
Analysis of the Role of Social Organizations Dealing with Domestic Violence on the Example of Jersey Battered Women's Service

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), on average, twenty people per minute are physically abused by their partner in the U. S. That number comes out to more than 10 million men and women (NCADV, 2017). With domestic abuse being such a nationwide issue that affects so many people, there needs to be organizations with people there to help the victims with their needs. One of these organizations is called Jersey Battered Women's Service (JBWS). JBWS is a private, non-profit agency located in Morris County, NJ and provides service to those who have experienced domestic violence. They are a confidential agency and do not provide their address to anyone as an extra means to protect the women. They consist of a large variety of paid professionals along with volunteers.

JBWS has an interesting history to it, as it was founded back in 1976 as a 24-hour helpline for those who were experiencing domestic abuse. It became evident in the community that an organization like JBWS was needed when one of the frequent callers was murdered by her husband while she was working at a hair salon. Not long after, a former victim opened her home to other women in need. By 1978, JBWS was a full-service agency. They received funding to open the agency by going door to door to raise funds. The mission of JBWS is "prevention of domestic violence through the protection and empowerment of the victim, the rehabilitation of family members, the advocacy of social reform to prevent partner violence, and the education of the public about domestic violence and its consequences." (JBWS, 2018). With their services provided and their 24-hour staff, they can fulfill this mission.

Recently, I had the opportunity to interview MMH, an employee at JBWS. MMH graduated from Elon University in 2018 with a bachelor's degree in Human Services Studies. She is hoping to become a LSW in the next few years and eventually get her MSW. As for now, she is helping the community as she does the work of a social worker as a residential case manager at JBWS. MMH is talked to me about the mission and history of JBWS but also let me know about the large community they serve. This agency, although located in Morris County, serves a large amount of New Jersey. They are a part of the NJ Prohibition to end domestic violence and are a certified shelter within it. Therefore, they often will accept victims from other shelters that are also a part of this NJ Prohibition. Not only do they accept people from all over the state, but in extreme cases, they will even accept those from out of state that are seeking help.

JBWS offers a large amount of services for women such as: counseling, support groups, case

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management, and helping the victims meet their goals. They also provide an intervention program for the abusers; however, this is often a court ordered program and not many choose to come on their own accord. As a residential case manager, MMH has general case manager responsibilities. She must get consent for information to be taken or released, problem solve, and help clients with daily needs. During MMH's response, she explained to me that although there are specific tasks that need to be done, they also like to help clients with more personal issues such as buying them a train or bus ticket so they could go to a job interview. She said anything JBWS can do to ensure the clients success is a part of their mission. She also preforms other daily duties such as: ensuring the safety of the facility, ensuring the carpools are arriving to the lot safely, and going through client resolution within the facility, particularly with roommates.

There are many other services provided at JBWS as well. For example, they provide out and in agency referrals for clients, offer support and encouragement, and food security. They often tell clients to cut down on their grocery shopping because all the food they need is provided to them for free. JBWS receives food from Shoprite at an extremely reduced price which is where all the food is coming from. If clients need more help than what they will find at the facility, then their case managers will work with them to help them receive benefits such as SNAP and TANF.

As a case worker, MMH tells me that she works with about four or five clients on a one on one basis. However, she also has a case load of around three people. She is also available for anyone who wants to come and talk to her. Every client is assigned a case worker to them but sometimes clients will feel more comfortable talking to a different case worker just because they prefer someone else or they do not like their assigned one. The case worker is the one that the clients are mostly working with to help get them housing or jobs to get them back on their feet. However, if they need any psychological help, they have a primary worker, their therapist. Although when thinking of a victim of domestic violence, one would see a broken woman in need of help, MMH said it's not usually like that. She said, "they are just women who have found themselves in very unfortunate circumstances". Many of the women are strong and are extremely motivated to be able to support themselves. That doesn't go without saying that they do have moments where they show symptoms of PTSD and will blame themselves for the abuse, but the therapists work with them on these feelings and emotions. MMH said, "One of the most important things to do when helping these women is to help them find their strengths so they can move on from the situation. " During the interview, I also asked MMH about the skills she thought were necessary for this job. The first thing she mentioned was, "to be able to leave work at work". She explained that it is extremely important to leave things at the office because if you go home and are constantly thinking about alternate ways to help the clients, you will drive yourself crazy. She said that there is only so much that the agency can do for the women so stressing extra about it at home is not healthy and will lead to an early burnout. Other skills she mentioned were active listening, empathy, creative problem solving, safety planning,

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and having harsh boundaries for yourself. MMH elaborated, “Boundaries are so important because when you are so close to these clients you start to become a friend to them. Although that’s good, it’s important to remember that you are not be friends and that this is a ‘patient to client’ relationship.

JBWS can and has helped so many women overcome their domestic abuse, however, MMH explained that there are many obstacles that they run into as case workers. She said that for the most part, finances are difficult. This agency is completely non-profit and is funded mostly from fundraisers and grants, but they cannot just hand out money to the women who need it. They provide a multitude of services but at the end of the day, the women often do not have the time or money to do what is needed to do. The clients who come in are often working at jobs with many hours which makes it difficult to go to certain appointments that they need to or find additional services. It’s especially difficult if transportation is an issue for the client. This is what MMH likes the least about her job. She says, “I can only do what I do when I can do it.” She wishes that she were able to do more to help her clients but there is also a point where she needs to acknowledge that these are grown women and if she does everything for them then they will have trouble being self-sufficient when they leave JBWS.

Another thing MMH does not like about her job is that the program is only sixty days which often is not enough time. For most clients, the program can be extended to ninety days, but even then, it is too short. MMH explained, “It’s difficult to be able to fully help a client in such short amount of time. It’s especially difficult to find affordable housing so if a client can’t find a place to live in time then they’re homeless. We have a housing area that’s fairly affordable for after clients leave but it can only house a handful of families, and they can only live there for up to two years.” It’s difficult for victims because if they cannot live in one of the housing areas, then they are out of luck since Morristown’s homeless shelter has a waiting list. This can lead to a multitude of other social problems. It also makes it difficult for the women to heal because if they can’t find some place to live, they will often go back to their abusers.

One of MMH’s favorite things about her job is the women themselves. She said that the women who come in are very inspiring since they want to be better and back on their feet. “You often forget what happened to them because they are so strong and motivated,” MMH said when I asked her about why she liked the women. She sees how manipulative the abusers are and how badly it impacted the lives of the victims, yet they are still able to come in, ask for help, and move on with their life. One example she gave of the manipulation she has seen is that one woman had a temporary restraining order put against her abuser and it included their son in it. The woman’s son went to the same school that she worked at, so she was forced to take all her sick and vacation leave until the temporary restraining order was dropped.

After conducting the interview, I was definitely very interested in the type of work that MMH

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does. Working in domestic violence cases was never something I thought I would be interested in, but it was something I wanted to learn more about. Now that I have a better understanding of this area in social work, it is an area I would consider however I know that I would prefer to work with adolescents. JBWS serves a good amount of the community and is offering a large amount of services to help those in need. I think that it does a good job being accessible to the community, even despite its confidential location. However, I have come to realize how much finances come to be an issue in social work. By having a non-profit agency, it might be difficult to have enough funding to provide the best services and it could be difficult in helping the population of people that cannot afford to make the change they need in life. With the amount of need that is there, I know that the field is so important and I'm excited to be able to be a part of it all.

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