

Article for the North Vernon Plain Dealer and Sun by Jeanie Hahn, Karmin Koelmel and Katrina Coryell

Statistics say that in the United States of America one out of every 7 households experiences Domestic Violence. Behind locked doors in our own county terrible secrets are hidden. Family members are kept in terror by a controlling and abusive spouse or partner. Picture this following scenario: A woman and her 3 children, 2 dogs and a cat in a carrier pull up in front of an office in our county. The woman has black eyes, no money, and is crying. Her children are also crying, hot, hungry and tired. They have had little sleep for the past 3 nights due to the fighting and screaming going on in their house. The woman comes into the Jennings County Council on Domestic Violence feeling defeated, helpless and hopeless. She desperately needs help. Our staff goes to work getting her medical care, food clothes and a place to stay. Unfortunately, there is no place in this county to shelter her or the children. Family tragedies like this happen all too often in our community.

This is all about to change for the better. An agreement has been signed between the Jennings Villas Board of Directors and the Jennings County Council on Domestic Violence Board of Directors stating that the Council on Domestic Violence will move into the Villas and begin the process of making the facilities into a domestic violence shelter for women and children.

The Council on Domestic Violence is depending on the generosity of community members, churches, civic clubs, and local industry to donate the necessary funds to help make the Villas a safe place where any victim of family violence can come to work on solutions to getting free from a violent or abusive partner.

The need for Jennings County Council on Domestic Violence's services is evident when assessing the facts. So far in 2012, JCCDV has served 256 victims. Additionally, up to this point, there have been 238 calls to 911 in relation to domestic violence. With the opening of a new shelter, opens the opportunity to help in an even greater way. The new shelter facility known as The Villas is located adjacent to St. Vincent Jennings Hospital property and has a state of the art security system on every window and door. The shelter will have at least 17 beds, which have been donated by MUTC and members of the community. JCCDV is already receiving much community support and volunteers. With the opening of The Villas comes the opportunity to help survivors remain in their hometown surrounded by the support of family and friends. Furthermore, JCCDV will have the opportunity to implement more one-on-one and in-

The community partnerships Jennings County Council on Domestic Violence has built and continues to maintain have facilitated an opportunity for JCCDV to open a shelter for battered women and their children. Jennings County has a great need for such a facility because many times survivors leave an abusive relationship only to have to travel out of county and away from their support systems to an unfamiliar shelter in another county where they do not stay, but return to Jennings County. Staff then has to

scramble to find safe houses and hotel rooms for them. This situation ups the lethality risks and is not a good solution.

Along with providing a safe place, JCCDV will continue to offer its other services to survivors. Staff advocates for their survivors, assisting them in securing their rights and working towards independence. This support can range from helping clients find jobs to assisting in legal advocacy, referring to the filing of protection orders, abuse petitions and injunctions. Survivors can be provided with emergency financial assistance and outreach materials. JCCDV offers crisis counseling, providing emotional support and guidance. Staff is always available to listen and offer assistance, including providing information and referrals to available resources. JCCDV also serves Jennings County through community education. Staff presents at businesses and schools, raising awareness of domestic violence, providing warning signs and making the depth case management to help survivors become safely independent. At least two full-time staff positions will be added to the current JCCDV staff.

Please help us as we begin this new endeavor to break the cycle of generational abuse that exists in our home county.