

Tier program assists single moms

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

MONTOUR FALLS — Jackie Fish recently ended an abusive relationship. Now she's determined to get on with her life by confronting the circumstances that led to the abuse.

By attending a new program, Women's Outreach to Women, Fish discovered that many other single mothers, as well, have painful stories to share of beatings and other mistreatment.

"Pretty much every girl who has come here has said stuff like that," said Fish, 20, as she straddled her smiling 4-year-old son, Shawn, on her shoulders.

Women's Outreach to Women — also known as WOW — was begun last October as a project of Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier. The program operates out of Catholic Charities' First Step office, which offers crisis counseling for abused women.

WOW caters to single mothers throughout Schuyler County by offering a variety of services provided through volunteers. These aides are mothers who have received mentor training.

"Older women mentor younger women, especially single mothers in abusive relationships who have very little family support," said Sarah Conley, a victim services counselor with First Step. "We, as women, can care for them like extended family."

Many of the women who come to WOW have been beaten and/or sexually abused by the fathers of their children, Conley said.

She noted that WOW helps participants develop such living skills as cooking; proper nutrition; money management; social communication at home and on the job; career goals; and adapting to the work environment.

Conley added that because of the neglect they've suffered, several mothers have never had the motivation or opportunity to hone such skills.

"They might sit home all day, smoke cigarettes and watch TV — and fight," Conley said.

Another focal part of the WOW program is the opportunity for participants to gather weekly and discuss their feelings on such issues as relationships; love; suffering; anger; forgiveness; and empower-



Chantelle Zavala decorates Easter baskets during a Women's Outreach to Women meeting Feb. 26, at the First Step crisis counseling offices in Montour Falls. The baskets were created during the previous week's meeting.

Greg Francis/Staff photographer

ment.

"It's wounded hearts coming together," said Marion Zavala, program coordinator.

Fish noted that WOW mentors guided her toward keeping her anger under control.

"Instead of me exploding, I would write my feelings down on a piece of paper and talk about it later that day," Fish said.

Conley said that participants appeared anxious to discuss such issues once they sensed they were in a caring environment.

"We're just scratching the surface of topics they want to talk about," she said.

Fish acknowledged that she looks forward to the weekly meetings.

"It's a way of getting out of the house," said Fish, who, along with Shawn, lives with her mother. Fish added that with WOW's guidance, she hopes to attend college.

Conley noted that she plans to expand the WOW program by recruiting volunteer mothers who can offer phone sup-



Brenda Gertzen, left, a mentor, looks up the dictionary definition of "forgiveness" with Kendra Kimler.

port to participants.

"They don't have anyone to call when the baby's sick, or they're lonely," Conley explained.

Zavala remarked that such programs as WOW are vital for frightened mothers who feel they cannot easily escape their abusive situations.

"It helps so much when you feel you have a safe place to go to, and somebody's not going around behind your back," Zavala said.

Diocese releases new pastoral assignments

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has announced the following appointments, effective June 23:

Father Louis Vasile from pastor, Church of the Resurrection, Perinton, to pastor, St. Alphonius Church, Auburn.

Father James Lawlor from sabbatical to pastor, St. Catherine of Siena Church,

Mendon.

Father Foster Rogers from pastor, St. Alphonius Church, Auburn, to administrator, St. Pius X Church, Chili.

Father Charlie Manning from pastor, St. Pius V Church, Cohocton, and Sacred Heart of Jesus Church, Perkinsville, to administrator, Holy Name of Jesus Parish,

Greece.

Father Robert O'Neill from pastor, Church of the Annunciation, Rochester, to administrator, St. Christopher Church, Chili.

Father Peter Bayer from pastor, St. Margaret Mary Church, Rochester, to pastoral care director, St. Ann's Home, Irondequoit.

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Note to readers

This week, the Diocese of Rochester expresses its gratitude to the people of the diocese for their support of the 1997-98 Thanks Giving Appeal, which garnered a record \$5 million in pledges.

The TGA is the primary fundraising mechanism for all diocesan activities, so it is not unusual for any given issue of the *Catholic Courier* to report news about TGA-funded programs and/or events. We have made a special effort to point out the TGA connection in several of this week's stories, however, as a means of emphasizing the appeal's importance in diocesan life.

Catholic Charities taps new Auburn manager

Donald Lawler, a certified social worker with Cayuga County for 34 years, is the new coordinator for the Cayuga County Catholic Charities office. The office moved to 33 William St., Suite 3, Auburn, Jan. 27.

Lawler had retired last fall from the county. "But this came along and fit right in beautifully," he said.

The work is an opportunity to continue advocating for children and families, he said. For 24 years he had been supervisor for Child Protective Services of Cayuga County.

"It was always the chance to be in the right place at the right time, and make a difference," he said of his career.

Catholic Charities programs include single parenting services, older worker employment services, counseling services, parenting education and parish social ministry education.

The Auburn office, first opened in 1983, is affiliated with the TGA-supported Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes (which changed its name from Finger Lakes Social Ministry Jan. 1.)

Jane Sorensen, CSWR, had served as coordinator since last fall, after concentrating on program development. She continues offering counseling services on contract with the agency and is in private practice.

In announcing Lawler's hiring, Giovina Caroscio, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes, stated, "He brings a lifetime of professional experience and a demonstrated commitment to the Cayuga County community."

Lawler also teaches sociology and aging courses at Cayuga Community College, and has maintained a private practice for counseling families. He and his wife of 41 years, Joanne, are members of Sacred Heart Church, and have four grown children.

The office number is 315/252-0018.

—Kathleen Schwarz

Charities office relocates

Catholic Charities of the Southern Tier is relocating its Elmira office. The office, formerly on College Avenue, closed for the move March 23-27, and planned to open at its new site Monday, March 30.

The new address is 215 E. Church St., Elmira, NY 14901. The phone number remains 607/734-9784.

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