

ICADV

Informer

Domestic Violence Awareness Month is Here!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Parent Alienation Syndrome 2
- Help Victims Become Survivors (cont.) 2
- MUNA Training 3
- Skylark Project Update 3

ICADV Advisory Council

- Bonnie Campbell
Attorney at Law
- Caitlin Coyner
KCCI
- Jean Hessburg
- Patty Judge
Iowa Lt. Governor
- Tom Miller
Iowa Attorney General
- Charlotte Nelson
- Sally J. Pederson
Former Lt. Gov.
- Linda Railsback
MD, MPA, FACOG

October is always a busy time at ICADV and this year is no exception. You can't look at a bus, a lamp post, or go to the movies without seeing our "I'm a Survivor, I'm Your..." campaign. For the second year ICADV is promoting this public awareness campaign as a way of helping Iowans see that there is no typical abuse survivor.

Another way ICADV is sharing this message is through the **Faces of the Iowa Voices Project**. This traveling photography exhibit will visit nine cities throughout October.

The exhibit includes the 31 large portraits of Iowa abuse survivors. These amazing women agreed not only to share their stories, but their identities, and most important to this exhibit, their faces, as well.

The exhibit begins **Today October 4th at the DMACC Urban campus** (building 1 student lounge). The exhibit will be open from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and photographer, Katie Thompson, is likely to be around most of the day. However, to guarantee a chance to meet Katie, and some of the women who participated in the project, try to attend the evening

reception from 5:30 to 6:30. So, gather up some friends to come by after work. You won't want to miss this moving exhibit.

After Des Moines the exhibit is off to Bettendorf, Keokuk, Forrest City, Creston, Ottumwa, Council Bluffs, Fort Dodge and finally Sioux Center.

None of this would be possible without the incredible commitment of Katie Thompson who has already given her talent and hundreds of hours of her time and is traveling with the exhibit in an RV all month long.

Help Victims Become Survivors!

Iowa's victims of domestic violence and sexual assault need your help. The upcoming legislative session is more critical than ever before. For years the programs that help domestic violence and sexual assault victims across the state have struggled with limited funds due to cuts from state and national

programs. Since 2002, nine programs have been forced to close due to a lack of funding.

The line item in the state budget to fund these programs was eliminated in 2003. Now the Attorney General's Crime Victim's Compensation Fund, which has been the safety net since 2003, has been depleted. If the Iowa Legislature does not



IowaCASA & ICADV
Funding Restoration Project
victimstosurvivors.org



Laurie Schipper,
ICADV Executive
Director

Parental Alienation Syndrome—Learn the facts

I have no doubt that some of the most important decisions made in our court system are about the custody of children. They usually don't make the headlines like major corporate mergers or exciting scandals, but nothing affects a family more than where the children in that family will live.

Recently, Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) has been making headlines in some high profile custody cases. The use and potential misuse of PAS prompted the National Network to End Domestic Violence to release the following article to help us all become more savvy on the topic. The full article is below. For more information visit www.nnedv.org

Laurie Schipper

In response to the increased media attention surrounding the release of Alec Baldwin's book entitled, "A Promise to Ourselves," the National Network to End Domestic Violence, the Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment and Appeals Project, the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and StopFamilyViolence.org release the following:

(September 29, 2008) Washington, DC - The National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV), the Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment and Appeals Project (DV LEAP), Stop Family Violence, and the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, four of the nation's leading domestic violence victim advocacy organizations, call on the media and the courts to rectify the misunderstanding and misuse of Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) in custody cases.

"Child custody cases are among the toughest cases courts have to handle. And in custody cases where domestic violence is involved, the judges have an even higher responsibility to ensure that the safety of family members is not dangerously impaired by misleading - and legally unjustifiable - 'parental alienation syndrome' theories," said Sue Else, president of the National Network to End Domestic Violence. (cont. pg 4)

Help Victims Become Survivors! Cont.

(cont. from page 1) fund these programs with at least a \$4,000,000 allocation as many as nine more programs will certainly close.

ICADV is working with the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault (IowaCASA) to raise awareness about this funding crisis. This partnership has resulted in a special website www.victimstosurvivors.org as well as radio and television public service announcements. We plan to share these PSAs with everyone we can.

The radio PSA was recorded Wednesday, October 1st with

the help of Capitol 106.3's donated recording and editing. The television PSA will be recorded Saturday, October 4th at ABC 5 in West Des Moines. More than 25 abuse survivors have volunteered to act in the television PSA as a way of showing their support for the programs that helped them through their abuse and their commitment to keeping those programs open to help future victims.



Sophie prepares for her part in the Victims to Survivors radio public service announcement.

Please do what you can to help victims become survivors. Visit www.victimstosurvivors.org to learn how easy it is to contact your elected officials and let them know that victims of domestic violence and sexual assault need help.

MUNA Clinic Staff Focus on Important Life Skills.

MUNA represents immigrant abuse survivors in immigration and family law cases. Of course, as is true for most people, the needs of these clients are not limited to the courtroom. The work of our staff doesn't end when a case is closed either.

On October 27th the MUNA legal clinic staff held a training entitled "Building a Stronger Future." 45 clients and former clients spent an

entire Saturday learning topics such as resume writing, interview skills, personal finance, the importance of good credit, home buying basics, parenting skills, emergency English, and what to do in case of an immigration raid.

These women would not have been likely to attend if ICADV had not provided childcare for the day. So, not only did staff and volunteers fill a day with important information for

immigrant women, they did their best to entertain 65 children as well.

Presenters from seven different local programs volunteered their time for the day as well. ICADV is grateful to these programs and the education they provided. ICADV would also like to extend our appreciation to our SILAs (Special Immigration Legal Advocates) for the effort they put in to this training and everything they do at the clinic.

Project Update

The Skylark Project has a new ace in the whole! AmeriCorps member Katie Jares has joined ICADV's staff specifically to work on the Skylark Project (ICADV's Advocacy project at the Iowa Correctional Institute for Women). Katie brings amazing energy to this project. Please enjoy her message and update below.

The Iowa Correctional Institute for Women (ICIW) is shrouded in flowers. Everyone is always struck by those flowers on their first visit. Indeed, the bouquet of bright colors just seems strangely misplaced set against the razor wire backdrops and the



The Skylark Project

"You can loosen the drum, unstring the lyre,
but who can stop the skylark from singing?"

-Khalil Gibran

inconspicuously dressed women beyond the fence. Opening the door is returning to the reality of the prison. The over-crowded, noisy visiting room that smells strangely of cafeteria food is filled with women meeting with their family and friends talking over the vending machines or at the small child-sized tables.

The Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the Iowa Department of Corrections, and the University of Iowa College of Law have partnered together to start offering assistance to

some of the women who live within the confines of this razor wire. More than 60% of incarcerated women in the United States have experienced abuse or violence prior to entering prison. Another third will experience abuse or violence during their incarceration. Therefore, a staggering number of these women are survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault with quite limited resources available to them. These unhealthy relationships

(Cont. from page 2) “Parental Alienation Syndrome” is a claim that has been used to suggest that some parents try to undermine their children’s relationship with the other parent, typically the noncustodial parent, by making false statements about that other parent, most often in the form of abuse allegations. In fact, actor Alec Baldwin made that claim about his own child custody case in a recent interview with Diane Sawyer.

“PAS is being used by some abusers as a tactic to demonize parents’ attempts to protect their children from abuse, denying victims of domestic violence justice in the courts. The fact that some parents behave badly in ordinary cases is no reason to ignore real abuse when it is presented to the court,” also stated Else.

Joan Meier, DV LEAP’s Executive Director, said, “PAS was invented to defeat child abuse claims - and it has been remarkably successful in misleading family courts into believing that women who are sincerely trying to protect their children and themselves from abuse, are just seeking to end the children’s relationship with their noncustodial father.”

According to NNEDV, DV LEAP, SFV, and NCADV, victims of domestic violence face a surprisingly uphill battle in family court to win custody of and safety for their children. All too often, courts award custody and unsupervised visitation to parents found to have committed domestic abuse. Many courts handling custody cases do not understand the dynamics of domestic violence and fail to properly factor in the impact of abuse when considering the best interests of the child.

“The most important factor judges should be weighing in making custody decisions is the safety of the mother and children, and the introduction of PAS overshadows this critical need for safety,” said Rita Smith, Executive Director of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

Meier states that research has shown that children become “alienated” from a parent for a variety of valid reasons, most often resulting from the parent’s own negative behavior and relationship with that child.

“The proponents of ‘parental alienation syndrome’ are purveying invalid junk science is not even legally admissible. PAS has been emphatically rejected by the Presidential Task Force of the American Psychological Association and by the National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges. Leading researchers in the field of custody have agreed that PAS has no scientific validity and the only courts to address the issue have found it inadmissible,” said Meier.

“With the increased media attention surrounding the release of Alec Baldwin’s book, it is important to let the public know that victims of domestic violence are being silenced through the use of ‘parental alienation syndrome.’ We cannot afford to consign thousands of children to unsafe custody or visitation with abusive parents because family courts have come to believe that abuse allegations mean nothing more than a campaign of alienation,” said Else.

ABOUT NNEDV

The National Network to End Domestic Violence Fund (NNEDV) is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization dedicated to providing public education, training and technical assistance to maintain and develop the professional expertise of advocates working to end domestic violence. NNEDV strives to strengthen advocates as organizers and activists in the tradition of social change movements. For more information, please visit www.nnedv.org.

ABOUT DV LEAP

The Domestic Violence Legal Empowerment and Appeals Project (DV LEAP) is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization which provides a stronger voice for justice by fighting to overturn unjust trial court outcomes, advancing legal protections for victims and their children through expert appellate advocacy, training lawyers, psychologists and judges on best practices, and spearheading domestic violence litigation in the Supreme Court. For more information, visit www.dvleap.org.

ABOUT NCADV

The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization formed in 1978 to establish a national network of community based programs to assist victims of domestic violence. NCADV provides support to programs and state coalitions, technical assistance, public policy and community awareness campaigns to work towards the vision of every home a safe home. For more information, visit www.ncadv.org.

ABOUT SFV

StopFamilyViolence.org is an online national activist organization that works to organize and amplify our nation's collective voice against family violence. SFV activists raise their voice to ensure safety, justice, accountability and healing for people whose lives have been affected by family violence. StopFamilyViolence.org is a project of The Tides Center, a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization. For more information visit www.stopfamilyviolence.org

Skylark Project Update Continued.

(cont. from page 3) are often the reason the women are at ICIW in the first place. Women perpetrators are much more likely than men to commit an act of violence against someone whom they were previously involved with intimately. Similarly, women perpetrators are more likely than men to be charged as co-conspirators rather than acting alone.

In Iowa, following the abolition of the death penalty, the state established some of the harshest sentences for Murder I and Kidnapping I, including women who kill their abusers or are charged as co-conspirators—regardless of whether they were present when the crime occurred—because of knowledge they had about the crime. ICADV's Skylark Commutation Project seeks to educate the public about gender-bias in sentencing and assist women who are serving long-term sentences in seeking commutation if their crime was influenced by domestic violence. (Commutation is the process of appealing to the governor for the conversion—commutation—of a term of life to a

term of years. An inmate with a term of years can apply for parole at some point within their prison term. It is not an automatic release from prison.) Common belief is that the women who fall into these categories are small, but at the time of writing, a cursory examination of cases has found 15 that qualify for assistance, and a survey of the approximately 150 other cases that could qualify will be completed by next Tuesday.

For the first step, the Skylark Project has selected three women to offer direct commutation assistance to—Sheila Schertz, Avis Blair, and Helena Burrell. Each woman matched with two University of Iowa law students who will gather letters of support, prep them for the Board of Parole hearings, and write a formalized recommendation on the cases. The women gain invaluable legal assistance and an outside support system while the students have the opportunity to participate in handling a case and learn more about the inequities inherent in our criminal justice system.

While commutation assistance only serves women who are incarcerated for 15 years or longer,

the Skylark Project has also started offering three domestic violence/sexual assault support groups within the prison. There are currently long waiting lists for these classes and only 10 spots available to women. Now, with three classes, as many as 30 women can be receiving support during the same time. The groups use the *Seeking Safety* curriculum and led by two facilitators. Many of the women in these groups will be released within 1-5 years, and the hope is that the skills and support they receive now can positively impact their future relationships.

The Skylark Project plans on continuing to grow. However, we're aware of the successes and failures of similar clemency projects in other states. For the coming year, we're exploring the option of recruiting community volunteers to also assist with the process, providing public education on the process of commutation and sentencing laws, and partnering with other like-minded organization to provide comprehensive aftercare for released women.

ICADV



515 28th St.
Suite 104
Des Moines, IA 50312

Phone: 515.244.8028
Fax: 515.244.7417
www.icadv.org

Mission

The Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) provides assistance and education to programs that serve battered women and their children, working to end violence in intimate relationships.