

Annual Summary of 2009

2009 marked Sojourner's 30th year of commitment to supporting the efforts of victims of domestic violence to reclaim their lives. We can feel proud of the impact we have had and the good work we have accomplished over the many years we have been in service. We have helped thousands of domestic violence victims achieve significant and lasting changes in their lives and we have lobbied for and worked hard for systemic changes that have increased the safety of women and children throughout our community.

Today, Sojourner combines a comprehensive and professional approach to serve domestic violence victims at any stage of their experience. At the heart of this approach is a dedicated commitment to provide services that encourage the journey of victims from fear to hope. We believe that each individual who needs our services deserves our respect, compassion and support. We offer direct service support and information to enable participants to make informed decisions based on their unique circumstances; empowering victims to become survivors.

Our current services include:

A 24-Hour Crisis/Help Line is available to receive calls for immediate assistance any time of day or night to help callers assess their personal safety level, identify safety needs and options and assist with development of an appropriate safety plan.

Sojourner Shelter, is an emergency housing facility for women and children from throughout the Twin Cities and State who are unsafe in their homes. The Shelter provides basic needs, individual and group therapy; domestic violence and life skills groups; legal advocacy for adults and specialized, age-appropriate advocacy and activities for children.

Community Advocacy Program is non-residential and encompasses services which promote long-term safety. Legal advocates work in Hennepin County criminal, family, civil, and juvenile court. Intervention Advocates assist victims involved in the criminal justice system while Community Advocates support and assist victims through other civil court proceedings including divorce, paternity, child support, child protection matters, conciliation, and housing court matters.

Community Outreach and Education Department coordinates community presentations in schools and other organizations and plans and coordinates trainings for law enforcement, prosecutors, guardians ad litem, probation officers and other professional personnel.

Sojourner's Volunteer Program promotes community involvement contributed service hours as well as in-kind donation. The numerous contributions of volunteers represent a community-wide resolve to support battered women and their children and increases awareness of domestic violence in communities.

During this past year, Sojourner provided:

- Emergency shelter for **185 women and 178 children for 6052** bed nights
- Response to **1332** crisis line callers and **616** calls for Information and Referral
- Served **19, 669** meals in the shelter
- Community based legal advocacy and support to **666** women and **35** men
- **Transition support, parental coaching and services to 273** mothers to increase family stability for children
- **13, 334** hours in direct client advocacy
- **68** presentations which included **13** professional trainings reaching almost **3000** people in the community to increase information and awareness about domestic violence
- **4** volunteers training sessions
- Services Opportunities for **67** volunteers, **22** services groups which included **357** individuals for a total of **8084.5** hours of contributed service time.

2009 however was also a year of enormous challenge. Growing uncertainty about the economy and funding motivated an approximate \$50,000 reduction in preparation of the 2009 operating budget. However, the depth and breadth of the economic crisis was not anticipated and it didn't take long for us to realize that the expense reductions we had made did not go far enough.

As a result, we executed extensive efforts to curtail expenses and secure needed revenues to ensure the financial viability and security of Sojourner. The anticipation of government cuts, limited availability of grant funds and a probable reduction in donor contributions motivated the elimination of some positions and the restructuring of others. These were complex decisions but in the process we discovered some innovative ways to maintain a clear focus on our mission, and ensure a prudent use of our resources.

The economic crisis of 2009 also intensified the challenges for many of our program participants trying to rebuild their lives. Advocates reported this year that approximately 90% of our clients faced serious multi-layered crisis situations. Victims struggled with unemployment, lack of job opportunity, inability to afford legal assistance, lack of medical assistance, eviction and foreclosure, lack of affordable housing, interrupted child support, loss of childcare services and parenting traumatized children. Some residents were forced to stay longer in shelter because of the shortage of affordable and safe housing and the complexity of personal challenges. Advocates responded to increased requests for basic needs support as participants reported difficulty obtaining food, paying utilities and meeting other critical expenses.

The generosity of people in our community and the strength and courage of those victimized by domestic violence and abuse continue to motivate all of us who work here and we are more energized than ever to build our capacity to respond to and prevent this community problem.

There is no doubt we will need to remain aware of the challenges ahead. The economic situation in our cities and state will continue to prod us to do more with less. But the dedication, innovative spirit, knowledge and hopefulness of our staff and volunteers will surely help us meet and overcome any barriers.

Heartfelt thanks to all those who sustained this organization from the beginning and especially to those who have contributed to what Sojourner has accomplished in 2009.