

HouseLine

House Of Ruth Maryland Changing Attitudes. Saving Lives. December 2011

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HOUSE OF RUTH
MARYLAND



Kicked To The Ground And Forgotten

Tony was 11 years old when a gunshot changed his life. Just minutes before, he, his mother and 16-month old brother had returned home after visiting with his grandparents. Waiting for them was the man that Tony's baby brother called Dad. The man was angry and they all knew what that meant, so his mother grabbed his arm and the three of them ran. The first bullet hit his mother in the shoulder, the second in the hip. She fell to the ground and Tony kneeled at her side. The man walked up, took the baby out of her arms and then shot her through the throat. He then pointed the gun at Tony, but there were no more bullets in the chamber so instead, he kicked the 11 year old in the stomach and ran. In a period of less than ten minutes, Tony became one of the hapless victims that our society often overlooks – children who witness their parent being murdered and are then left to deal with the emotional ramifications.

Over the course of the last year, a subcommittee of the Baltimore City Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team, chaired by Dorothy Lennig, Director of the House Of Ruth Maryland's Legal Clinic has been developing a protocol for city agencies to follow in situations like this, as well as creating an online resource manual and checklist for family members. *Continued on page 2*

Kicked, cont. from cover story

There was no such protocol or resource manual in existence in 1997 when Tony's mother was gunned down. At the time, the onus fell solely on Kate Wood and her husband, the maternal grandparents of both Tony and 16-month old Joshua, to pick up the pieces and find their way through the maze of red tape. "Because I was a police officer at the time," says Wood, "there were a lot of people willing to guide us through the process, but if you don't have those kind of contacts, there's not really a program or a place you can turn to for help."

To create the protocol, the subcommittee has studied numerous cases that are all too similar to Tony's. "The recommendations we're making are for children who witness their parent being murdered," explained Lennig, "We know the time to intervene is right away, not 10 or 15 years later when the damage is already done."

"That's the thing about children with trauma – whether it's directed at them or not, they're being affected," says Wood. "My daughter used to tell me when Joshua was with his father and she'd walk in, he'd be crying. I think, even then, he sensed the fear and, in some ways, Joshua has suffered more than anyone."

The subcommittee's resource manual will be available online to city agencies while family members, often overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork involved, will receive a condensed checklist to help guide them through what needs to be done and how to do it.

"Sometimes Tony felt like Joshua was to blame because it was his father who killed her. The struggles those two boys have had to go through have been very hard."

The project was funded by a grant from Fund for Change and the final report will be released at the end of this year.

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

In early October, I was at City Hall when Mayor Rawlings-Blake announced funding for a new citywide collaboration between the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, the Baltimore Police Department and the House Of Ruth Maryland - a collaboration that will allow us to provide much needed services to more victims of domestic violence, and do it in a more timely manner. Later that same month, I was in Annapolis as Governor O'Malley, along with Lt. Governor Brown, Maryland Attorney General Gansler and Senator Cardin took the podium to announce continued federal funding for domestic violence programs in Maryland. Both announcements were warmly and gratefully received by everyone who sees the toll domestic violence takes on women and children on a daily basis.

It was gratifying to hear our leaders speak so publicly and passionately about their concern for the victims. However, there was also a bittersweet element to both press conferences. And that was the realization that for people like John and Gat Meredith and Tommy and Michelle Tavenner this news comes too late.

The Meredith's lost their daughter when she was gunned down in front of her two young sons by her estranged husband. Tommy and Michelle Tavenner, who stood on the podium with the Governor, lost their niece – a young mother with everything to live for when she was bludgeoned and set on fire – by her estranged husband. Both families have publicly recounted their pain in the hopes that their stories will change someone else's life. Standing on the same podium with the Tavenners was another man who knows all-too-well the tragedy of domestic violence. Three years ago, the Lt. Governor lost his own cousin when she was brutally murdered by her ex-boyfriend.

So while we gratefully acknowledge the positive impact of these two important funding announcements, we are again reminded of the awful and endless toll of domestic violence on the families of its victims. Too many families will face this holiday season without someone they dearly loved and still sorely miss. As all of you share this glorious season—be it as Christmas, Hanukkah or Kwanzaa—with those you love, please keep in mind the thousands of women and children, right here in Maryland, who can never go home again.

Sincerely,



Sandi Timmins
Executive Director



Sandi Timmins

6,240 Hours Of Legal Time

More than seven thousand victims of domestic violence apply for protective orders in Baltimore City alone each year. Most have never been in a courtroom before and yet suddenly find themselves standing within an arm's length of their abuser while forced to explain succinctly and without emotion why they fear for their lives. Imagine yourself in that position and you'll understand why victims who have the benefit of legal representation are much more apt to be successful in their pleas.

For nearly 27 years in courtrooms across Maryland, the House Of Ruth Maryland has provided free legal representation to victims in protective order hearings, but you don't have to be a math wizard to realize with 17 staff attorneys there aren't enough to go around. In August of this year, the law firm of Venable LLP took a major step to address that.

"Our Board Chair was approached and asked if we would participate in a pilot program to improve access to justice and legal services for poor people in Maryland," explained Seth Rosenthal, Venable partner and the man in charge of administering their pro bono program. "The idea was to hire a recent law school graduate and subsidize their full-time work at a legal aid organization for the period of one year. While the concept was different than our usual pro bono work, we considered it a natural extension so we readily agreed to fund one fellowship a year for the next three years."

On August 29, the first Venable fellow, Elizabeth Kenderdine, University of Baltimore School of Law graduate and recent inductee to the Bar, joined the legal staff at the House Of Ruth Maryland. "I always knew I wanted to do public interest and family law, and this fellowship gives me a year's worth of experience doing both those things – experience that I couldn't get anywhere else," she said. "I'll be spending a lot of time in court over the next year. To get so much courtroom experience so fast is not the norm for most new attorneys."

This won't be Kenderdine's first foray into trial experience. While at the University of Baltimore School of Law, she worked for their family law clinic and is no stranger to the pitfalls victims face when trying to escape their abusers. "I think there are a lot of people who go to law school in order to make a nice living – and there's nothing wrong with that. It's just that I want to fight for a cause. I know I sound like an idealist, but it's what drove me to become a lawyer."

Kenderdine's not alone in her idealism. This partnership between House Of Ruth Maryland, University of Baltimore and Venable brings together three organizations that passionately believe access to justice and legal services should not be a right reserved solely for the wealthy. "Ben Civiletti was Chairman of our Board for a long time," explains Venable's, Seth Rosenthal, "And his presence still looms large. He instilled a culture of handling pro bono matters along with our billable work – last year, the firm collectively worked 24,000 hours on pro bono matters."

At a time when funding for victim services struggles to keep pace with demand, this innovative program has been a major boon for victims in Baltimore City. "This program gives us 6,240 hours of a lawyer's time over the next three years – in our world, that translates directly into lives saved," says Dorothy Lennig, Director of the House Of Ruth Maryland's Legal Clinic.

Special Thanks To:

- Roland Slate for donating a portion of proceeds from their contracts
- Faith In The Family for their multi-year wish list donations
- Venable LLP Baltimore for selecting the House Of Ruth as their Go Casual For Justice beneficiary
- McCormick & Company for sending volunteers to help with our donation center
- Enterprise Rent-A-Car employees for volunteering in the donation center and hosting a shopping spree at Ruth's Closet
- Hunt Valley Business Forum for hosting a shopping spree at Ruth's Closet
- Jenkins Baer for donating fixtures and furniture
- Society for Clinical Data Management and RPS for featuring us at their Conference, and for their donation
- ELLIE for donating clothing from their October sale
- PSA Financial Services, Incred-A-Shred, and the Fallston Group for organizing and donating the proceeds from Shred Fest
- Jaime Kendrick for donating proceeds from "Kiss Away Domestic Violence"
- D'ana Downing for donating proceeds from "Jewels for Justice"
- Ruth Shaw, J. Jill and The Store Ltd. for donating during "Cross Keys Cares"
- Eastern High School Class of '61 for collecting donations at their reunion
- St. George's Garden Club for updating the shelter garden
- Heel The Hearts for donating proceeds from their domestic violence awareness rally
- Morgan State University's Women and Gender Studies program for raising funds on our behalf
- Park Moving and Storage for donating and transporting storage pods for Ruth's Closet and the Adopt A Family program

Dear Judge

There were 12 men seated in the circle and it was obvious, no one wanted to go first. "The assignment was to write a letter to the judge, I want you to read out loud what you wrote," said John Miller, facilitator of that afternoon's group at the Gateway Project. The 12 men, all present because they had been convicted or plead guilty to second-degree assault against their partner or wife, looked uncomfortably up, down and in any direction but at John.

After a lengthy and pregnant pause, one man started to read, "Dear judge, it's been almost two years since my arrest and I'm almost finished my House Of Ruth class." Something in his tone made everyone sit up a little straighter. "Throughout this time, I've learned to think before acting and to take other people's feelings into consideration."

In a group where many have literacy issues, there was something almost hypnotic about the man's words and tone. Young, obviously street smart and with tattoos across his face, he continued to read, "I am fully aware of the emotional and physical pain I caused Ms. Smith – at that moment I truly wasn't thinking. Since the incident I have reconciled with Ms. Smith and have been working on becoming a better man, father, brother, son and most of all, a better thinker."

Looking around the room, even the toughest of the group seemed spellbound. "I apologize for my actions, but I don't regret them because they've opened my eyes to truths that were unseen to me before. I'm working hard not only to correct my mistakes, but also to prevent them from ever happening again. I hope you take these words into consideration and know that you played a major part in my change."

He set the paper back on his lap and, for a brief moment, there was silence and then the room exploded in applause. John Miller and the other facilitators at the Gateway Project often talk about the dynamic that happens when the attendees, most forced by the court to enroll, suddenly become the teachers. That day, it became clear what they were talking about because somewhere during that 22-week period, the man who wrote that letter became visibly transformed. Does it happen to all Gateway participants? No, but for every one they reach, it means one less woman living in fear. And, in this particular case, two young daughters who will grow up with a healthy male role model in their lives.



One Great Thing

One brisk fall evening in October, more than 170 women flocked to Ruth's Closet for the kick off of the One Great Thing event – a five day opportunity to shop for treasures donated by some of Baltimore's most prominent women.

Featuring furs and one-of-a-kind finds from the closets of everyone from the mayor to newscasters to socialites – it's no surprise that no one went home empty-handed. In fact, by the end of the weekend, the One Great Thing event raised nearly \$18,000 in sales. We thank everyone who donated, volunteered, spread the word and, of course, shopped. We couldn't have done it without you.

Our Wishes For The New Year

I wish judges would consider domestic violence before they order joint custody.

*Margarita Alvarez,
House Of Ruth Legal Clinic*

I wish more non-violent men would challenge sexism in their communities when they see it and hear it.

Lisa Nitsch, Gateway Project, Si Puedo Program & Teen Initiative Manager

I wish the economy would improve because hard times are exponentially harder on people who need our services.

LuAnn Edwards, House Of Ruth Attorney

I wish that when a judge deems a man to be so dangerous that he can't be allowed near a woman's home or workplace, he or she would think twice about making that child spend time alone with him.

Sue Brown, Children's Therapist

I wish the school system would recognize how vital the topic of teen dating violence is and implement a mandated prevention curriculum.

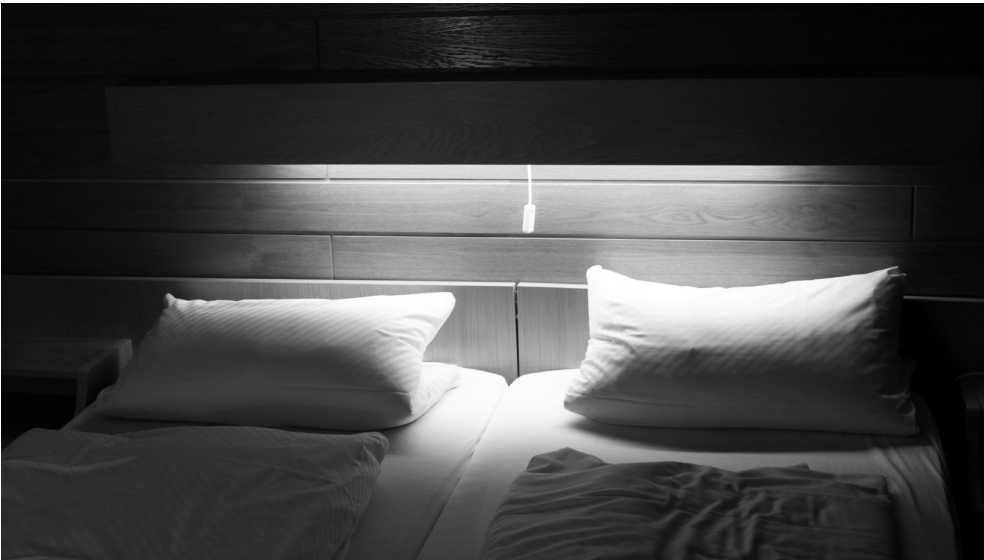
Candice Karber, Teen Educator

I wish that one day all states would have clear legislation regarding cyber-bullying.

Amelia Lee Conlon, Teen Educator

I wish that domestic violence would end.

John Miller, Gateway



A Lifeline From Walmart

It's not unusual for the counselors at the House Of Ruth Hotline to answer a call and discover a Baltimore City police officer on the other end of the line. It's not a personal or social call, but instead an alert that the police have just responded to a domestic violence incident and deemed it unsafe for the woman in that situation to remain in her own home. The counselors know those calls aren't made frivolously and they also know it's a situation that has to be dealt with immediately *even if* the shelter is full. These days, when those calls come through, the Hotline staff can rest a little easier thanks to grant from Walmart that helps underwrite their motel program. The House Of Ruth's motel program itself isn't new, in fact, it's been in existence for years, but what has changed is the number of lives it's been able to help. "There's nothing worse than having to tell a woman, I'm sorry I know you and your kids need a safe place but we're full so you have to call other shelters," said Carol Bernstein, Manager of the House Of Ruth's Contact Center. "This grant has given us the leeway to put families up for a few nights so they can work with a case manager, know their options and come up with a plan that will keep them safe going forward." Although certainly the economy has resulted in more people seeking shelter, not all victims need that kind of ongoing assistance. "Sometimes it takes a day or two to get hold of your relatives in another city or you need to lay low until a warrant's been served and you know it's safe to return home. This funding from Walmart allows us to offer a two or three day lifeline to families who we might not have been able to serve before," explains Bernstein.

The House Of Ruth is grateful to Harris Harris Jones & Malone for making the introduction and to Walmart for its generosity. This grant is not only allowing us to serve more victims, but also to reach women who might not have sought our services otherwise – a critical step in lowering fatalities since we know that victims who receive services are less apt to end up murdered.



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We Honor All Those Who Have Embraced Our Mission And Made It Their Own.

The House Of Ruth Maryland deeply appreciates the support of those who share our vision of dignity, respect and safety for women and children. We also appreciate those who donate and choose to remain anonymous. Thank you for your generosity and commitment.



These gifts were made from July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011. If you donate through the United Way and do not see your name listed, we may not have received notification of your gift before this went to print. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of our list. Please call the Development Office at (410) 554-8443 with any changes, corrections or comments.

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