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## PROGRAM OPENS EYES TO GROWING PROBLEM

Amazed by the number of youths involved with abusive partners, a former Catholic-school teacher now reaches out to teens through a dating-violence program at Alternatives for Battered Women in Rochester.

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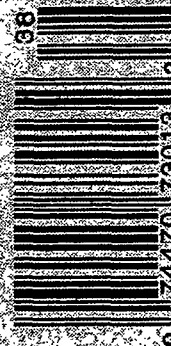


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY BABBETTE G. AUGUSTIN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**S**arah seemed to have it all. At the age of 20, she had a husband, a home and a beautiful new baby girl. She tried to be the perfect wife, and she had the black-and-blue marks to prove it. But Sarah's bruises hadn't come as a result of her domestic efforts — they were the stamp of her abusive husband.

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Kate had been married to a successful businessman for 26 years. The couple shared a beautiful home in Pittsford and enjoyed all the amenities of the good life. So what if her husband occasionally hit her? To Kate, that seemed a small price to pay for all she had received. But the reality of her life as an abused woman sunk in when her husband pushed her through a plate-glass window. Regaining consciousness in a pool of her own blood, Kate knew she needed help.

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Janet had decided to take her children and leave her husband for good. A drug addict, he had threatened to kill her several times because she refused to support his habit. She looked at the possessions in her small apartment, knowing she could only take along what she could carry on the bus out of town. As she picked up one of her children's teddy bears, Janet cried to herself, "Why do I have to be the one to go?"

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Sarah, Kate and Janet — and several other wom-

## A SEA OF VIOLENCE

en in this story — are real women whose names have been changed to protect their identities. Although their stories may seem extraordinary, such cases of domestic violence are far more common than most people realize.

In fact, domestic violence is the single major cause of injury to women in the United States, according to the New York State Department of Social Services in Albany. An estimated 3 to 4 million women are abused by their husbands or partners each year.

Statistics indicate that domestic violence has become a crime of epidemic proportion. Yet many people still find it hard to believe a man who professes love for his wife can inflict such excruciating physical and mental pain on her.

Battered women, however, know that pain all too well. Each year, more than 1 million women seek medical help for injuries caused by battering, according to the state DSS. In addition, injuries from domestic violence constitute 20 to 50 percent of all emergency-room visits in the United States.

Although the logical choice for an abused woman is to walk away from the situation, making that choice is rarely easy, Donna Ecker noted.

Ecker is co-director of Bethany House, a Catholic Worker house of hospitality that serves the needs of homeless women and their children. Her experience with battered wom-

en shows that abusive behavior by a husband or boyfriend may manifest itself in small ways before escalating into a serious problem.

"It is really important to realize that it usually doesn't start off by a woman being severely accosted," explained Ecker, who noted that the cycle of violence usually starts with verbal abuse.

The most frightening aspect of domestic violence, Ecker said, is that it knows no social, economic, racial or ethnic boundaries. Although most people associate abuse with poor, inner-city women, the startling fact is that domestic violence is just as prevalent among wealthy suburban families, she said.

And in many of those households, it is Catholic  
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BY BARBARA ANN HOMICK