

March is Women's History Month

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The History of the Battered Women's Movement and how it relates to Women's History Month 2019

For many years, women were viewed as the weaker sex, both mentally and physically. During the earlier part of the twentieth century men basically had the right to assault their wives as a way to "keep them in line." It wasn't until 1871 that the United States began to see domestic violence as a crime. This was a move in the right direction but justice wasn't always served because court decisions were reversed, abuse overlooked, and there was still a system that maintained domestic violence was private matter to be dealt with at home.

It was not until the 1970s that shelter services were offered to victims of abuse. As a way to help those escaping violence, some advocates began bringing women into their own homes to provide safe shelter. Women's advocates opened one of the country's first documented shelters for battered women in 1974. By the end of the 1970s, there were approximately 250 shelters for abused women; today there are several thousand domestic violence organizations in the US with many offering shelter.

In 1977, the country's first protocol for hospitals to recognize and treat abused women was created. It was successfully implemented that same year by nurses in a Boston hospital. Today, we continue efforts to recognize domestic violence as a health issue.

The inception of the Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs (DAIP) in 1980 was integral to the development of coordinated response programs. The group's focus was to reform laws and provide victims of abuse with ways to report and foster safety. Often referred to as The Duluth Model, the Coordinated Community Response plan employed by DAIP setup policies for each agency, tracking entities, and an interactive approach between the agencies to improve response to domestic violence. They also developed the Power and Control Wheel that many domestic violence organizations use today. The Duluth Model is an ever evolving way of thinking about how a community works together to end domestic violence.

With the leadership of then Senator Biden, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was passed in 1994. This focused on improving community response and effectiveness of the legal system for victims of abuse with further protections added in 2000, 2005, and 2013 and continue to be added. This seminal legislation offered critical support to law enforcement, providers, victims, and the community.

Here we are – March 2019 – Women's History Month. The theme is "Visionary Women: Champions of Peace & Nonviolence." The theme honors "women who have led efforts to end war, violence, and injustice and pioneered the use of nonviolence to change society." This theme resonates while reading through the history of the battered women's movement. We can all be champions of Peace & Nonviolence like those before us.