscal year 2007-2008 on June 30th, we know that we served 166 clients in the Emergency Shelter, 25 in Transitional Apartments and 119 through our Community Outreach Counseling for a total of 301 clients in those areas. Of that total, 110 were from James City County.

A sluggish economy and soaring gas prices provide evidence for projecting a higher number of clients for the next fiscal year. During FY08-09, Avalon anticipates serving at least 200 women and their children in the Emergency Shelter at a cost of \$1668.58 per person, 35 women and children in Transitional apartments at a cost of \$1662.68, and at least 200 in our Community Outreach Program at a cost of \$359.91. And although talk of a looming recession has been circulating for months, Avalon will continue to provide its services free of charge.

Avalon's overall objective for July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2009 can be summed up in 4 main points. We will work to empower and educate clients on how to

- 1) Live safely and free from abuse
- 2) Maintain a healthy mind and healthy body
- 3) Exhibit fiscal responsibility
- 4) Seek and maintain reliable employment and housing

I ask that the James City County Comprehensive Plan include continued support for the work that Avalon does so that, together, we transition abuse victims to survivors who are viable, contributing members of our County.