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Spruce Run

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Spruce Run News

December 2005
Working for Peace at Home

207-945-5102

www.sprucerun.net

1-800-863-9909 (hotline)

On Power and Empowerment

By: Francine Stark

Power: the ability to act effectively...natural abilities or capacities...strength or force exerted or capable of being exerted...the ability or official capacity to exercise control – authority...a privilege or right – prerogative...having great influence or control over others¹

A central word in the discussion of domestic violence and abuse, “power” requires careful attention. We define domestic violence as happening when one person, employing a variety of tactics over time, exerts power and control over another in the context of an intimate or family relationship. We often say something like “domestic violence is about power and control” or a batterer “seeks to have power and control over their partner”. We also speak of power in talking about helping people who have been or are being abused, saying the we use “an empowerment model” or that we seek to “give the person power” through the quality of our interactions.

Personal power is innate; we all have it. We rarely are conscious of how much power we truly possess, and sometimes people believe themselves to have none. Indeed, a person who lives in fear for her well being should she use her personal power to seek safety from a batterer may feel powerless.” That feeling of powerlessness is a rational response to oppression, based on experience of the futility of resistance. Feeling powerless, however, does not mean that one’s personal power is gone. It may mean that one’s power may be safely exercised only in careful, strategic ways.

Can any of us give power to anyone? I do not think so, but we may be able to help people figure out ways to focus and use their power to achieve their goals. Part of what we may be validating is a person’s feeling of powerlessness: “It sounds like you

feel powerless.” Our credibility as helpers depends upon our ability to reflect a person’s assessment of her challenges and choices and to construct our responses based on that understanding. We can help a person recognize the power that they have through validation of her use of power: “It sounds like you have worked hard to be safe and protect your children.” We can help a person construct a safety plan that uses her power in ways that minimizes the batterer’s ability to interfere and cause more harm. We can give validation, information, and offer our point of view to reframe problems and consider options, but we cannot give power.

By the same token, we cannot take power away, but we can impose limits on a person’s sense of capacity and freedom to act. The framework in which we make our personal choices governs our use of personal power. That framework is informed by our culture, peer relationships, family, laws and experience. The law against assault removes the right to use your power to assault but not

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the power itself. Hitting people is something we all have the power to do, but most of us choose not to do it, because we believe it to be wrong or because we fear or are unwilling to pay the likely consequences.

Respecting someone's right to make her own personal choices is not "giving her power"; it is respecting her autonomy, integrity, and agency. Providing people with accurate information, new information, and a physically and emotionally safe environment in which to think and focus their power is an act of compassion and intervention.

Empowerment: to invest with legal power; authorize...to enable or permit ⁱⁱⁱ

Empowerment is used frequently to characterize the model of crisis intervention used by a variety of professionals, including advocates in domestic violence projects. Generally, empowerment is meant to describe a process of helping people recognize their personal power and be able to use it in their best interest, to be safe, free, and self-directed.

I have two concerns about this use of the term empowerment. One, it implies people are not already aware of and using their power in their best interest as they perceive it to be. Two, it implies that such self awareness and direction are what is required to be safe from domestic violence rather than the cessation of battering on the part of the perpetrator.

It is difficult to find single words to describe complex things, yet we try. When a person calls or comes to Spruce Run for help, workers engage that person in dialogue through which we do our best to hear what the person is feeling, thinking, experiencing, doing, and hoping in response to the abuse being perpetrated upon them. We use this information to work collaboratively with this person to concoct or enhance safety plans – strategies for minimizing the batterer's ability to interfere with this person's rights to be safe, self-directed, and free. In a word, we provide 'help'.

Help: to do something or provide something that will be of use in achieving a purpose...to give assistance so as to enable someone to carry out an action more easily ^{iv}

Somewhere along the way, help got a bad reputation. The idea that any of us might need someone's help indicated that we were inadequate, weak, or power-

less, all "bad" things. How strange that such an inescapable truth as the human need for assistance became a negative attribute dividing us rather than part of the common ground uniting us. Human beings are all vulnerable to hunger, thirst, exposure, exhaustion, illness, disability, old age, and death. We all need help sometimes. As social beings, we benefit from both seeking and providing help to each other. The power to seek help is honorable, and the power to provide it is a privilege to be exercised with care.

ⁱ Reader's Digest Illustrated Encyclopedic Dictionary, Lexical Databases, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston: 1987.

ⁱⁱ Her is used as the singular pronoun to be grammatically correct while avoiding the awkward repetition of his or her throughout the essay. This is not to imply that the ideas presented here apply exclusively to women.

ⁱⁱⁱ Reader's Digest Illustrated Encyclopedic Dictionary, Lexical Databases, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston: 1987.

^{iv} Ibid

Service Statistics

In FY 2005, Spruce Run provided:

Hotline response and advocacy to 1,164 individuals, for a total of 3,369 contacts;

Support & education groups to 158 individuals, for a collective total of 1,204 hours;

Emergency shelter for 123 individuals, for a total of 3,127 bed days;

Community education and training for 3,019 individuals, including teachers, clergy, law enforcement, human services caseworkers, the medical community, and others for a total of 4,173 hours;

Information about healthy relationships and dating abuse to 7,472 students in Penobscot County schools;

Transitional housing for 18 women and their 22 children.

THE ANNUAL SPRUCE RUN
FABULOUS GALA DESSERT PARTY
AND
STUPENDOUS SILENT AUCTION
(A.K.A. THE CHOCOLATE PARTY)

FEATURING
THE SPONTANEOUS JAZZ ENSEMBLE

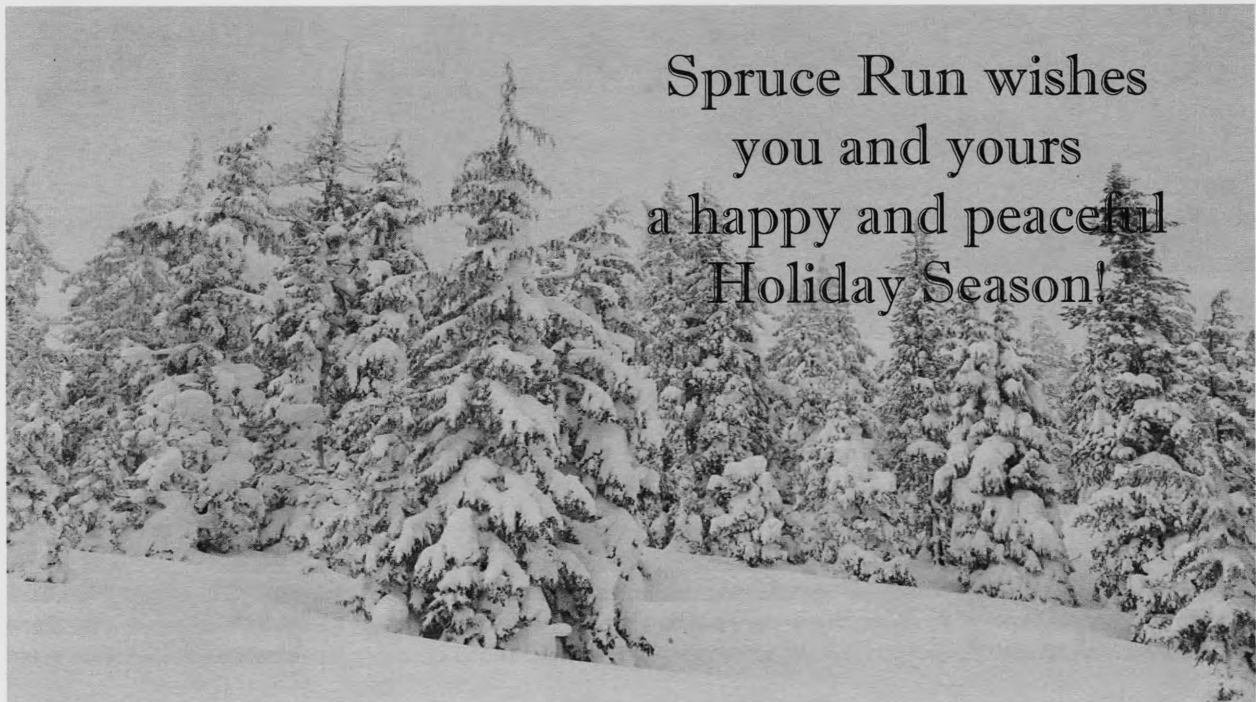


SATURDAY, MARCH 25

BANGOR CAMPUS BALLROOM

7:00 PM

SAVE THE DATE!
TICKETS GO ON SALE FEBRUARY 1!!



Spruce Run wishes
you and yours
a happy and peaceful
Holiday Season!

Clothesline Project at Penobscot Job Corps Center

For the second year in a row, Spruce Run's school based advocates have displayed the Clothesline Project at the Penobscot Job Corps Center in commemoration of Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Working in collaboration with Lanie Parsons, a career counselor at Job Corps, Spruce Run School Based Advocates Brook Minner and Joy Walters displayed more than 50 tee shirts created by survivors of domestic and sexual violence as well as those made in remembrance of a person who was killed by an intimate partner or family member. The shirts



were displayed on numerous clotheslines set up outside the Job Corps dining hall during the lunch hour on October 20th.

The display included an informational table where we offered books, brochures and purple ribbon pins for students and faculty members. Many members of the Job Corps community stopped by the display to ask questions about domestic violence or to share their own stories of the way violence has affected their lives.

The Clothesline Project always has a very powerful effect on those who see it and our experience at Job Corps this fall was no different. There were students who personally knew the women and children whose names were displayed on the shirts and one young man, while taking a break from his welding classes, brought many of his classmates over the look at the display, saying things like "This is important stuff; you all need to come check it out."

For three hours that day, the issues of domestic and sexual violence were discussed, debated and quietly reflected upon at the Penobscot Job Corps campus. Survivors were able to tell their stories and their friends and colleagues were able to gain a greater understanding of the tragic role domestic violence plays in all of our lives. Spruce Run's collaborative work with the Penobscot Job Corps Center continues every other week when our school based advocates meet with incoming students to discuss relationship and dating violence on the Job Corps campus.



Spruce Run Children's Worker Honored at Blaine House Tea

The Annual Blaine House Tea to honor Maine citizens who have made special contributions to the work to end domestic violence was held on October 13, 2005. Spruce Run Children's Program Coordinator, Johnnie Walker, attended along with honoree Janice McNally. Janice was presented with a plaque of recognition by Governor Baldacci. Johnnie introduced her with this speech:

Janice McNally has been a Spruce Run volunteer for the last five years. She came to us as a hotline volunteer in 2001 and took to hotline work right away. She is reliable, gentle and thorough as a hotline worker.

After Janice's first year as a hotline volunteer, she found her true calling as a children's worker. Janice's work with children has included activity groups for children of support group participants, working with children in shelter and, her current strong interest, working with children living in Spruce Run's transitional housing. She particularly enjoys 5 - 9 year olds and loves working one on one with them. Janice has told us that she loves to be able to see the changes in kids when she can work with them over time.

Because Janice is the kind of person who does not seek recognition for her work, we decided to honor her in the most public way possible. We'd like to thank her for her hard work, dedication and her fabulous cheesecake!

Everyone at Spruce Run would like to extend congratulations to Janice and express our appreciation for all her fine work. We hope she continues to use her skills on behalf of the children we serve for many years to come!

Spruce Run Transitional Housing Program Wins Department of Justice Grant

Spruce Run's Transitional Housing Program has been awarded a three-year \$173,290 grant by the Department of Justice in order to further community collaborations and implement an integrated case management approach to providing services to families.

The grant emphasizes building community relationships and collaborations, particularly with Training and Development Corporation; Women, Work and Community; and Big Brothers, Big Sisters. Each of these organizations will be able to provide on site services for Spruce Run Transitional Housing families.

Another goal of our Transitional Housing Program has been to move towards an integrated case management approach to providing services. This model will allow Spruce Run Transitional Housing staff to facilitate a monthly meeting for each family, which will include all the community service providers working with that family. This level of cooperation ensures that all service providers are on the same page about the family's goals, strengths, and needs. A collaborative approach to problem-solving the barriers the family faces is often the most productive. Spruce Run will also provide a 30-hour training about domestic abuse to a variety of these community partners.

The grant has also enabled Spruce Run to add a staff person to our very busy and successful Transitional Housing Team; Suzie Boutilier came on as the Transitional Services Coordinator in October, and we're delighted to have an extra pair of hands. A small amount of the grant money will be used to provide some new computers and furniture for the Transitional Housing Community Center.



Spruce Run Shelter Wish List Winter 2005

Spruce Run's shelter serves approximately 150 women and their children each year. Our shelter residents are often forced to flee their homes on short notice and sometimes arrive at shelter with only a few possessions. We work hard to make our residents comfortable, but we cannot do it without the generous assistance of our wonderful community. These are some of the items that we currently need for shelter residents:

White bath towels
Standard-size pillows
White pillow cases
White flat queen size sheets
Twin/Full/Queen size comforters
Trash bags (bathroom/tall kitchen/45 gal.)
Full-size blankets
White washcloths
Dishtowels and kitchen towels
Toothpaste
Moisturizer
Cold/Flu/Sinus medications
Adult pain relievers (Advil, Tylenol)
New Women's underwear
Bras
New Children's underwear
Women's and Children's socks
Women's shaving cream
Deodorant
Dryer Sheets
Hairspray
Kleenex
Q-tips
First aid supplies
Makeup
Baby monitors
Thermometers



Baby fingernail clippers
Vaporizers
Pain reliever for children
Diapers
Baby wipes
Baby shampoo
Baby lotion
Teething rings
Adult/Children's sleepwear
Dishwasher detergent
Lysol disinfectant spray
Fabreeze
Dish liquid
Batteries
Flashlights
Small Alarm Clocks
Stamps
Pens
Hairdryers
Tampons
Pre-paid phone cards
Pre-paid gas cards
Writing paper/tablets
Journals
Gift cards to buy clothes
Gift cards to movies
Gift cards to fast food



Announcing...

Spruce Run's new collaboration with Ofelia's Thrift Shop

Starting in mid-October, Spruce Run began a new partnership with Ofelia's Thrift Shop. Now, residents of our shelter or transitional housing can shop at Ofelia's for free. They are able to obtain clothing, shoes, jackets and cold weather gear as well as furniture and more substantial household items. In exchange, we are donating our current stock of used clothing to Ofelia's. This means that our barn will finally be clean and organized. We will continue to maintain emergency clothing and shoes at the shelter and we will restock these bins as necessary by obtaining items from Ofelia's.

Ofelia's is located at 1372 Union Street in Bangor and their number is 947-9526. Spruce Run continues to accept items from our shelter wish list (see above), as well as some furniture for our T Housing program. We believe that our support of Ofelia's and the good work that they do will allow us to focus more on the good work we do—helping battered women and their children—and less on dealing with mountains of used clothing.

Please support this new partnership by taking donations of used clothing in good condition to Ofelia's!

Staff Changes

We said goodbye to:

Suzanne Strout, who was our Office Coordinator. Suzanne left us at the end of the summer to go to law school. We wish her all the best and know that she'll bring her Spruce Run experiences into her practice of law. We will miss her cheerful presence.

Erica Watson, who was Spruce Run's Hotline Coordinator for many years. Erica's dedication and superb skills will be sorely missed. We wish her luck in pursuing post graduate studies at the University of Maine.

We welcomed three very experienced new staff:

Margo Batsie, who joins us as Community Response Coordinator. Margo has most recently worked for Womancare, the domestic violence project serving Piscataquis County, but also has experience with domestic abuse and sexual assault projects in Maine and other states.

Erin Brown, who is Spruce Run's new Advocacy Coordinator. Erin joins us from the Abused Women's Advocacy Project in Lewiston.

Suzie Boutilier, who worked with the Battered Women's Project in Aroostook County for several years before joining us as Spruce Run's new Transitional Services Coordinator.

Spruce Run Staff

Margo Batsie
Community Response Coordinator

Sue Bradford
Program Planning and Integration Coordinator

Suzie Boutilier
Transitional Services Coordinator

Erin Brown
Advocacy Coordinator

Dorathy Chocensky
Legal Services Coordinator

Amanda Cost
School Based Program Coordinator

Maureen Flagg
Family Systems Team Coordinator

Sue Hamlett
Public Awareness Coordinator

Rebecca Hobbs
Administrative Coordinator

Ruth Jewell
Criminal Justice Response Coordinator

Sherry Lane
Transitional Housing Coordinator

Karen Marysdaughter
Bookkeeper

Brook Minner
Shelter Coordinator

Tina Roberts
Special Projects Coordinator

Francine Stark
Training Coordinator

Johnnie Walker
Children's Services and Transitional Resources
Coordinator

Joy Walters
School Based Advocacy Coordinator

Spruce Run Services

If you or someone you know is experiencing abuse, the following services may be helpful:

24-Hour Hotline

We offer support, feedback and information about options, with the firm belief in one's right to make one's own decisions and act on one's own behalf.

Advocacy

Advocates are available to offer information and support at TANF/ASPRE, local hospitals, Penobscot County District courts, Child Protective Services and some schools.

Support/Education Groups

Women meet weekly to help each other by sharing experiences and offering encouragement and understanding to one another. They may bring their children to a children's group at the same time. Education groups provide insight into how our society and culture influence and respond to domestic abuse.

Children's Services

We give children the opportunity to talk about their feelings in a safe and fun environment in groups and when they are in shelter.

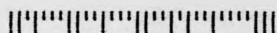
Shelter

We provide emergency shelter for victims of domestic abuse and provide information about other shelter and housing options.

Training and Education

We provide training, consultation, and education sessions about domestic abuse for schools, employers, service providers, and others to foster a coordinated community response to domestic abuse.

Spruce Run is funded by the United Way, the Department of Human Services, the Maine State Housing Authority, and your generous donations



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