

# LIFE



ADWAS opened the country's first transitional housing to deaf and deaf-blind low-income families with children who are survivors of abuse in the Seattle area.

## ADWAS Provides Housing for Abuse Victims

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Abused Deaf Women Advocacy Service (ADWAS) recently had the grand opening of the country's first transitional housing for the Deaf and Deaf-Blind abuse survivors and their families in Seattle, Washington.

This building, "A Place of Our Own" has 19 units of transitional housing for low income families with children who are homeless. They raised the whopping price tag of \$8.6 million dollars through a "Capital Campaign" fundraising series and grants from the city of Seattle and the state of Washington, as well as other organizations and agencies. Ground breaking took place in 2005 and construction was completed in August 2006.

The building incorporated several features designed to provide a safe haven for the residents. In addition to the design, there are several procedures that helps enhance the residents' living experience. "We designed the building so that we can monitor the coming and goings of people, as well as the surrounding area," said Marilyn Smith, ADWAS founder. "We support survivors in developing a personal safety plan so that they can go out in the community without fear," adds Smith.

ADWAS is a deaf non-profit domestic violence organization established in 1986. Smith currently serves as ADWAS executive director. ADWAS has been a trendsetter in advocacy services for the Deaf and Deaf/Blind victims and serves as a national model for at least 14 other deaf domestic violence organizations across the nation.

After years of advocacy, Smith realized that there were no transitional housing anywhere in the nation for Deaf and Deaf-Blind victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. ADWAS's website stated that, "Hearing based domestic violence housing often creates isolation and danger for Deaf and Deaf-Blind women seeking shelter where staff are not able to communicate with the victim and there is no adaptive equipment."

This led Smith to have a vision: Why not create nation's first safe transitional housing for the Deaf and Deaf-Blind survivors? That was in 1999.

### Policies and Procedures

ADWAS is educating the community about domestic violence. "ADWAS wants all abusers to be held accountable for their behav-

ior... and the community members are learning about the issues," said Smith. The intention is to provide a safe space for the survivors. "That means our Deaf events and meetings become safer for everyone," Smith emphasizes.

"This way, we have a triple layered approach to safe haven: We have a safe building with rules for security; each person is learning to be as safe as they can be and Deaf community is learning how to protect survivors at events and to make the abuser responsible for their behaviors," stated Smith.

There are policies currently in place for the transitional housing such as limiting number of visitors pre-approved by ADWAS per apartment and each resident promises to keep the names of other residents private and confidential. "We want people who are living here to feel confident that their safety issues are respected," said Smith.

"A Place of Our Own" transitional housing program has a guideline that determines who qualify for placement. The criteria include earning up to 30% of the Seattle area median income, qualification within the Seattle Housing Authority and Section 8 requirements. Residents also must have at least one child to qualify as well.

Residents may stay at the housing for a maximum of 24 months. "We want to give them enough time to find permanent housing that is right for their situation. Many survivors need at least this long to start work on their goals. It takes time to get through the court system, apply for subsidized housing, go to school or get a job that is appropriate," Smith explains.

"After they move in, as they work toward their personal goals, they can increase their income and become ready to move on to their own permanent housing. We provide whatever support they need to make their lives more stable, that means we work closely with Department of Vocational Rehabilitation and other resources," Smith adds.

The building incorporates the latest adaptive technology such as videophone, TTY, doorbell light and alarm lights.

While the building itself already has been paid for, the housing program are funded by a series of city and state grants annually. The program accepts all applications nationwide. "This is a national program, we will assist with transportation for those who wish to move to Seattle," stated Smith.