

**The Struggle to Belong:
Dealing with Diversity in 21st Century Urban Settings**

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**“Reconstructing Gender Relations through Domestic Violence Shelters:
From London, England to Boston, USA”**

Daphne Spain

Department of Urban and Environmental Planning

University of Virginia

Charlottesville, VA. USA 22904

spain@virginia.edu

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Almost simultaneously in the early 1970s, feminists in England, Europe, and the United States identified wife battering as an issue that demanded public attention. Until then there was no refuge for women seeking escape from abusive relationships. Working with minimal funding, activists claimed urban spaces as sites of resistance that challenged a man’s prerogative to assault his wife. Domestic violence shelters were material evidence that women refused to be beaten. They legitimized women’s basic rights to physical safety, without which women lack the autonomy necessary for full citizenship.

Shelters reconstructed gender relations for the women who created them and those who needed them . Acting collectively on behalf of women and children’s welfare, providers gained organizational and leadership skills outside the home and labor force. Women who sought shelter were asserting, often for the first time, their power to stand up against abuse. A refuge allowed women whose husbands had made them feel worthless to take the first step toward psychological independence. Wives who had suffered in isolation gained confidence when they discovered they were not alone.

This paper summarizes the beginnings of the “shelter movement” in Britain and the United States. It explores how domestic violence shelters, created by and for women, inscribed women’s rights to bodily integrity onto the urban landscape. Shelters symbolized the challenge to male authority at the core of feminist values. As such, shelters were central to the reconstruction of gender relations that characterized the Second Wave of feminism. I rely on

secondary sources for information about the first refuge in London, and use primary sources from a case study of a shelter in Boston, Massachusetts conducted in 2009 and 2010.

The political and social construction of domestic violence

Shelters were new in the 1970s, but family violence existed long before then. Historian Linda Gordon traces the origins of the formal movement against domestic violence in the United States to the late 19th century, when “child-saving” charities acknowledged the *mother’s* plight in a family subjected to a husband’s brutality. Fathers who beat their children often beat their wives. Whether wife battering was considered a public issue warranting intervention or a personal problem to be resolved within the family has fluctuated over time. According to Gordon, for more than one hundred years, public concern with domestic violence grew when feminism was strong and ebbed when it was weak. Between 1875 and 1910, when suffragettes were campaigning for the vote, and during the Progressive Era (1910-1930), reformers seized on wife-beating as an intolerable practice. During the Depression, when economic hardship took priority, and during the 1940s and 1950s when family values were strongest, domestic violence faded from view. The re-birth of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s known as the Second Wave “forced open the doors of closets that hid family problems”.¹

For feminists, male dominance is at the root of domestic violence. Wife-battering is the chronic assault on a person with lesser power who cannot effectively resist. Husbands beat their wives because they feel entitled to. Biblical decrees and legal practices often condoned such behavior. Husbands who feel threatened by the increasing independence of their wives may strike them to remind both partners who has the greatest power. Or husbands may attack their wives to make them afraid to leave, thus insuring the continuation of domestic and sexual

services. Attitudes differ about whether alcohol is responsible for domestic violence. Some see it as the primary cause. Others argue that drinking merely gives men license to be aggressive without taking responsibility for their actions. Above all, however, men use physical violence, both inside and outside marriage, to maintain control over women.²

In the United States in the early 1970s, violence against wives was invisible compared with the attention to rape. Grimstad and Rennie's 1973 edition of *The New Woman's Survival Guide* included fifteen pages on rape and how to prevent it; wife-battering was not mentioned. In their updated 1975 *New Woman's Survival Sourcebook*, however, Grimstad and Rennie introduced two pages on wife battering in addition to the section on rape and its prevention.³ NOW declared marital violence a major issue in 1975 when it established a task force on battered women and household violence. A coordinator of the task force, Del Martin, published *Battered Wives* in 1976, the first American book to publicize the problem.⁴ By the end of the 1970s, domestic violence had become a major feminist issue. Feminists wanted to do more than provide shelter. They wanted to combat women's sense of isolation and defeat that prevented them from taking control of their lives. According to Grimstad and Rennie, "Central to feminism is the attempt to impart a new consciousness to women of their potential strength and autonomy, which can be fostered through giving one another support and confidence".⁵

Wife battering was also making its way into mainstream American media, legislation, and government policy. In 1979 *U.S. News and World Report* identified more than 170 emergency shelters opened between 1975 and 1978. *The New York Times* began to cover domestic violence with some regularity in 1976, and by 1978 articles on the subject appeared in major news magazines. By 1980 laws in forty-five states and the District of Columbia addressed the legal rights of victims and increased penalties for their assailants. Federal agencies started

granting millions of dollars to combat family violence during the 1970s. Funding flowed through Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA), and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). Research on the causes of wife beating also began to appear in the 1970s. Much of it was conducted by sociologists at the University of New Hampshire's Family Violence Research Program with funding from the National Institute of Mental Health.⁶

In one decade, wife beating was brought out of the family closet and into public scrutiny. Pressure from feminist groups, media coverage, and federal subsidies reached a critical mass that created a domestic violence social movement. Unlike other social movements, the public never identified wife abuse as a problem that demanded a solution. Rather, it was tolerated at numerous institutional levels, especially by law enforcement. The police considered domestic disputes a private matter and were reluctant to intervene. As long as women endured assaults, screamed quietly, and had nowhere else to go, the general public knew little about domestic violence. It took feminists to construct wife abuse as a social problem. Then they created shelters to give women an alternative.

Emergence of shelters in the 1970s

The shelter movement started in London, England in 1971 as a by-product of community activism unrelated to domestic violence. Self-proclaimed feminist Erin Pizzey and a group of friends were protesting against rising food prices in their neighborhood. As they stood on street corners brandishing placards that listed food prices at different stores, they met numerous young mothers who said they felt isolated in their homes. Pizzey thought a community center would provide a place for them to meet other women, temporarily escape their loneliness, and identify

common problems they might be able to solve collectively. Pizzey pressured the local government into giving her and other activists an abandoned house at 2 Belmont Terrace. Volunteers transformed it into a comfortable place with a play area, stove and sink in the kitchen, and a washing machine. Upstairs were a room for an office and a room with a bed for emergencies. Chiswick Women's Aid had come to life. But in addition to filling its initial intent as an all-purpose gathering area, it increasingly became the destination for battered women and their children. A year after opening, the center was housing thirty-four women and children.⁷

There were few house rules, but one was that men were allowed in by invitation only. Another was that any woman who wanted a key could have one. All the women and children took responsibility for running the operation, avoiding the labels of "supervisor" and "client". Residents shared in keeping coal fires burning and cooking "massive stews and soups". The washing machine was in constant use because laundromats were too expensive for women on social security. To raise enough money to keep the center open, they held jumble sales of old clothes; the first one netted L70.⁸

By May 1973 the center was taking nearly 100 calls a *day*. At any one time thirty women and children would be living there, sleeping on mattresses laid in the hall and sharing one toilet. The center was able to move to a larger house at 369 Chiswick High Road when executives at the Bovis Company agreed to fund the facility. Their new quarters had large rooms, a garden, and a finished basement they converted to playrooms. Most important, it had three toilets. The center was licensed for thirty-six people, but there were often 100 women and children living in the house. Eventually Women's Aid opened four more centers in London.⁹

All of the houses were crowded, but they shared a positive atmosphere. They were effective, according to Pizzey, because women and children living with violence are shut off from other people, whereas

Women's Aid forces them out of their isolation. When they come into the house they are crowded together with many others who've been through the same kind of suffering. They have to communicate. Often for the first time since they married they are talking to someone who understands what it's like, because she's been through the same herself. They can also listen and recognize what others have been through. They can see they're not alone.¹⁰

Pizzey railed against public silence and government indifference to family violence in her treatise *Scream Quietly or the Neighbors Will Hear*, published in 1974. In her 1977 introduction to the American edition of the book, Pizzey noted that Women's Aid was the only place in England, and possibly the world, that would take in any woman escaping a violent relationship. By 1977 there were seventy refuges in the United Kingdom, all staffed by volunteers.¹¹

Scream Quietly educated the British public about the problem of wife abuse and the need for emergency shelters. The book combined a history of the domestic violence movement with hair-raising stories from the victims of that violence. When the book was published, Women's Aid had five large houses that served 250 women and children. Pizzey thought the centers had grown so fast because they were run *by* battered women *for* battered women.¹²

In the American edition of *Scream Quietly*, Pizzey recounted how word of Women's Aid had spread by women visiting the shelter. Two women from Amsterdam, for example, lived in the refuge for a week. When they returned home, they sought help from the Dutch government to

establish a similar center. They were told, though, that domestic violence was an English problem. Outraged, the two women squatted in a derelict house; the next day fourteen mothers and their children were on the doorstep. The government relented and funded the refuge. Pizzey and her colleagues also traveled, giving lectures in France, Germany, Switzerland, and the United States; the shelter movement was soon an international phenomenon.¹³ By the time Pizzey reached the United States in 1977, she found groups of women setting up “refuges” everywhere; she heard of one in Boston, and visited the House of Ruth in Washington, D.C.¹⁴ Rainbow Retreat in Phoenix, Arizona and Haven House in Pasadena, California also existed by the time of Pizzey’s visit.¹⁵

American feminists had begun to open shelters in the early 1970s. Some of the first ones were in Arizona, California, Idaho, Minnesota, Oregon, and Pennsylvania. Women in Massachusetts were also among this first wave.¹⁶ Erin Pizzey mentioned a refuge in Boston during her visit to the United States, although her lecture tour did not take her there.¹⁷ She may have heard of RESPOND, founded in 1974 in working-class Somerville, or Transition House, established in elite Cambridge in 1976, adjacent communities just outside Boston’s city limits. I have selected RESPOND, which advertises itself as “New England’s first domestic violence agency”, to study in depth.¹⁸ RESPOND illustrates how working-class women participated in the movement to create places where women established their rights. Few of the founders were members of NOW, which they considered anti-male. Instead, they were “flaming feminists who liked men”.¹⁹ Co-founder Maureen Varney noted that

A growing number of women, affected by current changing roles and patterns in society, are beginning to take more control over their own lives.

However, it is difficult to actually involve many working-class women in the

women's movement because feminists do not always take into account the needs and problems that affect working-class women's daily lives. *It is impossible for a woman to begin to recognize her own strengths and take more control over her life when she is constantly terrorized by her husband.*²⁰ (emphasis added)

Somerville's RESPOND: A temporary refuge from the storms of life

In 1974 four community activists publicly announced the idea for RESPOND, Responsible Escape for Somerville People through Options and New Developments. Anne Broussard, Pauline Dwyer, Jean Luce, and Maureen Varney, all single mothers, had been discussing the idea for several years.²¹ According to Dwyer, they “met in barrooms and talked forever”.²² There was a lot to escape in Somerville in the early 1970s. Varney described the city as a densely populated blue-collar urban area with one of the highest rates of alcoholism in the country; not a very pretty place to live. She and the others saw a need to give young women hope for a better life.²³ They envisioned an organization that could respond to four problems women faced: youth in crisis (teen runaways); young women in transition (single women seeking independence from their families); women in crisis (victims of wife battering); and housing for welfare recipients.²⁴

Broussard and Dwyer asked Somerville Mayor Lester Ralph for a CETA worker who could coordinate a program to provide for the “shelter, health, education, and well being of the women and children of Somerville”. In compliance with CETA regulations, Dwyer and Broussard assured the mayor that they could hire the employee by the end of the year.²⁵ The mayor granted their request and selected Jean Luce as planning coordinator. Before co-founding RESPOND, Luce had been a member of the Somerville Youth Coalition and the Neighborhood

Youth Corps. Her full-time job with RESPOND included negotiating with funding agencies, working with the Board of Directors to set up job descriptions, and locating a permanent building for the organization.²⁶

The founders added men to the Board of Directors because they “gave legitimacy to Respond [sic] in the eyes of the city”.²⁷ Reverend DeForest Brown, Father William Leonard, and Attorney William Jerome joined their Monday evening meetings.²⁸ In 1974 the Board filed for incorporation as a non-profit, tax-exempt 501 (c) 3 organization; when that status was granted in 1975, the “S” in RESPOND was changed to stand for “Special” in recognition that its mission had expanded beyond the local community.²⁹ Anne Broussard, then President of the Board, started looking for office space. She found it at the Somerville Multi-Service Center at 1 Summer Street. Reverend Paul Duhamel of the First Methodist Church, who operated the Center in the church building, agreed to let the group use a desk and telephone.³⁰

In January 1975 *The Somerville Journal* featured an article about RESPOND’s multiple missions under the headline “New program RESPONDS to women’s crisis needs”. “Youth in Crisis” would provide a facility, open 24 hours a day, where runaway teens could live temporarily and receive counseling. The “Young Women in Transition” component was an effort to give women an alternative to early marriage. Small groups of young women would live cooperatively in apartments paid for by their own earnings; they would work part-time while continuing an education or vocational training. The program would provide “a semi-sheltered and safe environment for young women in a working-class community who often don’t have the opportunity to go away to college to break the ties of home”. The “Women in Crisis” was described as an emergency shelter where a woman and her children could go during a family crisis to talk with other women. “Housing for welfare recipients” would provide apartments

where welfare mothers could live with their children while “getting more on their feet financially”.³¹ Housing, or at least temporary shelter, was the theme uniting all of these efforts.

The article encapsulated Somerville women’s needs to escape from the streets, early marriage, domestic violence, and poverty. Whether one organization could address all these issues simultaneously was doubtful. As the Board began to realize that their initial plans were too ambitious, Varney and Broussard attended a meeting on battered women and were asked by members of NOW to join a panel on the topic. Varney had been thinking about the issue and reading about shelters in other countries. A year earlier, she and Judy Sutfren had written a proposal for a Women’s Crisis Center in Somerville in which they mentioned shelters in England, Ireland, and Toronto.³² As word got out about RESPOND’s Women in Crisis program, they were overwhelmed by calls from battered women. Over the course of the year, Board meeting minutes reflect an increasing attention to domestic violence; they also reflect the realization that the organization was being stretched thin. By the end of 1975, RESPOND’s sole mission was supporting battered women and their children.³³

Maureen Varney was the leading advocate for a shelter.³⁴ A childhood memory fed her commitment to providing refuge from domestic abuse. She recounted the incident in the proposal:

One of my most vivid memories is that of a fire in a block near my home. I rushed out to see if my home was in danger. To my horror, there were three children screaming from the third-floor windows, smoke billowing around their heads. Their mother, whose husband was drinking, left the children to seek help from the police. She had no phone and so it was necessary for her to travel through the snow to get police assistance. It isn’t clear how the fire started, but I am sure

that if the woman had a place to go at that time of night, she would not have left the children unattended.³⁵

While others might have blamed the mother for leaving her children, Varney blamed a society that offered no options for women in crisis. She recognized that family violence was a difficult cycle to break. Battering one night could lead to repentance and new resolutions the next morning. Domestic abuse was especially difficult for working-class women who could not escape their husbands or community easily, for financial and psychological reasons. A battered wife might feel too ashamed or guilty to approach friends and neighbors who knew her family. A woman who resorted to emergency rooms was treated as if *she* were the problem. And a woman might be reluctant to press charges against her husband because she knew he would be “sober and sorry” in the morning; she would also have to live with the consequences of having filed a complaint. Varney understood all these complicating factors. She wanted to create a place where “a woman can seek temporary refuge from the storms of her life”.³⁶

The Women’s Crisis Center as Varney described it would provide a “neutral shelter with a warm, supportive atmosphere within the Somerville community”, a safe refuge where women subject to domestic violence could bring their children. The Center would be staffed by volunteers, who were also available for counseling. Staff would direct a resident to agencies and resources that could help her assess her situation and consider her options. They would be referred to Somerville Women’s Health Project for medical care, or Cambridge/Somerville Legal Services for legal advice.

At the time Varney and Sutfren wrote the proposal, the Board was considering three or four buildings near Union Square. Until adequate funding was available, the Center would be

open only on weekends, when drinking was heaviest and the police department received the most domestic calls. The limited weekend plan would allow the Center to begin operating quickly.³⁷ Varney pushed the Board for a May 1, 1975 opening.³⁸ They missed that deadline, but started offering shelter in a four-room apartment at the Mystic River public housing project. Mayor Ralph, a progressive politician, gave them the apartment rent-free.³⁹

Once fully funded, the Center would be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with a paid and volunteer staff. The plan was to establish contracts with the Department of Public Welfare so its employees could come to the Center to explain available services to residents. It was important that women learn to make their own decisions about their marriages, whether that meant filing for legal separation or encouraging their husbands to join Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Staff encouraged residents to form support networks to help each other solve similar problems. Residence was expected to range from one day to three or four weeks, depending on a woman's needs.⁴⁰

Local media began to recognize Varney for her work with domestic abuse victims. In March 1975, Boston's television Channel 5 ran a special show on "Battered Women" in which Varney served as a panel member and interviewer.⁴¹ Eunice West of Channel 5 sent Varney a copy of the show; RESPOND used it to educate community groups about domestic violence.⁴²

Varney and Sutfren presented the draft proposal to the Board at the April 1975 meeting. The proposal was directed to smaller foundations interested in innovative or radical programs. Bill Surette of the Shaw Foundation was mentioned as someone to contact.⁴³ In early May, Jean Luce wrote to Lisa Leghorn and Betsy Warrior at the Cambridge Women's Center asking for advice about sending the proposal out to foundations. Luce reported that RESPOND had formed a task force to get the Center going, and that several members of AlAnon (a support group for

families of alcoholics) were eager to volunteer. In that letter, Luce also thanked Leghorn and Warrior for writing an article on wife-beating that appeared in the alternative newspaper the *Boston Phoenix*.⁴⁴

While they were seeking funding for the Center, the founders met Marie Siraco. Siraco was assigned to RESPOND as a VISTA volunteer, becoming one of the pioneering members of the staff and continuing to work there while raising eight children. Siraco's knowledge of domestic abuse arose from her involvement with alcohol programs through the Catholic Church. Drinking and family violence were highly correlated, and women who attended Al Anon meetings held at the Church were often battered. Al Anon and AA were the only safe places to talk about the taboo subject of abuse. The first victims Siraco knew were sheltered at St. Catherine's Convent through the auspices of Al Anon.⁴⁵

Siraco met with Martha Black and other women who were willing to speak about the violence they, or their friends, were trying to escape. They had all been in Al Anon a few years or more, and were at different levels of recovery. They knew that Al Anon alone was insufficient to solve the problem. "We knew that instant relief, while the battering was going on was needed and [a] long term program was needed to keep the violence away". Siraco observed that battered women needed to make short-term decisions, like leaving an abusive husband, in order to eventually make long-term decisions.⁴⁶ Board members adopted Al Anon's approach to the batterer; it supported women whether they chose to stay or leave.⁴⁷

Alcohol played a significant role in sparking domestic violence, but Varney interpreted drinking as a symptom of larger social and economic problems. In her opinion,

The working-class man receives little esteem from his job and compensates for this lack by drinking with his friends at the neighborhood bar. This same man is frequently laid off at work (particularly during the present economic period) which forces all family members into new roles as the wife takes over financial responsibility for the family. This increased stress leads to drunkenness and domestic violence. The man vents his frustration and anger at his position in society by abusing those who are even less powerful than he, his wife and children.⁴⁸

Varney's class-based analysis is consistent with radical feminist interpretations of violence against women. Men use physical assault to assert their power over all women, married or otherwise. Like rape, domestic violence has structural roots in power relations between the sexes. As long as women possess fewer social, psychological, and economic resources than men, that power imbalance will persist. Varney formed her opinions, in part, by counseling battered women. Although she occasionally heard of women battering women, she was learning that violence was "mis-use of power and in our society unfortunately the power was predominantly on the side of the men".⁴⁹

Varney and Black joined VISTA and became co-directors of RESPOND. Varney was the Community Educator, making presentations to doctors, nurses, and other professionals; Black worked directly with battered women. They took courses in co-counseling and started two groups. Varney recalled that RESPOND was the "first and only group at that time dealing with the age old problem of battering. Domestic violence had not been addressed, recognized, or spoken about to any members of the professions or to police, family or even trusted friends".⁵⁰

In April 1975 Board member Frank Mazzola purchased a six-unit apartment building at 24 Walnut Street with the understanding that RESPOND would buy it when they could afford to pay him.⁵¹ Raising the money was arduous. It started in February with a performance of “Firesticks: A Journey into Self-Respect”, a series of vignettes based on the personal experiences of seven women who, “with sensitivity, wit, and humor, share their lives and growing sense of respect for themselves as women”.⁵² The play was staged at the First Methodist Church Hall and raised \$266.00. They did better with a rummage sale at the church in March, which netted \$430.00. Bread and Roses Restaurant made RESPOND its “cause for the week” in March and generated \$85. Combined with a bake sale, a small grant from Paperback Booksmith Community Action Fund, and several donations, RESPOND raised about \$1,000 that year.⁵³ The most successful event of 1975 (\$386.00) was an “Oldies but Goodies” dance where Harvard theologian Harvey Cox and his band entertained the crowd.⁵⁴ Substantial donations of \$5,500 came in for a downpayment on the building at 24 Walnut Street; the Haymarket Foundation also awarded the organization \$2,000.⁵⁵

The mortgage on the apartment building soon changed hands. Maureen Varney and Jean Luce put up the rest of the money on behalf of RESPOND. Varney, a single mother of six children, used her house as collateral for a loan; Luce contributed her savings. Over the next few years Luce prepared numerous grant proposals asking for funding for the “Refuge”, as it was being called. She invoked the organization’s good reputation within the community and explained the three components to their program. Weekly support groups served sixty women by encouraging them to build self-confidence and explore alternatives to living with violence. Emergency housing provided women with child care, someone to talk to, and information about medical, legal, and welfare resources. Community Education included newspaper, television, and

radio coverage; in one year RESPOND offered dozens of workshops on domestic violence for hospital staff, community agencies, and women's groups.⁵⁶

All those proposals paid off. For the 1977-78 fiscal year, RESPOND reported income of \$11,000 from CDBG funds and \$2,000 from the Haymarket Foundation. Further, CETA contributed \$33,000 in the form of salaries for four staff members. CDBG money was used to hire a full-time Program Director.⁵⁷ But it was never enough. A letter from Treasurer Janet McDonald to the Board of Directors, dated Christmas week 1979, reported that the financial position of the organization was "extremely grave". Payroll had been met more than once by individuals making personal loans to the organization. McDonald explained that they were expecting \$28,000 in CDBG funds from the city, but had been informed in September that the grant had been denied. She reminded the board that

this is the same grant that over one year ago, as a result of women storming City Hall, exerting political pressure, getting TV coverage, was approved and the money was slated for Respond. We have not been able to bill against this money as yet and are now told the revised proposal is denied. In simple english [sic], WE ARE BEING SCREWED!! WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?⁵⁸

An emergency Board meeting was called for December 28. Women who had once depended on the shelter rallied to RESPOND's support. A January 3, 1980 letter to the Editor of the *Somerville Journal* criticized the city for its failure to deliver the funds. A "former battered woman" wrote to express "outrage at the possibility of RESPOND having to close its doors because city bureaucracy is putting the agency's funding in jeopardy". She recounted how RESPOND had helped her and her children escape family violence and create a new life. She

warned that “the City will commit an unforgivable crime if it lets RESPOND die”, denying its services to other battered wives.⁵⁹

The money eventually came through. The Walnut Street house was quickly outgrown and the facility was moved to Oak Street, where the mortgage was held by two other Board members. Demand continued to grow and there were typically more women and children than beds available. Some staff members took victims home with them if the shelter was full; others invited women over for the holidays. When recounting these memories, founders of RESPOND acknowledged that the experience of starting a shelter had been of as much benefit to them as to the women they served; for the first time they realized their power to create a new institution. They all said they never anticipated that RESPOND would last so long, serve so many women, and become part of a larger movement.⁶⁰

Reconstructing Gender Relations

Chiswick Women’s Aid and RESPOND illustrate how shelters reconstructed gender relations for both providers and their clients. Using political talents typically credited to men, Erin Pizzey pressured local government into giving her and her colleagues the first house to be used as a refuge. She convinced business executives to pay for a larger house and leveraged those successes into the acquisition of four additional houses within three years. Pizzey violated masculine organizational hierarchy by making few distinctions between staff and residents. Everyone living at the house took responsibility for cooking, cleaning, and providing support for others. The only formal rules were that men could enter only by invitation, and every resident was entitled to a key to the house. Women who had been abused gained self-confidence when they discovered others who had similar experiences. Pizzey’s book put domestic violence on the

public agenda by demanding that it be recognized like any other crime of assault, and sparked an international shelter movement. These are significant accomplishments for a grass-roots organization.

Americans Anne Broussard, Pauline Dwyer, Jean Luce, and Maureen Varney identified domestic violence as a problem that touched all women, but especially the working-class. They were politically astute, adding men to their Board of Directors to enhance their legitimacy in a masculine system. At the same time, they relied on help from the Women's Center to pursue funding resources. The founders successfully lobbied for CDBG, VISTA, and CETA funding to establish RESPOND. They used television, radio, and newspapers to educate the public about wife battering, and sponsored workshops on the topic for hospital staff and social service professionals. All single mothers raising children, the co-founders possessed organizational skills critical to running a shelter. Varney became Co-director of the first shelter, and was recognized as an expert on the topic of domestic violence. RESPOND gave battered women options. It referred them to medical and legal aid agencies, established support groups, and gave them a safe environment in which to make long-term decisions.

The women who opened the first shelters in London and Boston were community activists with the ability to get things done. They had autonomy and they demonstrated agency. In contrast, the victims of spousal abuse possessed neither. They were economically and/or emotionally dependent on the abuser and lacked the resources to escape repeated bouts of violence. By creating domestic violence shelters, feminists offered victims an exit that could build their self-esteem and lead to greater autonomy. In doing so they challenged the very foundation on which gender inequality is based. Wife battering is the most extreme and brutal expression of the oppression of women in a patriarchal society, a type of violence that is an

integral element in the structure of female subordination.⁶¹ Male violence, whether inside or outside the home, creates fear that undermines women's ability to move and act freely in the public sphere. When feminists demanded that wives have a right to physical safety, they took a step toward affirming full citizenship for all women.

¹ Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 2-4; 19-20.

² Gordon, *Heroes*, Chapter Eight. See also Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Bantam, 1975).

³ Kirsten Grimstad and Susan Rennie, *The New Woman's Survival Catalog* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1973); Kirsten Grimstad and Susan Rennie, *The New Woman's Survival Sourcebook* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975): p. 214.

⁴ Kathleen J. Tierney "The battered women movement and the creation of the wife-beating problem" *Social Problems* 29, 3 (February 1982): 208.

⁵ Grimstad and Rennie, *The New Woman's Survival Sourcebook*, p. 214.

⁶ Tierney, pp. 209; 213.

⁷ Erin Pizzey, *Scream Quietly or the Neighbors Will Hear* (Short Hills, NJ: Ridley Enslow Publishers, 1977): pp. 9, 10.

⁸ Pizzey, *Scream Quietly*, pp. 11-12.

⁹ Pizzey, *Scream Quietly*, pp. 44,45.

¹⁰ Pizzey, *Scream Quietly*, p. 45.

¹¹ Pizzey, *Scream Quietly*, p. 4.

¹² Pizzey, *Scream Quietly*, pp. 130, 131.

¹³ Pizzey, *Scream Quietly*, pp. 5-7.

¹⁴ Pizzey, *Scream Quietly*, p. 7.

¹⁵ Tierney, p. 207.

¹⁶ Del Martin, *Battered Wives* (Volcano, CA: Volcano Press, 1976):Chapter 10.

¹⁷ Pizzey, *Scream Quietly*, p. 7.

¹⁸ "Reaching Out" newsletter of RESPOND, vo. 17, no. 1 (Summer 2008).

¹⁹ Interview with Marie Siraco and others, June 22, 2009.

²⁰ "A Women's Crisis Center in Somerville" by Maureen Varney, 1974, p.4. RESPOND archives.

²¹ Interview with Marie Siraco and two other early members of RESPOND. June 22, 2009.

²² Pauline Dwyer – October 1989. RESPOND archives.

²³ "A Women's Crisis Center in Somerville" by Maureen Varney, 1974. RESPOND archives.

²⁴ Memo to Our co-community workers in Somerville. October 19, 1974. RESPOND archives.

²⁵ Letter to Mayor S. Lester Ralph from Anne Broussard and Pauline Dwyer, November 12, 1974. RESPOND archives.

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- ²⁶ “New program RESPONDS to women’s crisis needs” *Somerville Journal*. January 30, 1975.
- ²⁷ “Overview from Jean Luce. N.d. RESPOND archives.
- ²⁸ Letter to Mr. William J. Seretta, Jr. December 6, 1974. RESPOND archives.
- ²⁹ RESPOND Annual Report 1974-1984. RESPOND archives.
- ³⁰ Letter to Paul Duhamel, December 4, 1974. RESPOND archives.
- ³¹ New program RESPONDS to women’s crisis needs” *Somerville Journal*. January 30, 1975.
- ³² “A Women’s Crisis Center in Somerville” by Maureen Varney, 1974, p. 3. RESPOND archives.
- ³³ “RESPOND Annual Report, 1974-1984”, RESPOND archives.
- ³⁴ “Overview from Jean Luce”. N.d. RESPOND archives.
- ³⁵ “A Women’s Crisis Center in Somerville” by Maureen Varney, 1974, p.1. RESPOND archives.
- ³⁶ “A Women’s Crisis Center in Somerville” by Maureen Varney, 1974, p.1, 3. RESPOND archives.
- ³⁷ “A Women’s Crisis Center in Somerville” by Maureen Varney, 1974, p.2. RESPOND archives.
- ³⁸ RESPOND Board Minutes, March 4, 1975. RESPOND archives.
- ³⁹ Interview with Marie Siraco and others, June 22, 2009.
- ⁴⁰ “A Women’s Crisis Center in Somerville” by Maureen Varney, 1974, p.2. RESPOND archives.
- ⁴¹ RESPOND board minutes, March 4, 1975. RESPOND archives.
- ⁴² Letter from Jean Luce to Lisa Leghorn and Betsy Warrior, May 2, 1975. RESPOND archives.
- ⁴³ RESPOND Board minutes – April 1, 1975. RESPOND archives.
- ⁴⁴ Letter from Jean Luce to Lisa Leghorn and Betsy Warrior, May 2, 1975. RESPOND archives.
- ⁴⁵ Interview with Marie Siraco and others, June 22, 2009.
- ⁴⁶ Marie Siraco – October 1989. RESPOND archives.
- ⁴⁷ “Overview from Jean Luce” n.d. RESPOND archives.
- ⁴⁸ “A Women’s Crisis Center in Somerville” by Maureen Varney, 1974, p.3. RESPOND archives.
- ⁴⁹ Maureen Varney – October 1989. RESPOND archives.
- ⁵⁰ Maureen Varney – October 1989. RESPOND archives.
- ⁵¹ RESPOND Board minutes – April 1, 1975, p. 1. RESPOND archives.
- ⁵² “New Program RESPONDS” *Somerville Journal*, January 30, 1975.
- ⁵³ RESPOND, Inc., Statement of Income and Expenses, January 1, 1975 through June 30, 1975.
- ⁵⁴ Jean Marie Luce, telephone interview, September 25, 2009; RESPOND, Inc., Statement of Income and Expenses, January 1, 1975 through December 31, 1975.
- ⁵⁵ RESPOND, Inc., Statement of Income and Expenses, January 1, 1975 through December 31, 1975.
- ⁵⁶ “What is RESPOND?” n.d. RESPOND archives.
- ⁵⁷ RESPOND, Inc., Financial Statement, May 1, 1977- April 30, 1978; Annual Report 1974- 1984. RESPOND archives.
- ⁵⁸ Letter from Janet McDonald to Board of Directors, December 22, 1979. RESPOND archives.
- ⁵⁹ “A plea for battered women” *Somerville Journal*, January 3, 1980. RESPOND archives.
- ⁶⁰ Interview with Marie Siraco and others, June 22, 2009. In 2008 the organization opened a new facility that housed twenty women and their children. *Reaching Out*” The newsletter for RESPOND, Inc. vol. 17, no. 1 (Summer 2008).
- ⁶¹ Grimstad and Rennie, *The New Woman’s Survival Sourcebook*, p. 214.