

Springs to get wife-abuse agency

Saying wife abuse is an escalating crisis in El Paso County, Dist. Atty. Robert Russel Thursday called for support of an agency to counsel battered wives.

Russel told reporters at a morning press conference that a new agency called Battered Women Services will be formed this month.

The agency will be staffed by two fulltime directors who will be funded by a CETA grant.

Although the total amount needed to keep the agency afloat is unknown, Russel said financial assistance is imperative.

"One of the largest problems in this community is wife abuse," Russel said. "There were an estimated 8,200 cases of beatings reported to the police department last year.

Family disturbance is a problem of major proportions," he added.

Russel said 367 women last year filed assault complaints with the district attorney's office "and that's just the tip of the iceberg."

Russel's call for funding was echoed by the agency's director, Sharon Briggs.

"The CETA grant runs out May 1 (1978) and fund raising is essential," she said. "We're going to need a lot of money."

Ms. Briggs said she would concentrate on private funding for the agency.

She said the agency will provide alternatives for women whose husbands beat them. They will include family counseling, referral to other agencies and temporary shelter.

"The problem of violence in the home is very detrimental to the family. We would like to provide a safe house where a woman could go with her children."

Russel said "putting husbands in jail won't solve the problem. He said the courts must have alternatives to locking up a husband."

"I need a lot of alternatives," he said.

"Some women file charges and then go back home. This only accelerates the problem."

Russel said the typical battered wife calls the police, files a complaint against her husband but drops all charges when she gets in court.

In court, he explained, she realizes she has nowhere else to go but home.

"To continue prosecution without alternatives is useless," he said.

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Battered Women Need Aid: DA

By JIM GIBNEY

Special to The Denver Post

COLORADO SPRINGS — Dist. Atty. Bob Russel has called for community support for Battered Women Services, a group recently formed to offer temporary shelter and counseling for abused wives and their children.

Russel said the problem is a national one and has been going on almost unnoticed, particularly in larger cities.

Police records here, Russel said, show officers responded to 3,192 family disturbances last year, the majority of them involving abused wives.

In 1976, the district attorney said, 367 women signed abuse complaints, with only a few of the husbands being prosecuted.

"We've put a few husbands in jail," Russel said at a press conference last week, "but the majority of wives come to my office after their husbands have been arrested and say they have no place to go and want the charges dropped by my office and the court."

RUSSEL SAID DECISION CHANGES usually are the result of threats or "sweet talk" from the husbands.

The district attorney said he needs "a lot of alternatives" for solving problems of abuse to wives and children.

"Unless we do something," he noted, "women will get killed, children get abused and run away from home, all because of this heavy volume of crime."

He pointed out that a recent murder-suicide in El Paso County apparently resulted from wife battering.

Sharon Briggs, director of Battered Women Services, said her organization is being aided by the Pikes Peak Mental Health and Family Counseling Center and by Suicide-Rape Crisis Service volunteers.

Briggs said there are indications that in families where wives are beaten there is a 50 per cent chance children will also be physically abused.

Battered Women's Service, she said, is offering a "safe house" for women and their children until the family situation can be solved.

The organization has offices at 12 N. Meade Ave. in east Colorado Springs. Its office phone is 633-4601, and its crisis number is 471-HELP.