



# HELP & SHELTER

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## ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1995

### Introduction

Help & Shelter is a non-partisan non-governmental organisation which was established in November 1994 with the following object:

"To provide subsidised or free assistance to persons who, faced with domestic violence or other social, socio-economic or personal problems, are in danger of having their need for help unmet because of poverty and lack of means."

In June 1994 the directors of the Georgetown Legal Aid Clinic had given permission for a legal aid support group spearheaded by businesswoman Denise Dias to use 2 of the offices in the Clinic's premises at Maraj Building, Georgetown, for the purpose of providing social services complementary to the legal services offered by the Clinic.

The group was particularly concerned about the high incidence of violence, alcoholism and poverty in Guyana, the increase in family instability and decrease in family support resulting from the increase in emigration and the lack of help available to persons wishing to leave abusive situations and/or needing counselling and crisis services.

The group operated informally on an ad hoc basis until November 1994, when, with the prospect of a sizeable donation being obtained, it was decided to incorporate under the name Help & Shelter Ltd. The founding members were Ms. Dias, attorney-at-law Susan Moore, social worker Sharon Campbell, researcher/activist Andaiye, social worker Colleen Hopkinson and attorney-at-law Josephine Whitehead.

Within the overall object stated above, the establishment of a crisis and counselling service, including a crisis line, for people in distress and of a shelter for abused women and their children were made the first two goals of the organisation.

What follows is a synopsis of the progress made towards these goals

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during 1995. Appended to this report as Schedule 'A' is a month by month report of our activities and appended as Schedule 'B' is a list of donations and funds received/approved during the year. Our financial statement may be inspected upon request at the above address.

### **The Structure and Functioning of Help & Shelter**

Help & Shelter is a company limited by guarantee. It is run by a board of directors which reaches decisions by majority with the chair having a casting vote if necessary. There were initially 6 directors, namely Denise Dias (chairperson), Susan Moore (vice-chairperson), Sharon Campbell, Colleen Hopkinson, Andaiye and Josephine Whitehead (secretary/treasurer), but are now 5 as Ms. Campbell resigned in September.

The directors meet at least once a month but in some months have met as many as 5 times in order to deal with the heavy work load involved in getting a new organisation off the ground. All the directors work on an entirely voluntary basis.

The first annual general meeting was held in May, at which the first directors were all re-elected. In November, a Certificate of Continuation of the company under the Companies Act, 1991 was obtained and in December the company changed its full name from Help & Shelter Ltd. to Help & Shelter Inc. and adopted new by-laws.

In mid-year the directors recognised the need to spread the work to be done by Help & Shelter and as a result of an Action Workshop facilitated by educational psychologist, Dr. Janice Jackson on 1 July, and attended by over 40 volunteers, 5 committees were formed, namely fundraising, public education, training, child counselling and general counselling committees. The first 3 committees are working committees and the latter 2 are more in the nature of volunteer support groups. The function of each working committee is to develop and carry out a programme of activities in its particular area. There is a monthly meeting between committee representatives and the directors at which programmes are approved and information about the progress of the committees and of the organisation itself is exchanged. A list of the members of each committee is appended to this report as Schedule 'C'.

Early on in the year, the founding members of Help & Shelter, mindful of the problems that can be caused by having a large but inactive membership, decided that rather than opening membership to anyone wishing to join, it would be restricted to people who had demonstrated active commitment to the organisation. In November all committee members were invited to join and it is proposed that in the near future a similar invitation will be extended to those volunteer counsellors who completed the recently held training course.

Help & Shelter has 3 paid members of staff, namely a coordinator of the Crisis & Counselling Service (Ms. Yvonne Mbozi), a secretary (Ms. Jennifer Bynoe) and an office assistant (Mr. Cornelius Roberts).

Throughout the year Help & Shelter has been involved in collaboration



with a number of women's groups, agencies and individuals, all of whom gave their time on a voluntary basis. Construction engineer Mr. Jorge Festas de Santos gave advice regarding the rehabilitation of the building for the shelter; social worker Ms. Patrice La Fleur conducted the first training workshop; Dr. Janice Jackson gave us the benefit of her knowledge and experience on a number of occasions and, as already mentioned, facilitated the Action Workshop in July; Senator Diana Mahabir-Wyatt, the founder of a shelter for abused women in Trinidad, came to Guyana in June and gave us a considerable amount of invaluable advice; child specialist Dr. Faith Harding and qualified counsellor Ms. Patricia Adams counselled clients free of charge; CESO volunteer, counsellor Marge Roche spent 6 weeks advising and assisting us in January/February and 3 months from September to December; chartered accountant Mr. Christopher L. Ram donated his professional services in preparing a draft budget for the shelter, and information was exchanged and the possibility of structured collaboration discussed with representatives of a number of women's organisations which are involved in work against violence against women, namely Camal International Home; Genesis Home; Red Thread; Caribbean Association for Feminist Research & Action (CAFRA); Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association (GRPA); Women's Progressive Organisation (WPO); National Congress of Women (NCW) and Guyana Association of Professional Social Workers (GAPSW).

### **The Crisis & Counselling Service**

Our goal was to establish a service to provide counselling to people unable to afford it, crisis counselling to people in emergency situations and generally to help people in distress. It was envisaged that the service would assist both people coming into the office and calling a crisis line and that a core of volunteers would be trained to give counselling.

A meeting with interested persons was held in February to discuss the establishment of a core of volunteer counsellors, at which it was agreed that it was necessary to employ someone to coordinate the service to be provided. A coordinator was employed in May and in the same month a weekend training workshop took place, attended by 42 persons who had responded to our notice in the newspapers. This was followed by a 3 month long weekend training course from September to December, which was run by the training committee and during which a number of resource persons gave of their time, namely Ms. Helen Amsterdam, Ms. Roxane George, Ms. Avette Richards and Ms. Chauncey Richmond. At the end of the course 34 volunteers were awarded certificates of participation.

From June to December the service, although not officially opened, operated on an ad hoc basis, with clients being given assistance directly or referred to other organisations and agencies. The service was officially launched on the occasion of International Day Against Violence Against Women on 25 November, with a function attended by representatives of donor



agencies and other supporters and addressed by Justice of Appeal Desiree Bernard. In December volunteer counsellors were on call on a roster basis.

From January 1996 it is intended that the service get into full swing, with pairs of volunteer counsellors being available at the office on a roster basis every weekday between 8am and 6pm, to counsel clients face to face or over the telephone, accompany them to the police, hospital and/or court and generally give support. Existing volunteer counsellors will be given ongoing supervision and training, and training will also be given to new volunteers.

It is hoped that the single telephone line which now serves both administrative and counselling purposes will be joined by at least one more line, which will then be available for counselling only, and that call forwarding facilities will be introduced by GT&T to enable the crisis line to operate on a 24 hour basis.

With the coming into full operation of the service, the need for accommodation larger than the 2 small rooms at present occupied courtesy of the Georgetown Legal Aid Clinic (which is itself in need of additional space) has become apparent. It is hoped that more spacious premises can be found very shortly as cramped conditions will inevitably limit the efficacy of the service.

Help & Shelter was fortunate in receiving funding to enable the establishment of the service from a number of sources. UNICEF gave a grant of \$473,000 for training, resource material and a 6 month salary bridge for the coordinator; CIDA gave a grant of \$971,543 for office equipment and supplies, resource material, training, preparation of a referral directory and a 6 month salary bridge for a secretary and the British Partnership Scheme approved funding of \$1,181,490 for office equipment, resource material, training and a public awareness campaign.

### The Shelter

The goal is to establish and run a shelter for abused women and their children, where they can stay for a maximum of 6 months, receive counselling and learn skills to protect themselves and their children from abuse and to take them toward self-sufficiency and economic independence.

The proposed location of the shelter was identified shortly after the organisation was established, with the Government indicating its willingness to make a gift of the land and building to us. Caribbean Management and Engineering Consultants Limited volunteered engineering and quantity surveying services.

The state of the building was such that we were advised that it be demolished and a new building be erected. Preliminary plans were prepared following site visits and discussions and following further discussions these were amended and final plans and bills of quantities prepared. It is proposed that the building be able to accommodate 10 women and their children (for whom schooling will be arranged). Apart from a resident housekeeper, staff will be kept to a minimum as the women will be expected to look after their children

and do the cooking, washing, cleaning etc. The remaining land space will be used for growing fruits and vegetables and rearing fish and chickens. The compound will be surrounded by a high, fortified wall, as security will be of the essence.

It is hoped that the formalities of the gift of the property by the Government will be completed early in the new year and that construction will commence before mid-year. Applications for funding have been made to Futures Fund and SIMAP and it is hoped that other donor agencies and service and business organisations will assist with donations of furniture, fittings and equipment.

**Help & Shelter is most grateful for all the support received  
during the year**