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**ENDING THE DISCONNECT:
New Initiative Hopes to Make Victims of Domestic Violence Safer Through Collaboration**

SCHAUMBURG, IL – In the last year, north suburban police responded to nearly 6,000 domestic violence related calls for service, an average of 16 calls per day. How officers respond to these calls is critical to the safety and survival of victims in these incidents. Although many police departments in the area have protocols for responding to domestic violence calls, the actual response depends on the judgment of the beat officers that arrive at the scene. How educated these officers are about services available in their area is an important component of this response. The current lack of knowledge paired with some disagreement on confidentiality issues between domestic violence agencies and police departments has left agency and police work disconnected. Women In Need Growing Stronger (WINGS) and Northwest suburban police departments are working together to end this disconnect with the WINGS Police Beat Officer Initiative.

The Beat Officer Initiative actually began with police social workers who often define the training curriculum for beat officers. "WINGS has had a relationship with area police social workers for a number of years," according to Director of Clinical Services Amy Kingan. The social worker offers assessment, referral and short term counseling services to area residents who are referred by the Police. Domestic Violence victims and offenders are often referred to the social worker who then facilitates referrals to other agencies (like WINGS) or provides counseling services at the department. The relationship with the police social worker was critical to solidifying the partnership with the beat officers.

At first, you might think that WINGS would have approached the police but according to Amy, it was just the opposite. "We had been doing some spot training/education with the officers...we gave them tours of our Safe House Emergency Shelter and tried to speak with them that way." In January of 2008, Amy received a request for seven beat officer education sessions from Melina Dominguez, a police social worker at the Palatine police department. Although area police had been supporters of the organization in the past, this was the first attempt at something structured and long term.

Clinical Services staff jumped at the opportunity and prepared a session that would be repeated for each of the 7 beats at Palatine. "We talk about WINGS services and introduce them to WINGS as a referral source," Kingan says. "Some of the officers don't know that we have a Safe House in their area...after we leave they are more knowledgeable about the services available in the North and Northwest suburbs." says Patti Krivo, WINGS Manager of Interns and Outreach Services.

As compared to officer education through the Safe House tour, both women commented that the Beat Officer Initiative is allowing them the opportunity to reach more officers and "humanize" the organization so that officers have an easy referral source when responding to a domestic violence call. WINGS hopes to expand the training to include beat officer education sessions in Rolling Meadows, Schaumburg, Arlington Heights, and other departments in the North and Northwest Suburbs.

A well-staffed agency that works to prevent domestic violence is often a police officer's best resource. If the domestic violence perpetrator has been arrested, or has driven off and is missing, the shell-shocked family members need a safe place to go, and the police do not have those resources. But the agency does. Family members, badly upset, need help and counseling, but the police officer is needed to respond to another call. Agency members, experts in domestic violence, can fill the need. Most significant, if the victims request it, the agency members can work with the police and the courts to stop the violence, stop the repeated calls, stop the drain on the police department, and stop the emotional suffering.

WINGS offers transitional housing, emergency shelter, and outreach services. The Safe House, a 15,000 square foot facility opened in January of 2005, has already helped over 700 individuals flee from domestic violence. The facility can

house up to 45 clients each night and provides medical, legal, and financial advocacy as well as therapeutic counseling and access to housing and other resources. In addition to the Safe House the agency has 25 apartments and homes located in Chicago, Chicago's north and northwest suburban Cook County and portions of Lake County in Barrington. In all, WINGS provided 32,906 nights of shelter for clients last year. For more information visit www.wingsprogram.com.

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