

Women have new place to turn

By DONNA LANE KAUDER
STAFF WRITER

WEST MILFORD — A new "family" has moved into the township.

Founded by Save Our Sisters, the Battered Women's Shelter is the only haven for victims of domestic violence and abuse in upper Passaic County.

Located at an undisclosed spot in the township, the shelter opened early this year to assist homeless and battered women in crisis.

Director of SOS and founder of the shelter Sandra Ramos, recognized the need to offer services to women of this area about two years ago. At that time, she opened her first shelter in the Haskell section of Wanaque. Later, SOS moved to Bloomingdale, but the building was too small and costly. So, Ramos came to the township and applied for grant money to place a downpayment on a building and some property.

About 40 women are served by SOS, a group of about 25 volunteers. Aside from victims of battering, rape and molestation, the shelter also assists women without homes.

Last week, Ramos gathered together her volunteers, women and children assisted by the shelter and

several interested community leaders and members from the township and held an old-fashioned open house, to acquaint people with the shelter.

The day officially began with the poetry in motion of afro-percussionist Edwina Lee Tyler, who beat her drum in time to a Langston Hughes piece and encouraged all those in attendance to join in a traditional African welcome song.

Tyler uses her drum as a healing instrument and instructs women at the shelter to use the drum therapeutically.

Following Tyler, minister and Chairwoman of the SOS board Ann Benedetto offered an opening prayer. Benedetto said the grass roots organization has always extended a helping hand for people in need and empowered woman to make the world a better place.

"The shelter is a safe haven and a warm community for everyone who comes here," Benedetto said.

Representatives from the Passaic County Prosecutor's Office, social workers, a Lioness Club member, house mothers and several women living at the shelter took turns talking about themselves and the special place the shelter occupies in the township.

As always, the need for more

volunteers was stressed and community support is still a primary concern, Ramos said.

Audie Gammon represented the West Milford Lioness Club and said she was "very impressed" by the shelter and felt it was a "marvelous environment for the children." Gammon said her organization has listed the shelter as one of their priority projects for 1991.

So far, the Lioness Club has donated clothes, toys, toiletries, a crock pot, a television and a small dinette set to the shelter.

Gammon, also a member of Riverdale's Town and Country Motorcycle Club, said the club chose the shelter as their work project for Earth Day. The club cut, cleared brush and rototilled a 20-foot by 20-foot plot of land at the shelter for use as a vegetable and fruit garden. The garden has helped to teach gardening skills to the women and children at the shelter and is already producing fresh vegetables and fruits.

If interested in serving as a volunteer at the shelter, SOS is in desperate need of electricians, carpenters and plumbers or any type of assistance.

Ramos can be contacted at 2 Ellen St., Ringwood, 07456.

WM Argus - 6/23/91