

The Telegraph

Land of Lincoln helps families break cycle | January 30, 2002

Editor's Note: The United Way provides consistent funding in a vast network of health and human service agencies in our communities that are in place to help people financially, emotionally or physically. The following is one of the many much-needed programs funded by the United Way contributions.

ALTON – Domestic violence may end in death because of the risks associated with it, says Joan Spiegel, directing attorney for Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation, Inc.

“These cases are considered an emergency and a priority for us,” Spiegel said. “We have had clients who died.”

Spiegel, who has been with Land of Lincoln for almost 20 years, said she and her staff are often shocked by the severe, irrational violence their clients are confronted with. “One of our clients suffered from leukemia, and her husband refused to pay her medical bills or provide transportation for her treatments,” she added. “Another woman required extensive reconstructive surgery on her face after her husband beat her for being late for breakfast. You would think we would get jaded and callous, but the situations continue to shock us.”

The Alton Land of Lincoln office is one of eight branches throughout a 65-county service area in Southern Illinois. Clients live at or below poverty level, and Land of Lincoln can provide them civil justice in six specific areas: housing; consumer law; public benefits and health law; community economic development; elder law and disability right; and family law.

Spiegel said efforts from the Alton office to reach domestic violence victims in the rural areas of Madison, Macoupin, Greene, Jersey and Calhoun counties are paying off.

“The United Way funding supports a paralegal in our office who helps with community outreach and education. Court personnel and law enforcement officials are more familiar with us now because of our outreach efforts, and we’re getting more direct referrals from them,” Spiegel explained.

Paralegal Deborah Kahl or another Land of Lincoln staff member attends domestic violence coordinating councils in Madison, Greene, Macoupin and Jersey counties, which further helps their agency to link up with the social service networks available in each community. As more people become aware of Land of Lincoln services, more families are being helped, she said.

“When families are poor, the abuser will use the children to control their spouse,” Spiegel said. “Victims are fearful of losing their children, but having an attorney reassures them and gives the victim the extra push they need to move beyond the abusive relationship.”

She cites statistics that in an abusive relationship, the victim goes back to the abuser on average seven times before leaving.

For more information about Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation Inc., call 462-0029.

Those interested in supporting the Project Reach Out, or any of the programs funded by the United Way, may send donations to: United Way, PO Box 70, Alton, IL 62002, or call 462-1234, Ext. 15.