



Ocean County
Observer

Opinion

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2006 • 1

OUR VIEW

Places of refuge for battered women

Experts say the most dangerous period for a woman whose husband or companion is abusive is the period after she tells him she is leaving but before she walks out the door.

In last week's murder suicide in Lacey Township, Rosemary Walters, 37, was physically abused before her husband shot her to death and killed himself with their 6-year-old daughter in the house, authorities said.

The couple's 9-year-old son was in school. A neighbor said the couple's daughter told her daughter that her parents were divorcing.

Authorities did not detail the abuse or say whether it was ongoing, so there is no way of knowing whether the Walters marriage fit that pattern.

But in far too many cases, women are the victims of abuse, both physical and emotional, and suffer the ultimate abuse — murder — when they dare to attempt to escape.

That's why it was gratifying to hear about plans to double the space at Dottie's House, a Brick shelter for women and children fleeing domestic violence situations.

For decades women suffered in silence because they had nowhere to go if they mulled leaving an abusive relationship. There was no shelter for battered women and their children in Ocean County, no safe haven to protect them from brutal beatings.

Then Catholic Charities came along and opened Providence House, which provided shelter and counseling to help these women through the process of leaving their violent pasts behind and preparing for difficult but peaceful futures.

Dottie's House opened to fulfill the same mission.

Both are in secret locations to prevent attacks by irate spouses.

Both provide important educational services to women who might have been out of the work force for years, been kept in the dark about family finances, or whose abuse kept them from being the best parents they could be.

The aim is independence for the women, a worthy goal.

But Carol Wolfe, Dottie's House executive director, said the need is so great that they have to turn women and children away.

Domestic violence is so pervasive in the county that, even when the expansion is completed and Dottie's House more than doubles in size from eight to 17 units, they'll still have to turn families away, Wolfe said.

We applaud the mission of Dottie's House and Providence House in offering an oasis for troubled families and a path to a better life.

But we decry the violence that creates a need for the facilities.