

The Sojourner Truth

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE FRIENDS OF SOJOURNER

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Our Mission:

To provide safe shelter for women & children, advocacy and education for individuals and communities victimized by domestic violence.

Mental Illness and Domestic Violence



■■■ A recent tragedy of gun violence, this time on a college campus in Oregon, has again sparked conversations on the relationship of violence to mental illness. In many cases, the presence of mental illness among the perpetrators in these catastrophes was conclusive. Their randomness makes the murders even more unnerving, forcing us to acknowledge that any one of us, or someone we love, could have been victims, being in the wrong movie theatre, schoolroom, prayer meeting, or mall at the wrong time. The National Alliance on Mental Illness, and the most recent research inform us that any link between the mentally ill and violent behavior, is very weak; less than a fifth of homicides are committed by mentally ill individuals.

A common misconception regarding domestic violence follows. Harming someone we love, and who likely loves us, seems insane. Although a person committing domestic violence could be suffering from mental illness, the majority of abusers are not. Domestic abuse is not a result of losing control of self; *it is the purposeful use of physical, emotional, verbal and non verbal means to gain control of one's partner.* An abuser's "crazy" behavior is often quite effective in establishing extensive control.

Just as common is the misconception that the victim's mental health is responsible for their failure to leave the relationship once the situation becomes miserable, or even dangerous. Without question the chronic stress that dominates a victim's daily life can trigger mental and physical health crises; PTSD, depression and anxiety, as well as feelings of low self worth are common. But it is critical to acknowledge the web of control the abuser has often been building and exercising in the victim's everyday life—using isolation, blaming, intimidation and threats as a trap. It is equally important to remember that leaving the relationship does not guarantee safety; quite the opposite, victims are often killed while or after leaving.

For some survivors of abuse, professional therapy is helpful in finding healing and balance; for years, support groups have proven very useful. But for the majority of survivors, time, safety, and a supportive community are the network that provides the possibility, not only of recovery of health, but of discovering inner strength to live lives that are their own.

Written By: Judi N.—Advocate/Trainer



Please watch for Sojourner's **Holiday Appeal Letter**. Your gift this season will help ensure Sojourner's ability to provide critical services to victims of domestic violence and abuse.

Holiday Appeal

From Fear to Hope: Isabelle's Story of Survival

Isabelle came from Nigeria on a visa obtained for her by her husband. He planned to send for her children at a later date to come to the United States. She had known this man since she was a teenager and gave up life in her country to make a new life with him in the United States. Isabelle had a business she left behind with her brother to help support her children who were left in the care of her family.

Within months of her arrival in the States, her husband stopped completing her immigration paperwork. He would throw away the unopened mail from immigration and her visa expired. She was at his mercy as he became more and more abusive. She wanted so badly to escape but was unable to read English and did not know anyone or have money to hire a translator.

Her living conditions were very poor. Her husband became physically abusive, would not provide personal

hygiene products, clothing, phone cards to speak with her children and family and would buy very little food. She would go days without food. She started school to try to learn English and after a while confided in people at her school. They advised her to call Sojourner. She took a courageous step and came to the shelter. She only stayed a short time because her family in Nigeria and his family, who lived here, pressured her to return home to her abusive husband and make the marriage work. They told her she was shaming herself and her family. Six months later, after enduring months of abuse, she again left home to come to shelter and this time it was final. She was terrified, exhausted, malnourished and pregnant. While in shelter she worked with legal advocates and an attorney to get an

Order for Protection and a divorce. Advocates explained her rights, accompanied her to appointments, hired translators and ensured that she knew how to keep herself safe. She had her baby while in shelter. The advocates continued to provide support after she left the shelter. They connected her with an immigration attorney who helped apply for legal immigration status using laws created through VAWA (Violence Against Women's Act). At the end of this very long process she will be able to get a green card, have a work permit and most importantly be able to bring her children here. Sojourner provided advocacy support and connected with many other community organizations to ensure that her comprehensive needs were met.

UPDATE: Isabelle is now living in her own apartment, has a work permit, a healthy baby, strong community connections and is patiently waiting for her other children to join her.

My Journey as an Intern



The first time I walked through the doors of Sojourner shelter, I remembered feeling at home. I walked into the dining hall to be overwhelmed with excited children and busy mothers filling every seat. There was something special about this place—something greater than a safe place to come in time of need.

I learned to navigate crisis calls, locate resources, and play pretty, pretty princess for hours on end. I became a part of the shelter team and the families embraced me. I remember listening to some of the children talk about how good they were at reading. So, I started a reading challenge. They began to read like little Einstein's! It was truly amazing! In one month, they had achieved their reading goals and a party was in order. The mothers joined me and we baked cakes and made a celebration for the children. After one of the mom's said, "Thank you for helping make my child's time here easier, for making them excited about being here." In that moment I realized why Sojourner was so special.

Written by Sydney G.

Yes, I was doing my job, but I was also bringing a sense of belonging to families who had no place of *their own*—no place to call *home*.

Every week I was fortunate to accompany a legal advocate into court. It felt like the voices of those robbed of their safety were never going to be heard. But then, Sojourner's advocate would enter the courtroom and all of that would change. She was tenacious and intelligent, speaking up as a strong woman on behalf of other women. She brought hope and did her best to ensure every survivor would have the support they needed to move forward.

Over the years I have been involved in non-profit work however, I can honestly say that Sojourner was the most inspiring. The advocates taught me how to turn a passion into a career. I will graduate from Loyola University this year. I hope one day I can turn my love for social justice and service into a career. I will carry with me my experiences at Sojourner and the women and children I met. Thanks to them, I learned to be a stronger woman and now have my own voice to speak up for those who are unheard.

Capturing the Day to Day Moments at Sojourner



Staff cooking up a delicious dinner for the residents.



US Energy volunteer working hard in the garden.



SpartanNash volunteer day.



Taking the families for a fun day at the Apple Orchard.



Donation drive from Cargill.



Playground—Before



Playground—After

Did you know?

We have **internship opportunities** that provide hands-on learning experiences!

Donation drives are extremely helpful! Get your church, friends and groups involved!

Our **monthly e-newsletter** updates our supporters on current events and needs!

We provide **presentations and education** to parents, youth and the community!



We have a Facebook page! Follow us and see what we are up to!
<https://www.facebook.com/sojournerproject1>

For more information about ways to stay connected and getting involved, please call 952.351.4062 or email laura@sojournerproject.org for more information!



P.O. Box 272, Hopkins, MN 55343
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 24-Hour Crisis Line: 952-933-7422
 www.sojournerproject.org

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Return Service Requested

If you would like to receive future newsletters and communications by email or if you would like to be removed from our mailing list, please contact the Program Support Coordinator at 952-351-4062.

- ... Teen Gift Ideas ...**
- Footballs, Basketballs
 - Sports Jerseys and Baseball Caps
 - Teen Apparel
 - Wallets and Purses
 - Makeup and Nail Kits
- Small gift cards (\$15-25) for:**
- Target
 - Wendy's
 - McDonalds
 - Best Buy
 - Subway

Please accept our heartfelt thanks for your thoughtfulness.

- ... Baby and Children's Gift Ideas ...**
- Pretend Play
 - Dress-Up Clothes
 - Toy Household Appliances/Toy Tools
 - Multicultural Dolls
 - Art/Craft Sets

- ... Women's Gift Ideas ...**
- Slippers
 - Purses and Wallets
 - Lotion or Body Wash Sets
- Small gift cards (\$15-25) for:**
- Target
 - Gas Stations
 - Cub Foods and other grocery stores

The holiday season can be an especially difficult time for the families in our program. Thanks to your generosity and support Sojourner hosts a holiday boutique for our clients. Your gifts help provide joy and reassurance year round of better days to come and we are thankful for your generosity and support. Please also know and remember that financial gifts and gift cards support our needs year round and are much appreciated!

In this list you will find a couple of gift suggestions and for a more detailed list please visit our website at www.sojournerproject.org.

Holiday Wishlist