

Michigan's SAFE protects, helps abused women

By F. Carlton Peoples
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According to a U.S. Department of Justice study, nearly 25 percent of surveyed women said they were either raped or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, cohabitating partner or date at sometime in their lifetime.

According to these estimates, approximately 1.5 million women annually were victims of either rape or

physical assault by an intimate partner.

From October 2003 to September 2004, domestic violence programs in Michigan received 55,208 crisis calls, an average of 151 calls per day.

A call that could just have easily come from a close relative, friend or co-worker suffering the vicious cycle of domestic violence and abuse.

These alarming statistics are just one of the reasons or-

ganizations like SAFE (Sisters Acquiring Financial Empowerment) were created to help ill-treated and abused women.

Kalyn Risker, a survivor of domestic violence, is founder and executive director of SAFE.

Risker suffered six years before finally being able to get out of a verbally and physically abusive relationship.

"I don't feel I was really

brave because of how I got out — I got out when I was taken to the emergency room," Risker said of an incident of abuse that landed her in the ER.

After sustaining multiple injuries including two black eyes, a pinched nerve and an orbital fracture requiring major emergency surgery in 1998, she decided she'd had enough: "I had to have reconstructive surgery and a titanium implant." Risker decided that the incident would be the last time she would suffer at the hands of her abuser.

She took her situation as an opportunity to rebuild herself mentally and financially, enrolling at Davenport University and earning a bachelor's with a human resource administration specialty.

As a human resource manager, she met with other women who were victims of

domestic violence.

"That is when I came up with the idea for SAFE. It's different from other programs for survivors of domestic violence because it is specifically designed to break the cycle of economic abuse," she said.

Beginning May 2006, SAFE officially began providing services in the greater metropolitan Detroit area. The training that SAFE provides free of charge to participants addresses the need for survivors to gain employment, economic empowerment and financial independence, because many have either relied on the abuser to provide for them financially or the abuser has attempted to impede their financial situation.

"All of our services are provided by individuals who are professionals within their field," Risker said, adding that the importance of such a

program is paramount and increases the likelihood that a survivor will continue to survive on her own.

"At SAFE, we don't pass judgment" she noted.

Participants are trained in how to build a résumé, financial planning and networking skills, as well as how to stay safe when seeking employment because an abuser may try to prevent the victim from seeking employment by starting an argument, fighting or creating a situation where the victim is forced to be late or even miss an interview.

Programs such as SAFE allow women to be empowered beyond abuse and toward healing.

SAFE can be contacted at 800-757-4919 or e-mail safe_start@yahoo.com.

Listen to the SAFE's Internet radio talk show at www.blogtalkradio.com/SAFE.

Atlanta hospital faces tough deficit—\$55 million in hole

ATLANTA (AP) - For generations, Grady Memorial Hospital has treated the poorest of the poor, victims of stabbings and shootings, and motorists grievously injured in Atlanta's murderous rush-hour traffic.

Now, Grady itself is in grave condition.

Staggering under a deficit projected at \$55 million, the city's only public hospital could close soon, leaving Atlanta without a major trauma center and foisting thousands of poor people onto emergency rooms at other hospitals for their routine medical care.

"I don't have the words to describe the onslaught of healthcare needs that will hit the region if Grady were to close," said Dr. Katherine Heilpern, chief of emergency medicine at the Emory University medical school, which uses Grady as a teaching hospital and supplies many of its physicians.

"This is a huge deal. We may literally have people's lives at stake if the Grady Health System fails and spirals down into financial insolvency."

Grady Memorial Hospital's board of trustees unanimously agreed recently to establish a nonprofit governing board intended to attract \$300 million in immediate and long-term funding from the city's business, philanthropic and government communities, as well as from the state.

Dozens of activists, doctors, clergy members, lawmakers and citizens packed an auditorium across from Grady and demanded to be heard before the board voted.

"Y'all ought to be ready to stay here all night," said state Sen. Vincent Fort, who was involved in a scuffle with hospital security guards shortly before the meeting.

"The fight ain't over. If some of us have to go to jail, so be it."

Founded in 1892, Grady has struggled financially for years. But now it has reached a crisis because of rising healthcare costs, dwindling government aid, a lack of paying customers and years of neglect — a situation not uncommon among urban hospitals like Grady that primarily serve the needy.

Other public hospitals that have been in distress in recent years include D.C. General Hospital in Washington, which in 2001 stopped taking inpatients, and Martin Luther King Jr.-Charles Drew Hospital, which was built in Los Angeles after the 1965 Watts riots. The hospital lost its government accreditation last summer because of shoddy care and closed its trauma center.

The loss of Grady would be unconscionable to many political and civic leaders in this booming metropolitan area of 5 million people. The overwhelming majority of the 900,000 patients treated at Grady each year are poor and Black, and the institution is considered a vital part of Atlanta's Black community.

But some fear that after the switch to a nonprofit governing board the hospital will be less committed to the poor, and that the board will go from mostly Black to mostly White. Grady has been run by a governing board whose members are appointed by politicians in Fulton and DeKalb counties.

Fort, a Black Democrat from Atlanta, said earlier that Grady is "absolutely critical" to the city's Black poor. And he charged that Atlanta's "White power structure" — including the business leaders and politicians that are pushing for the nonprofit board — is trying to orches-

trate a takeover.

"To the extent that you have African-American doctors, nurses and other professionals operating a big-city hospital and taking care of Black people, that is a source of pride in the Black community," Fort said

Your Horoscope Says... January 17-23

ARIES

Drive the speed limit this week or you could wind up with a ticket. Why rush? Serenity is available if you only stop and listen for it inside of you. Discharge your usual obligations with dignity, and count your blessings.

Soul Affirmation: I am guided by the joy within.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 13, 49

TAURUS

Justice is on your mind again this week. This may be, in a cosmic sense, or you may still be speeding along trying to get a ticket. Slow down and relax your brain energies! The Universe knows how to take care of itself and of you. Trust!

Soul Affirmation: Distant love is sometimes sweeter.

Lucky Numbers: 8, 11, 18

GEMINI

No need for rowdiness, wild ones. You can make your point without waving your hands and arms about wildly. Speak your wisdom softly, gently this week, so that others can hear it and benefit.

Soul Affirmation: I face each week with a smile, and the week smiles back at me.

Lucky Numbers: 22, 27, 31

CANCER

Things speed up again this week, and you are in a highly creative mood.

An outspoken female in your circle may illuminate a thorny question for you. You'll be surprised and pleased by what you hear.

Soul Affirmation: I look for the good in all that comes to me this week.

Lucky Numbers: 25, 33, 36

LEO

One of your most unique gifts is the power to change your mind. You

know how to change the way you think, and it gives you great personal magnetism. This week, you may be called upon to change the way you think about a person close to you. Do it!

Soul Affirmation: Friendships are shock absorbers on the bumpy roads of life.

Lucky Numbers: 10, 14, 20

VIRGO

Focus intently on the personal this week. Others may seem scattered or impersonal, but it's not about you. Keep your thoughts and feelings to yourself until others are more receptive to your good vibrations.

Soul Affirmation: I master fear by knowing that all is well.

Lucky Numbers: 23, 24, 39

LIBRA

A personal decision is made, and you are happy for the person who makes it. This person may be younger than you, but you've got a karmic bond between you. Enjoy the excitement of moment, and know that faith is being kept by your very actions.

Soul Affirmation: This week, I forgive myself for everything that has happened.

Lucky Numbers: 3, 4, 7

SCORPIO

Hidden resentments could surface and you'll want to be able to gracefully back away from arguments this week. Appreciate the good vibrations and ignore the negative. You'll be doing the Universe's work.

Soul Affirmation: What I've been waiting for has been here all along.

Lucky Numbers: 15, 16, 21

SAGITTARIUS

Charming, simply charming is what you are this week! Use your sparkle to set a few dreams in motion by meeting with those who can help you move for-

ward. Wow! Have you got it going on! Keep your spontaneous side in check this week.

Soul Affirmation: I know that enjoyment is a state of mind this week.

Lucky Numbers: 9, 42, 51

CAPRICORN

Think things through before you act. Concentrate on small details. They will make the difference between success and failure in your endeavors this week. Don't go for the gusto just yet, your ideas need to be massaged a bit more before you present them openly. Call that special someone who has been on your mind.

Soul Affirmation: True friendship is a mirror into which I look to see the beauty of my inner self.

Lucky Numbers: 2, 17, 41

AQUARIUS

Your financial constraints will soon come to an end. Meanwhile, make a game of spending less. See how long you can go without letting lose a dime, and you will be in a better position to make decisions about bigger ticket items soon. Start thinking about where you would like to take a short excursion.

Soul Affirmation: I paint my world in colors of the rainbow.

Lucky Numbers: 12, 19, 32

PISCES

For the past two weeks, you have been playing it safe. Now you can live on the edge a little. Luck is back with you again. You'll be aware of love prospects lingering around you. You'll see that your career is full of bright possibilities. Now is a good time to take a chance.

Soul Affirmation: Self-confidence is the key to my success this week.

Lucky Numbers: 30, 40, 53