

Breaking the Cycle of Violence



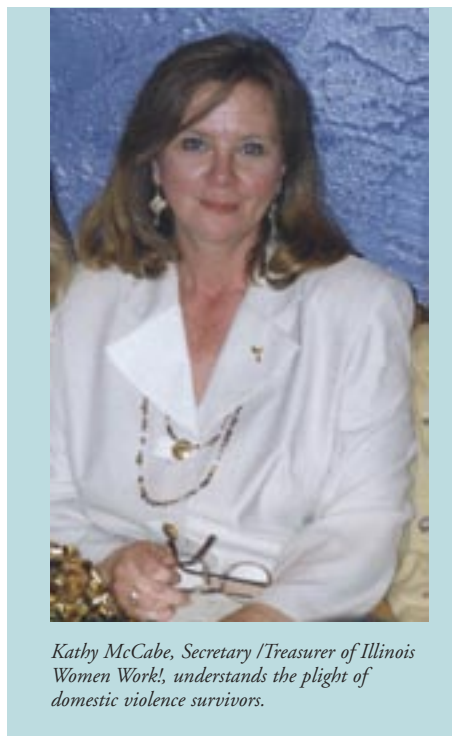
By Quiana Kinloch

According to Kathy McCabe, Secretary/Treasurer of Illinois Women Work!, most cases of domestic violence occur because the abuser knows that he wants to abuse and can abuse. While much can be done to change the mindset of these abusers, female empowerment is imperative in ending the cycle of violence against women.

Illinois Women Work! works with the Illinois Support, Training and Employment Program (ISTEP) for displaced homemakers to empower women to reach economic self-sufficiency and independence. Quality education, thorough training and successful job placement are critical elements in achieving this goal. ISTEP's objective for 2005 was to have 400 women complete the program to continue job training and 400 complete the program for employment. According to the Illinois Department of Labor, ISTEP achieved 92% of the first goal and 86% of the second.

AN OVERWHELMING PROBLEM

Illinois Women Work! assists women in rebuilding their lives by offering career counseling, life skills development, mentoring programs, skills assessments, training and other resources. Women from various walks of life make use of these services, but the majority of women who participate in the program are domestic



Kathy McCabe, Secretary/Treasurer of Illinois Women Work!, understands the plight of domestic violence survivors.

violence survivors. According to the most recent statistics, 64% of ISTEP participants report domestic violence when entering the program. Kathy McCabe thinks this number is alarmingly high.

As a survivor of domestic violence, McCabe believes that domestic violence is one part of a greater problem - women are still seen as second class citizens and are still the victims of male privilege. Through their education, job training and job placement activities, Illinois Women Work! helps sur-

vivors gain the financial footing they need to leave violent relationships. They also recognize, however, that financial stability alone is not enough to get women to leave dangerous situations.

A POWERFUL SOLUTION

Primarily, Illinois Women Work! wants to make sure their participants feel safe. With so many roadblocks obstructing the path to security for domestic violence survivors, Illinois Women Work! provides women with the array of support services necessary to help them reach their greatest potential. Upon entering the displaced homemaker program, each woman is given an assessment that asks if she has been involved in a close personal relationship that included physical, emotional or mental abuse. ISTEP refers abuse survivors to resource centers which provide medical, legal and children's advocates as well as counselors both in and out of a shelter setting.

Empowerment enhances the self-esteem of all people, but can make a particular difference for survivors of domestic violence. That is why Illinois Women Work! makes sure its programs all include self-esteem boosters. Counseling is one way to help increase women's self-esteem so program participants undergo assessments, learning about their personal strengths and options. According to McCabe "self assessment shows [participants] that they are skilled



With the help of Illinois Women Work!, domestic violence survivors receive job training that leads to a range of employment opportunities.

and gifted. It boosts self esteem.”

In addition to counseling, participants also need a support network. Family members sometimes have difficulty serving as a support network because they have a hard time understanding the dynamics which make it difficult for survivors to leave their abusers. This lack of understanding led McCabe to create a lecture that she calls “Why Don’t You Just Leave,” which explains why so many women remain in violent relationships.

“A woman leaves seven times before she leaves for good. Each time she leaves, she gains more strength. This strength is something she carries with her for the next time. She gets stronger until she leaves for good,” McCabe says.

With the support of Illinois Women Work!, women see their strength and know they have a support network on which they can rely. Illinois Women Work! realizes that strength-building is a process, one that must be carefully cultivated. Illinois Women Work! provides women with enough strength to pull themselves up and with the endurance needed to stay up for the long term, they fight their way to security and success. ✓

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Graduates of the News Choice program at the YWCA of Asheville, NC are among the thousands of women assisted each year by Women Work! member organizations that work with survivors of domestic violence.