

## **OUR HISTORY**

"Associazione Aiuto Donna – Uscire dalla Violenza" (*Help Women Against Abuse association*) was founded within the Bergamo Municipal Women's Council, a female association founded by the Municipal Council back in 1996.

Right from the start, this association aimed at playing a key role in the administrative decisions, to enhance the participation of women in the city's activities, to promote cultural events with the aim of enhancing open-mindedness alongside creating a communication and interpersonal network.

Of the four Committees were founded then, one was specifically meant to address women's problems.

A survey shed light on such common yet hidden problem, violence against women in and out of the home – which needs to be tackled through the right means.

Contrary to what occurred elsewhere over the rest of the region, our province lacked organisations capable of addressing the problem.

Thus, encouraged by other similar experiences in other cities, the 3<sup>rd</sup> committee of the Women's Council proposed a project to the Councillor for Social Policies, with the aim of supporting and helping women suffering abuse. Thus came about the "Associazione Aiuto Donna - uscire dal violenza" (*Help Women Against Abuse association*), founded in 1999 by 18 founding members: mothers, teachers, professional care workers, psychologists, social workers and professional workers. All these women shared common feelings and training background regarding physical, psychological, sexual and economical abuse against women.

## **OUR PROJECT: OUR GOALS**

The driving force behind the "Associazione aiuto-donna" has always been doors open to all women.

Therefore, the first goal was set up an advice desk where abused women could freely turn to, sure with guarantee of anonymity and in full respect of their cultural and religious identity: a place where women would feel welcome and find solidarity, care, impartiality and competence.

Therefore, services were set up with the aim welcoming and offering specific consultancy services (legal and psychological) to women who sought help.

The second goal was starting a deep rooted information campaign regarding abuse against women. This campaign was based on public event aimed at presenting the Association. Such events included exhibitions, shows, publications, organising congresses and training courses for anyone interested and willing to help in prevention, assistance and cater for the consequences arising from such problems.

## **ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT**

In addition, during these years of activity we have been carrying out constant training/supervision activities for the volunteers who made great efforts and devoted their time to implement the project. As a matter of fact, there is almost daily contact with the sufferings women undergo in contexts of unconditioned violence, made it necessary a specific training programme to address the conscious and subconscious dynamics in this kind of cases.

Following these surveys and processing of the acquired data, we conceived the idea of founding a self and mutual-help group, operative since 2001. Women willing to take part meet at the Association's offices once a week to share their life experiences, emotions and pains.

In times of electronic communication in which communication barriers seem to have been broken and everyone is free to express his/her ideas regardless of the space restrictions, self-alienation has become an extremely common feature.

## **OUR TEAM**

**Our team**, welcomes all women seeking a way out of psychological, physical and economical abuse **through assistance by various professional figures such as professional care workers, lawyers, psychologists and reception workers.**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

On 16<sup>th</sup> December 2006, our association was awarded a certificate of civic achievements by the Bergamo Municipal Administration.

## **WHAT WE HAVE TO OFFER**

### **ASSISTANCE BY PHONE**

Our personnel receives phone calls on 035 212933 from 9.30 AM to 12.30 PM from Monday to Friday and from 3.00 PM to 5.00 PM on Wednesday and Friday.

In addition there is 24 hours answering machine on which you can leave your message. During the phone call, the personnel tries to understand what kind of help the woman is seeking and the kind of situation she finds herself in. However, in order to address the problem fully, you must book an appointment at the Association's offices.

### **ASSISTANCE INTERVIEWS**

Interviews are held at our headquarters with two of our volunteer personnel. Such service is carried out after booking an appointment during the phone call and only upon full consent by the woman.

During assistance interviews (usually two or three), we outline a route together with the woman in order to help her find her way out of the violent cycle and relationships based on self-harming behaviour. Specialised consultancy services are offered based on this interview.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSULTANCY**

This kind of services consists of some personal interviews (2/3) with a psychologist who, with the help of the woman, tries to outline the latter's psychological profile. In addition, by gathering data, this kind of activity allows ascertaining whether the state of distress the woman presents are a result of current traumatic episodes or whether such situations are due to a state caused by the repetition of previous traumatic episodes.

At times psychological consultancy allows diagnosing serious psychopathological cases requiring psychiatric help.

### **LEGAL ADVICE**

Volunteer lawyers offer their time and professional capacities to give the women requesting help advice on the rights and duties provided for by the family law. In addition, the lawyers are available even for other information regarding the regulations set by the laws in force, to defend themselves against violence by their partners.

**ADMISSION IN PROTECTED CENTRES**

In case of very serious cases there is a service set up in cooperation with the competent authorities (Social Services, Police Headquarters) to admit women and their underage children, if any, in a protected centre.