



HELP & SHELTER

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ANNUAL REPORT FOR 1996

Introduction

In our (first) Annual Report for 1995 we gave the background and rationale for the establishment of Help & Shelter in November 1994 and a synopsis of the progress made towards the achievement of our first two goals, namely the establishment and running of a crisis service and the establishment and running of a shelter for abused women and their children.

In this report we will outline the progress made during 1996 and our plans for 1997.

Appended to this report are 3 schedules: A - the press release issued on the first anniversary of the crisis service (Monday, 25 November - International Day Against Violence Against Women), B - our first year crisis service statistics and C - a list of donations and funds received during the year.

Membership

The membership of Help & Shelter, which at present stands at 30, comprises persons who have actively shown a commitment to the work of the organisation. As indicated in our report for 1995, the emphasis is not upon a large but an active body of members.

Administration

The **board of directors** was increased from 5 to 8 in May, 1996 the new directors being Marguerite Buckmire, chair of the Fundraising Committee, Elizabeth Cox, chair of the Counselling Committee, and Doolarie Hopkinson, chair of the Public Education Committee.

With regard to **staff**, Yvonne Mbozi remains coordinator of the crisis

service and we also employ a secretary/receptionist and an office assistant.

Our **base of operations** has continued to be 2 rooms in the offices of the Georgetown Legal Aid Clinic (for which we are sincerely grateful), but we are shortly to move to larger accommodation at the bottom flat of the Ministry of Labour annexe on Homestretch Avenue (for which we are similarly grateful), where we will be able to expand the services offered to people in crisis, hold training sessions, meetings and workshops and invite organisations which provide drugs and alcohol abuse and AIDS counselling to make use of our facilities.

The Crisis Service

The service is at present open from 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday. Counselling by trained volunteer counsellors is available and if clients require, a counsellor will accompany them to the police station, hospital and court and generally give support. Volunteer counsellors are supervised and monitored by Patricia Adams, a highly qualified and experienced professional therapist. We are deeply indebted to Ms. Adams for all her help throughout the year.

The training which the volunteer counsellors have received will be reinforced and extended during 1997 and it is proposed that new volunteers will also be trained. Our thanks go to Janice Jackson, Patrice La Fleur, Beverley Braithwaite-Chan, Christine King and Marilyn Jordan for their assistance with the development of a training programme.

When we move to our new accommodation it is proposed that our opening hours be extended and a telephone hotline installed.

If we are unable to provide the assistance which a person requires, we will refer her/him to the appropriate organisation or agency (if any) and for the purpose of easy referral are compiling a **resource directory**, copies of which will be made available to other organisations and agencies. We are grateful to Demerara Tobacco Company Ltd. for sponsoring a notice in the press inviting organisations to send us information for inclusion in the directory.

As previously indicated, our first year statistics and first anniversary press release are appended as schedules to this report.

Without the voluntary service of our counsellors the crisis centre would be unable to function and deepest gratitude is extended to each of them.

Our sincere thanks also go to Karen de Souza for her willingness to help us in helping young victims of sexual offences through the trauma of court proceedings and special mention must be made of director Colleen Hopkinson's tireless dedication to this aspect of our work.

A significant breakthrough was made in May, when as a result of representations made to the then Chancellor of the Judiciary, Hon. Mr. A.F.R. Bishop, and with the agreement of the then Chief Justice (now Chancellor), Hon. Mr. Cecil Kennard, it was agreed that representatives of Help & Shelter and Red Thread attending court with clients would be accorded official recognition and given permission to sit at the bar table if so desired. It is

anticipated that this agreement will be fully implemented in 1997.

The Shelter

The goal remains 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.

We have encountered some delay in obtaining the grant funding necessary to rehabilitate the building identified for the shelter but are hopeful that we will be able to start construction by mid-1997.

There has also been some delay in having the gift by the Government of the property identified for the shelter finalised, but we expect that this should be attended to early in 1997.

The urgency of the need for shelter accommodation cannot be overstressed and we are pleased that another organisation, Genesis Project, already has a completed building and will hopefully be open early in 1997.

Domestic violence legislation

The Domestic Violence Bill was finally passed by Parliament on 19 December 1996, more than 3 years after it was submitted to the Government in draft by the National Women's Rights Campaign. Its intention is to provide speedy and effective civil relief for victims of domestic violence by empowering magistrates to make protection and other orders and giving the police wide powers of enforcement. Whether or not the legislation will work will however depend upon a number of things being done, including informing the public about the existence of the legislation and how they can use it and ensuring that the magistracy and police are fully aware of their new powers and responsibilities. Help & Shelter will play what part it can in this process.

Financial

In February we obtained the Minister of Finance's approval as a charitable organisation, thus exempting us from corporation and property taxes and in December we obtained exemption from withholding tax on funds in our savings account.

As previously indicated, details of grants and donations received during the year appear in Schedule C.

Our Fundraising Committee has rendered sterling service in organising a raffle which raised \$92,000: and a CARICOM Day Lunch which raised \$236,026:. In addition we raise funds on an ongoing basis from the sale of Help & Shelter t-shirts. Our thanks to Liz Deane-Hughes, Elizabeth Cox, Sidewalk Cafe, Courts and Grace Kennedy (Guyana) Ltd. for the kind donation of prizes for the raffle and to Eon Bettencourt for the donation of and discount on t-shirts.

In order to increase our own income generating capacity, we propose next year to begin the production and sale of notelets. We have also obtained

permission to place donation boxes in a number of business locations.

An audit of our accounts up to 30 June 1996 (our financial year runs from 1 July to 30 June) has just been completed and the auditor's report and financial statements will be presented to our second annual general meeting in February 1997. Copies may thereafter be obtained from our office upon request. We are most grateful to our auditors, Barcellos Narine & Co., for their voluntary services.

Summary

During the year we have been able to put the ground work done in 1995 to effect and run a crisis service which has helped over 200 persons in crisis, mainly victims of domestic and sexual violence. We have faced constraints related to accommodation which have resulted in our having been unable to be open longer hours and to put a 24 hour crisis hot line into operation, but these should be largely overcome when we move to our new accommodation.

A further constraint has been the difficulty in retaining the services of our volunteer counsellors, given the need of most of them to spend much of their time on paid work. Several counsellors remain available to the centre but given their responsibilities (including family care), there have inevitably been occasions when there is need of a counsellor but none are available. To address this problem the directors have recently decided to employ a full-time counsellor and it is hoped that the position will be filled as soon as possible.

It is a source of regret that we have been able to make little progress towards the establishment of our shelter due to delay in accessing the substantial amount of funding required (in excess of \$60 million). The running of the shelter will also require considerable funding on an ongoing basis and we hope to obtain the services of a professional fundraiser during 1997 to assist the directors with this formidable task.

During the year Help & Shelter has continued to receive support from all sectors of Guyanese society, for which we are most grateful. We hope that this support will not only be maintained but strengthened during the coming years as it is essential if we are to remain in existence, much less expand the work we are doing, play our part in ensuring that the domestic violence legislation is made effective and continue with our efforts to promote the societal changes which are necessary if the incidence of violence in any and all its forms is to be significantly reduced.