

FLINT WOMEN'S PRESS

Volume I, Number 1

Flint, Michigan

August 1979

When will battered women's shelter open in Flint?

Each night, a number of women in Flint are beaten up by their husbands and boyfriends. Some are bruised, others are cut-up, occasionally some are killed. The vast majority, though, have been beaten up before and will be beaten up again. They've grown accustomed to this nightly or weekly act of violence and will continue to put up with such treatment. If they decide one night that they've had enough and want to seek some safe shelter until they can put their life back together, they will have no place to turn to in Flint.

For three years, a group of Flint women have talked about opening a battered women's shelter. Committee's were formed, meetings were held. Much time was spent on trying to obtain funding from traditional, male-dominated sources—the Mott Foundation, Flint City Council, Genesee County Board of Commissioners. The group had no luck.

Little time was spent on organizing women and other grass-roots support. Division within the group led to the YWCA finally taking over the battered women's shelter project.

That was close to a year ago, and still Flint has no shelter. In the past four months the YWCA has secured over \$100,000 in grants, obtained a house and has hired three full-time people. Yet, with all of this, still no shelter.

When the Flint Voice spoke out against this mismanaged mess in February, the YWCA promised the shelter would be open in the spring. Then they said it would definitely be April 1. Then it was May 1. Then June 1. They July. Current reports have placed it closer to September 10 while others are saying it will be opened later in the fall.

So what are they doing with this vacant house, \$100,000 and three full-time people?

Well, first of all, they claim \$100,000 isn't enough. The house, though quite small for a shelter, is still being readied. The paid staff are not counselors—they're "resource developers."

And all during this time, battered women in Flint still have no place to



go.

Well, not exactly. It seems that all of the social service agencies and the Everywoman's Center (which is a program of the YWCA) has been sending women up to the "Underground Railroad" in Saginaw for housing.

The Flint Women's Press decided to check into why this was happening. What we discovered was a battered women's shelter that has been providing excellent services to women since 1977 only 30 miles up the road. The Underground Railroad has never received a visit from the Flint shelter group.

In almost every respect, the Underground Railroad has succeeded exactly where the Flint shelter has failed. It took just thirteen months from the time the idea was conceived until the doors of the Underground Railroad opened. They, too, had originally tried to get funding from traditional sources but, when they saw

what they were up against, organized a massive grass-roots effort to make the shelter a reality. Spaghetti dinners, door-to-door fundraising and appeals to inner-city churches got them off the ground. One of the churches donated the house and renovated it for free.

On December 27, 1977, with no funding, no paid staff and only \$2000 in the bank, the Underground Railroad opened its doors. Fifteen dedicated volunteers were the people who staffed the house.

Soon, the shelter was full. As the community began to see the work they were doing, more donations were made. CETA called them and asked if they would like some employees. A walk-a-thon raised over \$11,000. A grant from a newly created state fund was awarded them. A community development block grant came through and they were able to buy a second house. All of this in a little over a year's time.

In the meantime, the Everywoman's Center in Flint was busy sending Flint area women up to Saginaw instead of putting their own shelter into effect. Nearly 20% of the women at the Underground Railroad are from Flint. At times, every single resident of the shelter has come from the Flint area.

The Underground Railroad is now

considering a new policy to accept only women from Saginaw County, hopefully to force the YWCA to act immediately in opening their shelter and stop dumping "clients" in Saginaw.

"If they have \$100,000, they should have a shelter," commented one of the staff at the Underground Railroad.

"The women of Flint should apply some pressure and get that shelter open."

The people connected with the Flint shelter were reluctant to speak with us and we were referred to four different persons before we could get some vague answers.

We were told that the Flint shelter could not open unless it received another \$15,000 for renovation work (it wasn't clear why the necessary renovation was placed last on the list of priorities). The spokesperson from the YWCA claimed that most shelters that don't take a good three years to develop before they open will soon collapse and close up. When asked, though, about the success of the Underground Railroad in Saginaw, the spokesperson commented, "Well, Flint women certainly couldn't survive without it!"

She said she hoped the Flint shelter would be open in the fall. □

Our first issue

Welcome to the first issue of the Flint Women's Press.

We have felt for some time that Flint women needed a forum to communicate their thoughts and feelings to each other. Little chance is offered in Flint for women to grow and realize their true potential.

We hope that the Flint Women's Press can aid in that effort.

We also recognize that the media in this town is a male-dominated business with a token woman here and there. Issues important to women are often ignored as attention is focused on male power struggles (Carter vs. Kennedy), and sports.

Television and radio have created poor stereotypes of women that our

young children are looking to as models. We must offer an alternative to the Charlie's Angel media image of women.

If the Flint Women's Press is to succeed, we will need your support and participation. We intend to publish quarterly so if you would like to work on the next issue give us a call at 742-1230. We are open to suggestions and encourage you to get involved in Flint's first feminist newspaper.

∞ Cynthia Halboth, Veronica Moore, Carol Banfield, Barb Liske, Patrice Warner-Isaac, Doris Suci, Chris Conquest, Deb McCormick and others.