

Voices of Women Organizing Project
Battered Women's Resource Center
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Battered Women's Experiences with the EAU
(The Emergency Assistance Unit of the Dept. of Homeless Services)

Since 1998, the NYC homeless population has increased by nearly 62% to an all time high of over 38,000 adults and children. A total of 9,249 families, including more than 16,500 children, are currently sheltered in city facilities. Approximately 21% of homeless families and 25% of single homeless women are homeless due to domestic violence.

The City's domestic violence hotline (run by Safe Horizon) received over 12,000 requests for shelter last year. Only 560 families can be housed in domestic violence shelters (1780 beds in 35 shelters specifically for battered women and their children).

Battered women, like other homeless people, must go to the EAU when there is no d.v. shelter beds available. Having only one location for screening shelter applicants puts battered women in danger, as abusive partners can easily find them. Moreover, EAU conditions are so terrible as to encourage domestic violence victims to return to their batterers rather than subject themselves and their children to the abusive conditions in the EAU.

WOMEN WHO ARE FLEEING ABUSE NEED SUPPORT AND SAFETY. A system that meets the needs of battered women & their children must include:

- An Emergency Assistance Unit (EAU) in each borough and the option to choose the office location that is safest for them;
- Immediate screening for domestic violence and referral to trained, supervised staff for assessment;
- An assessment center specifically for victims of domestic violence in a confidential location;
- An advisory board consisting of domestic violence survivors and advocates to oversee the NOVA (No Violence Again) unit of HRA (the City's Human Resources Administration);
- A policy that abusive partners should never be contacted to verify homelessness or domestic violence;
- More shelters beds for victims of domestic violence, especially for disabled women, lesbians, single women and women with older sons (all of whom have a harder time finding shelter);
- A policy of transferring battered women to a Tier II shelter once their allotted time in a domestic violence shelter is up (women can stay in d.v. shelters for only 90 days with a 45 day extension. Once their time is up they are referred back to the EAU). Battered women should not have to prove again that they are battered or homeless, but should be given presumptive eligibility to a Tier II shelter;

- Conditions in the EAU must improve so that battered women are not forced to return to abusive partners and that all homeless adults and children are treated decently. The City must ensure:
 - Regular health and fire code inspections to monitor conditions;
 - Children and families must be in overnight placements by 6pm;
 - Families must be permitted to bring food into the EAU and edible food and drinks should be provided to all applicants who need it;
 - Families must be allowed to leave the EAU for appointments, work, doctor visits, etc. and given car fare when needed;
- Providing all applicants with written information on how to apply for shelter in English, Spanish and other languages as needed. Each applicant should receive a statement of their rights;
- Access to Section 8 Housing for battered women and an application process that is more timely and less bureaucratic;
- An increase in the Public Assistance Shelter allowance, currently \$286/month for a family of 3, to a level that would allow welfare recipients to rent apartments in New York City.

Nationally, twenty-five to thirty one percent of women will experience intimate partner violence at some point in their lives and three to ten million children will witness that violence every year. On average, three women a day are murdered by their intimate partners and approximately 324,000 pregnant women are battered every year. In fact, homicide by an intimate partner or ex-partner is the leading cause of death for women in this country.

The Voices of Women Organizing Project (VOW) is an organization of survivors of domestic violence working to improve the systems battered women and their children turn to for safety and justice. We are dedicated to ensuring that survivors are recognized for our expertise, that our voices are heard and that we are included in the decision-making process.

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