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## **BREAKING** The Silence . . .

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in the number of transition houses for battered women; and, an increase in the money allocated to related services and counselling programs. Abused women, for example, are given two free hours of legal advice and are given priority in terms of housing assistance. But society and individual communities must be strong in helping to develop more responsible attitudes about wife assault. A community can do this by:

1. considering wife assault a serious problem that is built into the structure of society and the family, and not an isolated family or personal problem;
2. educating the general public on the facts surrounding wife assault and the characteristics and needs of battered women, and by dispelling the myths;
3. encouraging community and health service personnel to take a non-judgemental approach to helping battered women, as well as ensuring confidentiality of their identity and situation;

4. promoting the growth of more protective, supportive and preventive services and programs at all levels - for individual women, children and men, the family unit, the community, and for society as a whole.

### **What Can an Individual Do In Response to Abuse Against Women?**

When a battered woman decides to do something about their situation, they turn first to family and friends for help. At this point she has usually suffered several beatings and is experiencing a number of feelings: fear, guilt, self-blame, humiliation, sadness and loss, ambivalence, powerlessness, relief, anger, and anxiety. When you become aware of an abusive situation, there are a number of things you can do to help an abused woman:

1. do not ignore her, wife assault is a crime, call the police;
2. talk to her, tell her that it is more dangerous to do nothing about the

3. express concern for her injury, and the safety of her and her children;
4. ask her what you can do to help, but let her direct what happens to her;
5. provide her with the wife assault crisis lines in your area, as well as the telephone numbers to women's shelters or centres;
6. get involved with your local women's shelter and become a role model;
7. become informed through reading, speakers, workshops, videos, films, and other available resources;
8. and, write or visit your local politicians expressing your concerns about abused women.

All kinds of women are being abused - young and old, rich and poor, well-educated and illiterate, urban and rural. Women of all nationalities, races, religions, social or professional backgrounds are experiencing abuse. Assault or battering can happen to any woman?

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## Rural Women's Shelter Program . . .

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tance of continuing to build relations with the police and other community service personnel.

Educating the public has been a key role of the Co-ordinator. "We try to gear public education to the group," said Chris. "Service clubs, church groups and high schools," she added, "all want to understand the issues, but they back off when it gets too personal." She said, "they feel comfortable discussing it as long as they can say 'those women,'" However, through education Chris does feel that the traditional institutions - such as the church, local doctors, lawyers and social workers - are beginning to accept the RWSP.

Volunteers are also encouraged to arrange public education events and speak out about the realities of violence against women.

One volunteer explained, "It is a great organization because you are heard." Another added, "This is what I do to try and somehow make it more fair."

Commenting on why she got involved, Chris stated: "I've become involved out of my anger and outrage at the violence women and children experience, and I want to change it." She knows that the Rural Women's Shelter Program is making a difference in Wellington County.

For more information on the Rural Women's Shelter Program contact Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis, P.O. Box 1451, Guelph, Ontario, N1H 6N9, (519)836-1110.

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### *"My Friend's House"*



Members of the Maple Valley Women's Institute displayed a few of the eleven quilts which they donated to "My Friend's House" in Collingwood. This newly established crisis centre is a home for battered women. Pictured left to right are: Phyllis Aldcorn, Hazel Scott, Muriel Lewis and Margaret Arold.