

Modernizing Economic Benefits in Vermont

By Frank Mazza, Community Resource Coordinator, Department of Economic Services, Agency of Human Services

Economic Services (ESD), the division in state government where Vermonters apply for public assistance, is undergoing significant changes. In a time of fiscal austerity, increased caseloads, and a reduced workforce ESD has had to implement strategies to take advantage of technology and to utilize our staff more efficiently. The changes are the result of many months of discussion and planning. It has been a process that has encouraged the input of consumers and community partners.

The effort to modernize Economic Services focuses on five areas. First, ESD now has an interactive benefits website: mybenefits.vt.gov. People are able to obtain information about our programs. They can find out which organizations in their community can help them if they want to apply for

Reach Up, 3SquaresVT (food stamps), health care or fuel assistance. Later this year ESD will release an online application that will be very convenient for those with access to a computer. Hard copy applications will always be available, as well.

Second, in October of 2009 ESD instituted a Benefits Service Center that began taking calls. The toll free number is 1-800-479-6151. Callers can use their phone keypad 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to request general information, ask for an application, or set up an account they can use to get information about their case. During regular business hours callers can speak with an agent to report changes that could affect their benefits or eligibility. They can also get answers to questions about programs, eligibility requirements, the application process, and their case.

Third, late in 2009 ESD began converting the mail that was received into electronic images that become part of the applicant's electronic record. This is accomplished at the Application and Document Processing Center in Waterbury.

Fourth, Economic Services is partnering with community organizations to make

sure Vermonters have what they need to apply for economic benefits. Services offered by the different organizations can range from providing access to a phone or computer to helping clients complete their application.

Fifth, in the near future the distribution of the eligibility determination workload will be made by specialty rather than geography. A new workflow tool will assign cases and tasks to workers across the state based on their availability and program specialty. This will replace the model of cases being assigned to the district/county in which the person lives. Some workers will determine eligibility for health care programs and others will specialize and be the experts in financial assistance programs, including general and emergency assistance.

How will all of this affect anyone who has experienced domestic or sexual violence? ESD hopes the changes will have a minimal impact. The goal remains to provide timely and accurate benefits and to do so in a respectful and professional manner. The individual's privacy, confidentiality and safety are of paramount importance.

Confidentiality and Consent

When Teens Experience Dating and/or Sexual Violence

By Willow Wheelock, Outreach & Education Program Coordinator

Organizations that work to end domestic and sexual violence understand the critical importance of maintaining the confidentiality of the women we work with and not sharing any information with others prior to accessing specific, time-limited consent from an individual. Advocates deeply respect and adhere to this code of conduct out of our belief in person-centered services and the understanding that some women's and children's lives literally depend on this level of conduct. When the women who access our services are young, teen women the importance of upholding their rights to confidentiality and consent before release of information remains.

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Men's Roles in the Twilight Saga

By Jason M. Duquette-Hoffman, M.S.,
Community Member

For better or for worse, I often find myself drawn to popular fiction like a moth to the flame. Although I managed to resist the *Harry Potter* phenomenon for over a year, eventually curiosity (and the frustration of my inability to participate in barbecue conversation with friends) got the better of me and I succumbed irreparably to the temptation of author J.K. Rowling's fantastic world of magic. I loved the *Harry Potter* series, even the parts I didn't like, for its thorough enjoyability.



ries. Others (even in this newsletter) have given a thorough accounting of the ways in which this series presents women as needy, weak, and otherwise in need of "care." I wish to speak mostly to the portrayal of men. As a man dedicated to equity and respect for women, and especially as a father of a young boy, I take serious issue with the portrayal of the male leads in this

though conflict-inducing progression in their relationship. The hyper-violent, hyper-masculine characterization of Jacob is capped off by his eventual "imprinting" on Bella and Edward's daughter. "Imprinting" is described as a process whereby a werewolf develops an unbreakable bond with another person that is so strong that even the person's resistance will eventually be over-

"As a man dedicated to equity and respect for women, and especially as a father of a young boy, I take serious issue with the portrayal of the male leads in this storyline."

So it was that I embarked on a devouring of Stephanie Meyers' *Twilight* trilogy. In the interest of full disclosure, I am a sucker for vampire tales. Because of this, I was prepared to lose myself utterly in the *Twilight* books, and come out hungry for more (as I often do with series books; even Tolkien couldn't write enough extras for my satisfaction). I put myself on the waiting list at IIsley, and waited. Luckily, I didn't end up having to wait long, as a friend bought us the first book and others gave us their copies of the next two. Once I was (as firefighters say) "fully involved" in reading this series, I did find it sufficiently entertaining that my dedication to reading became an issue for serious marital discussion. Unfortunately, while I wish I could say that this also meant that I liked this series, I am afraid I have yet to decide on whether I "like" Meyers' books or not.

It is an engaging story. The characters are, mostly, compelling. But I still struggle with getting past my distaste for some of the messaging in this se-

storyline. Edward, the male character with whom we are supposed to become most enamored, is patronizing, controlling, diminishing and generally barely cognizant of the perspective of his partner, Bella. He sees himself as her protector. He is convinced that he, and he alone knows what is "best" for her. This is fundamentally the epitome of every societal archetype of the Male that lies at the heart of violence against women. This diminishing of women fosters in men the belief that because we know best, we may and must take whatever steps we feel necessary to accomplish our ends. But it is not just Edward's character that turns my stomach.

Jacob, who perhaps is more "accommodating" of Bella's notions of self-determination initially, turns out not only to be just as controlling as Edward, but even more physically violent. In addition to the notion that Jacob and Edward have only limited control of their anger and violence, there is the absurdly cliché depiction of Jacob's sexual assault of Bella as a mutually enjoyable,

come by the constant and relentless attention (read: stalking) lavished by the werewolf. No matter that the subject of Jacob's "imprint" is a newborn girl, he is compelled to be her mate and protector for life. Since he doesn't age, the age difference is supposedly immaterial. Arranged relationships, hyper-violent and barely restrained masculinity, the control and domination of female partners, all of these conspire to raise the bile in my throat, and prevent me from liking what I would otherwise have considered a generally enjoyable read. I am dismayed by Ms. Meyers choices with respect to her depiction of men and their relationships with women and children. Given the popularity of this series, and in particular with young women, I am even more dismayed at its potential to negatively impact the lives of women and men in our culture. Consider this review my rotten tomato, hurled with vigor at the Master of Ceremonies in the theatre of patriarchy that remains, unfortunately, as sold out as ever.

Confidentiality and Consent

(continued from page 1)

One in four teen women will experience abusive and controlling behaviors by a partner by the time she graduates from high school. This is a staggering number, and indicates that many of the young women in our communities are exposed to battering by their dating partners. The emotional, financial, verbal, sexual and/or physical battery that teens experience by their partners is every bit as scary, humiliating, dangerous and lethal as the abuse and violence experienced by adult women. This is

why it is so imperative that confidential services are available to teens that experience dating violence.

If a teen reaches out to WomenSafe, they will have access to advocates who can work with them in a confidential manner, exploring and researching all options with the teen and then supporting the choices that the teen makes without ever having to share that information with anyone without the teen's consent. This is a privilege that can not be extended to teens in all areas of their lives, and may be a very valuable resource if a teen is contending with the hurtful or violent behaviors of their partner.

With WomenSafe services available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, teens are able to access an advocate during whatever times that are convenient to them. If you have a teen in your life, learn about teen dating violence and when appropriate, refer them to WomenSafe for free, confidential support and advocacy.



I don't regret meeting you
Even with all that you put me through

You have taught me to be everything you're not
And to appreciate everything I've got.

I finally broke free
And am happy as I ever could be

I was insulted, humiliated, and blamed for things that went wrong
And boy if you ask me, I'd say it went on for too long.

Showing extreme jealousy and possessiveness toward me
Oh, if only I could have seen

I'm not stupid, nor crazy, nor have I ever cheated
And even if I did who would be to blame
I wasn't the one always calling you names.

You pushed me further and further away
Though I just took it day by day.

You weren't the one who was scratched or arm held so tight it bruised
No, your head wasn't hit against a wall, your arm wasn't twisted
You weren't punched in the arm, especially when we took a cruise.

You abused your power in our relationship
And there were many parts I had to skip
Drowning in my tears every day and night
Because you never gave me the fair chance to fight.

~ Paige Vincent

Transitional Housing Advocacy and Support

By Anne Burmeister, Program Coordinator

WomenSafe received a 3-year Transitional Housing Grant through the federal Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) that assists survivors of domestic, sexual, dating violence and stalking to establish safe and stable housing by providing financial assistance for housing. The program also provides a wide range of flexible and optional services that reflect the differences and individual needs of survivors and that allows survivors to choose the course of action that is best for them.

In the three months the program has been operating, WomenSafe has financially assisted 10 women in a variety of capacities that facilitate living independently of their batterers; tuition payments, deposits, rent, utilities, car repairs and safety measures. If you or someone you know is fleeing domestic violence, sexual violence or stalking and facing homelessness as a result, please call Anne at 802.388.4205 for more information on program details and eligibility.



The Kids are (Finally) All Right

By Gemma Collins, Middlebury College Student Intern

A few weeks ago, I heard about the “Bechdel Test,” a model for a speedy feminist analysis of any film. The rules are as follows:

1. It must have at least two women in it who
2. talk to each other
3. about something besides a man.

I decided to run the test on Lisa Cholodenko’s new film, *The Kids Are All Right*, in which Julianne Moore and Annette Bening play two lesbians, Jules and Nic, who are in a committed and loving, if imperfect, relationship. That is to say, they’re normal. Contributing to the picture of normalcy are their two children, Joni (Mia Wasikowska) and Laser (Josh Hutcherson) who are half

siblings, Joni, having been conceived by Nic and Laser by Jules. What about the other half of their genetic material? That came from Paul (Mark Ruffalo) an anonymous sperm donor, now in his late thirties who Joni, under pressure from fifteen-year-old Laser, decides to contact shortly following her eighteenth birthday.

Ok, so 1. Check. 2. Definitely, Check. Here are two women who not only talk to each other but talk to each other about their relationship, their kids, and their lives. However, as somewhat self-centered and wholly charming Paul enters their lives he also takes center stage in the film. When he’s not in a scene physically, he is certainly affecting the dynamic of it, as each member of the family develops a unique relationship with him that changes their relationships with each other.

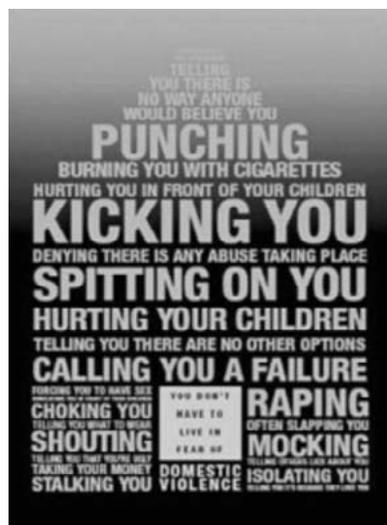
So 3. Tentatively Check. The film is fun, refreshing, and definitely takes a leap



in depicting the “American Family” in a way that although not new in reality is new to film. A feminist’s fantasy, it is not, however it comes closer than most, and that’s a good start.

Protecting Staff from Co-worker’s Violent Boyfriend

By W. Barry Nixon *Ask Rita in HR* [1] ■ August 23, 2010



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Protecting Staff from Co-worker’s Violent Boyfriend

Q: *Help, we have a wonderful staff member who is involved in a domestic violence situation and*

her boyfriend has threatened to come to our office to harm her . . . what should our nonprofit do to protect her and the other staff?

With in four women in the United States experiencing domestic violence during their lifetimes [2], this situation

may arise at some point for many nonprofits. It’s good that you are paying attention before an incident occurs. As just one example of what can happen, just last month three employees were killed in a workplace shooting in Albuquerque [3] that was sparked by a domestic dispute.

Before we get to steps you should take immediately, let’s start by defining domestic violence in the workplace: “violent behavior perpetrated against an employee while the person is working or conducting organizational business by a person that has a personal relationship with the employee.” Violent behavior can include:

- Physical, sexual and/or psychological behaviors that harm or are perceived as likely to harm
- Frequent harassing phone calls
- Unwelcome visits to the workplace that annoy or scare the employee and/or disrupt the work environment
- Stalking
- Physical assaults or threatening behavior such as loud outbursts

Steps to take immediately:

- Assess the level of threat by asking if the potential perpetrator owns weapons, has a history of behaving violently against the employee or others, has an arrest record for domestic violence or other violent crimes, and so forth.

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Domestic Violence Affects Pets Too!

By Jackie Rose, Addison County Humane Society Executive Director



Domestic violence, often only thought of in the context of people, unfortunately may also involve one's pets. As such, pets may be victims of abuse and/or may be used as vehicle by a batterer to prevent a victim from leaving the situation. In either case, pets are all too often caught in the cross-fire of a domestic violence situation.

There are several studies that highlight the involvement of pets in domestic violence situations. In a study entitled "The Abuse of Animals and Domestic Violence: A National Survey of Shelters for Women Who Are Battered" by Frank R. Ascione, Ph.D, Claudia V. Weber, M.S., and David S. Wood (1997) the researchers found that of 50 shelters surveyed about women and children escaping from domestic violence, 85% said that women in their shelter talked about pet abuse, 63% of children talked about pet abuse, and 83% said that they had observed the coexistence of domestic violence and pet abuse. Similarly, in a study conducted entitled "Battered Women's Reports of Their Partners' and Children's Cruelty to Animals", by Frank R. Ascione, Ph.D. in 1998, the research indicated that 70% to 75% of women reporting domestic violence also reported that their partner had threatened and/or actually hurt or killed one or more of their pets. Actual (as distinct from threatened) harm to pets represented the major-

ity (57%) of reports. Lastly, in a study entitled "Animal Welfare and Domestic Violence" conducted by Frank R. Ascione, Ph.D, Claudia V. Weber, M.S., and David S. Wood in 1997, nearly half (46.4%) of the incidents involved the father, step-father, or woman's boyfriend as the perpetrator. 93% of the children indicating they were "sort of upset" or "very upset" by the incidents. 50% of these children said they had protected pets, in some cases by directly intervening to keep pets from being harmed. These cases clearly demonstrate the link between violence towards people and their pets.

As indicated above, not only are pets often subjected to violence themselves, they often become a barrier to leaving an abusive relationship and can even become a tool of violence for an abusive partner who is willing to injure or kill a pet as a retaliation or as part of a pre-emptive strike designed to gain or maintain control by means of terrorism. The more one is attached to a pet, the more that pet can be seen by an abuser as a means to control that person. In a study entitled "To Leave or to Stay? Battered Women's Concern for Vulnerable Pets" by Catherine A. Faver and Elizabeth B. Strand (2003), the researchers found that many victims stay in abusive relationships because they don't know what to do with their pets. Many victims, up to 25%, reported that concern for their pets had affected their decisions about leaving or staying with the batterer. Additionally, higher proportions of rural than urban women reported that their partners had threatened or harmed their pets and that concern for their pets had affected their decisions.

So, what does this all mean? Simply, domestic violence affects everyone in the house, including the pets. If you or someone you know is in an abusive situation and pets are involved, the following actions may be helpful:

- Develop an emergency plan for sheltering the pets (contact WomenSafe or the Addison County Humane Society for more information)
- Establish ownership of the pets: obtain an animal license, proof of vaccinations or veterinary receipts in your name to help prove who owns the pets
- Prepare the pets for departure (collect vaccination and medical records, collar and identification, medication, bowls, bedding, etc.).
- Ask for assistance from law enforcement or animal control officers to reclaim the pets if left behind.

Remember, no one should be subjected to abuse at any time and that includes our furry family members. Contact WomenSafe or the Addison County Humane Society if you or someone you know needs assistance with a pet!

A Woman's Love

A woman is a breath of fresh air
Always treat her kind and fair.

When you're mad, don't let it go too far
Cause you might just leave her with an awful scar.

Cherish her and love her with all that you can
Because that is how to be a real good man.

When she is sick or sad, hold her close
Because that is when she needs you the most.

Don't cheat, nor badly treat
Nor scare, but gently care
Don't abuse, nor accuse

Just listen and be there
Cause she's a woman, a breath of fresh air.

~ Paige Vincent



Ask the Advocate

By Foresta Castañeda, Outreach Advocate

Do you have questions about Domestic and Dating Violence, Sexual Violence or Stalking? Send your questions to info@womensafe.net and an advocate will reply with a response. Selected questions and responses will be printed anonymously in our bi-annual newsletter.

Q: *What can WomenSafe do to assist my friend? She is currently experiencing domestic violence by her partner. She does not feel safe to leave at this time and she does not want to seek a protection order from the court, because she fears that taking legal action will further escalate her partner. What can WomenSafe really do given the situation?*

A: WomenSafe provides services to all victims of domestic, dating, and sexual violence and stalking regardless of whether she chooses to leave or stay. Talking to an advocate on our 24-hour hotline or in person can give victims an opportunity to discuss their situation in a confidential and non-judgmental setting. WomenSafe can assist women with safety planning- measures that can be taken to increase her safety before, during and after an incidence of violence. WomenSafe advocates can also provide valuable information about victims' rights, housing, legal options and community resources. Even if the woman is not able to leave at this time, this information could be helpful for someone interested in learning about what possible options for assistance and support are available in the community and could be helpful when making plans in the future. Connecting with WomenSafe is also a great way to learn about other community agencies, resources and or funding opportunities that could provide additional support to the woman while living in her current situation.

The Advocate

WomenSafe does not necessarily share the opinions expressed by the writers and reserves the right to edit and determine the content of *The Advocate*.

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WomenSafe

Committed to ending domestic and sexual violence

24-hour Hotline:
388-4205 or 800-388-4205

WomenSafe, Inc.
P.O. Box 67
Middlebury, VT 05753
info@womensafe.net
www.womensafe.net
office: 388-9180 fax: 388-3438

The Supervised Visitation Program @ WomenSafe
(The SVP): 388-6783



Protecting Staff from Co-worker's Violent Boyfriend

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- Ask the employee whether he or she has obtained a restraining order. If so, make a copy and, with the employee's knowledge, inform the police department of the restraining order.
- Consider getting a "no contact and restraining order" in addition to the individual's restraining order. (Not all states allow employers to obtain such orders so check your state law first.)
- Make receptionists, security guards and nearby staff aware of the perpetrator and instruct them how to respond (for example, who to contact) if the person enters the facility. If there is a restraining order in place, law enforcement can be called if the perpetrator visits.
- Alert your organization's legal counsel (or one available through an association or your insurance carrier) and ask for guidance. For example, it is important not to spark defamation issues.
- Encourage the employee to obtain knowledgeable assistance, perhaps through a social worker, a local domestic violence counseling agency, and/or through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Remember that if a potentially violent individual enters the workplace, it is not only the domestic violence target who is endangered. Create a safety plan; some of the options include:

- Set up an escort for when the employee leaves the building for her car.
- Adjust the employee's work schedule, location, or assignments if appropriate.
- Establish pre-arranged exit strategies.
- Install a "panic button" or electronic panic button [4] for the employee and/or the receptionist.

- Provide the employee with a global positioning device so you can quickly identify her location on your premises.
- Install additional security measures such as cameras and silent alarms.
- Request that the local police regularly patrol your parking area.



The supervisor's role

In this situation, the employee's supervisor should openly show empathy and concern for the employee's well-being. Keep in mind that targets of domestic violence can be both men and women. Examples of dialog for a supervisor include:

- I am concerned for your safety
- I believe what you are telling me
- You are not responsible for your partner's behavior
- You don't deserve to be treated this way
- I will support you and your decisions.

Supervisors should be clear that their role is not to intervene or provide counseling, but instead to encourage and assist the employee in getting help from HR, an EAP counselor, or other qualified person.

In this particular situation, the employee has herself raised the issue of domestic violence. This may not always be the case. Supervisors should also have training in recognizing the signs of domestic violence, such as:

- Getting many, many phone calls at work after which the employee seems distraught or upset

- Employees in nearby cubicles hear shouting, crying, and other unusual sounds during phone calls
- The employee has lost productivity, frequently seems distracted, has trouble concentrating
- The employee dresses too warmly for the weather, such as wearing a long-sleeved turtleneck on a hot day, possibly to cover up bruises.

Remember that these signals are not necessarily related to domestic violence, but they are evidence that warrant further investigation by the supervisor.

Action by co-workers

Beyond the specifics of the question that sparked this column, a common question is what action should a co-worker take when an employee has confided in him or her about domestic violence but doesn't want to speak to her own supervisor? When domestic violence spills into the workplace, the staff, clients, volunteers and others near the targeted employee can be hurt as well. As a result, it's important for the co-worker to raise the issue in order that all employees can be protected.

In fact, some organizations have official policies that require an employee with knowledge of a domestic violence situation to bring it to the attention of his or her own supervisor or to the HR department.

In closing, nonprofits should be proactive about preparing to address domestic violence as a workplace concern. It is not a matter of whether your organization will experience a domestic violence situation; it is simply when it will occur. The key to success is being prepared.

Reference Links:

- [1] <http://www.blueavocado.org/category/topic/ask-rita-hr>
- [2] http://www.caepv.org/getinfo/facts_stats.php?factsec=1
- [3] <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/07/12/national/main6671007.shtml>
- [4] <http://www.epanicbutton.com>

WomenSafe

Committed to ending
domestic and sexual violence

The Advocate

Newsletter of WomenSafe

Volume 15, Issue 2, Fall 2010

WomenSafe Provides:

- **Advocacy Services
(Free & Confidential)**
 - 24-hour Hotline
 - Information & Referrals
 - Emotional Support
 - Transitional Housing
Support & Advocacy
 - Medical Advocacy
 - Legal Advocacy
 - Systems Advocacy
 - Support Groups
- **Community
Outreach & Education**
- **Supervised Visitation
& Monitored Exchange**

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Middlebury, VT 05753

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info@womensafe.net
www.womensafe.net
office: 388-9180
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