

Haven

That it is even necessary is a source of anger and frustration for the people who run Interval House. But for 20 years, the downtown shelter has provided a refuge for women and children who are victims of violence. And it has helped bring the problem of wife and child abuse to the fore

By Barbara Aarsteinsen
TORONTO STAR

THEY LOOK back with satisfaction — and dismay. Interval House, the first shelter for abused women in Canada, marks its 20th anniversary this year. And it is a bittersweet milestone.

The women who founded the transition house and have worked with it over the years reminisce with pride about how far the project has come over the past two decades.

A whole network of shelters for women and children who are victims of violence has sprung up in its wake across Canada, and there are more services and programs available to help deal with the issue than ever before.

Most importantly perhaps, it has come to be widely recognized that men assaulting women and kids is not acceptable social behavior, no matter what the context, and all kinds of people are speaking out.

Interval House was knocked as a haven for runaway wives when it opened its doors in 1973; now it is a respected agency, almost an institution.

At the same time, however, the problem of violence against women and kids is as bad or, some argue, worse than ever.

"What is wonderful is that attitudes have changed tremendously," says Lynn Zimmer, the driving force behind Interval House. She worked there for 12 years and is now executive director of the YWCA in Peterborough.

"The general public agrees that violence against women is bad. They talk about the issue and they realize that its victims deserve help.

"What's rotten is that Interval House and places like it are still only a Band-Aid. They're not a cure.

"Our society has done very little to change the violent behavior that contin-



JOHN MAHLER/TORONTO STAR

DRIVING FORCE: Lynn Zimmer worked 12 years at Interval House.

ues to drive women into shelters."

The average woman is beaten 24 times before she turns to Interval House for help. About a quarter of its clients return to their partners; the rest go on alone.

"If it wasn't for Interval House, I would have committed suicide," says Esi Amifhah, 42, who fled to the shelter in 1987 and ended up staying for seven months.

"I received counselling and therapy. I was put in touch with a social worker and she helped me arrange classes to learn English and computer accounting.

"They put me back on my feet. The women there became my mother, sisters and best friends. They were everything to me."

Amifhah was assaulted by her husband 10 weeks after emigrating from Ghana with their five children — then aged 1 to 18 — to join him.

He had been in Canada for 20 years but went back to his native land and family annually for visits. At the same time — which Amifhah discovered on her arrival — he had established a relationship with a woman in Toronto, with whom he had a child.

After her stay at Interval House,

Amifhah got a job as a clerk at a hospital and moved into her own apartment. She is now a child care provider.

According to the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, there are now 72 shelters for abused women across the province. Last year, some 65,000 women and about 6,000 children passed through them.

In 1991, 120 women across Canada were slain by their partners, a 33 per cent increase over the previous year.

A study, *Woman Killing*, issued earlier this year by the Women We Honor Action Committee, analyzed the murders of 969 Ontario women between 1974 and 1990. It found that at least 61 per cent and maybe as many as 78 per cent were "intimate femicides" — committed by husbands or boyfriends.

A 1991 report from an all-party committee of female MPs, *The War Against Women*, discovered that at least one in 10 women is physically and/or sexually assaulted each year by her husband, boyfriend or former partner.

A 1992 survey by Ontario's women's issues ministry concluded that six out of every 10 Ontario residents either know an

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Potato gun is ultimate in Toyland arms race

My first thought was: What kind of diabolical, fiendish mind would dream up such a thing?

My second was: What kind of diabolical, fiendish parent would buy such a weapon of destruction for his or her own child?

My third thought was: Why didn't they have things like this when I was a kid?

What prompted these deep thoughts was a toy I saw recently, a toy so destructive, so terrifying that no boy could resist it: a slingshot designed to shoot water balloons.

The answer to the first question was obvious. It had been created by a former boy, likely one who had no children and wasn't likely to come in contact with any.

The answer to the second question was also obvious: a person who had sustained some frontal lobe damage. ("Can I have this slingshot, Dad?" "Sure son, and why don't I pick up one of these war surplus land mines? They'll be fun at parties.")

And the answer to the third question was even more obvious. They didn't have toys like this when I was a kid because: a) life was simpler then; b) our parents were too sensible to allow us to have them and; c) we didn't need to buy toys like this — we made them ourselves.

As I studied the water balloon missile-launcher, I realized something before I even had a chance to ask the mandatory questions on where this young generation was going and whether this toy arms escalation race would lead to a day when kids blew up each other's sand boxes with heat-seeking missiles.

I realized that, based on my own childhood experiences, the proliferation of such evil mini-weapons was of little consequence since boys, by most standards, are completely insane.

For some reason now lost in the mists of time, boys spend much of their formative years locked in a Darwinian struggle to determine who can survive the most dangerous force on Earth — other boys.

My childhood was pure survival of the fittest and while we didn't have anything as sophisticated as a water balloon slingshot, there certainly were enough objects of destruction available.

There was, for example, a toy gun — actually manufactured and sold by adults who claimed they didn't have criminal records — that used plugs of raw potato as bullets. After a few days of trying to put out each others' eyes with various root vegetables, we moved on to greater things when one kid, who had problems with his one-times table in school, figured out a way to adapt the gun to shoot pieces of wood.

After a week of bruises and welts, the guns were collected by neighborhood parents following a particularly gory scene involving a wooden plug and a nostril.

Then there was the kid down the street who converted a cap gun and a batch of firecrackers and launched a pre-emptive rocket strike against a neighborhood rival. He survived the ensuing explosion with only a few burns, although the target's family shed wasn't quite as fortunate.

There were also a host of other horror stories: the kid who used an umbrella as a parachute in a jump off a roof, somehow emerging with only a broken arm; the two guys who had a duel, high-noon style, armed with homemade slingshots and rocks, surviving only because they were such bad shots; and the gang, inspired by a *Roadrunner* cartoon, who launched a homemade go-kart off a ramp and watched in horror as the test pilot crashed into a telephone pole.

And these are the ones my mind hasn't blocked out because they involved huge amounts of blood or missing body parts.

One thing hasn't changed in all those years: regardless of how crude or sophisticated the toy, boys will find a way to make them even more frightening than they were intended to be.

Someday in the near future, no doubt, when toys have reached their zenith, a scene like this will unfold:

Boy No. 1: "Gee, Arnold, that's a great surface-to-air missile your folks gave you for your birthday."

Boy No. 2: "Yeah, it sure is, Sylvester. But wait till my parents leave and I'll show you what it can do with a little alteration . . ."

I doubt, though, that it will be as terrifying as that potato gun.

Chris Zellkovich is the deputy editor of *The Saturday Star*.



A to Z

Chris Zellkovich

Brace yourself — 'tin grin' turns trendy

By Murray Dublin
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Eleven-year-old Jessi Smith and four of her friends recently posed for a picture during an outing.

Jessi's mom Pat took the photograph. "They all smiled with their braces to show off. One friend, Becca, poor Becca, didn't have braces and she didn't get in the picture."

But Becca is getting them, adds Smith.

Forget "metal mouth" and "tin grin."

Those taunts of the past are as out-of-date and clunky as the braces that were bound to children's teeth 30 years ago.

"I'm in my 40s and my sister had braces," says Janet Pizzo, whose son, Dan, 13, got braces in May. "In all her junior high school pictures, she didn't smile."

Dan Pizzo has no such problem. Kids nowadays want braces.

"The number of children who ask me about braces has gone up dramatically in the past five or six years," says dentist Maury Leas.

"Now, we have kids showing

up in the dentist's office with their parents saying: 'Everyone else has braces and Judy is concerned that she doesn't. Surely, she must need them,'" says Bill Proffitt, professor and chairperson of the orthodontics department at the University of North Carolina dentistry school.

"I would say today it's very cool to have them," says Mimi Cohen, whose daughter Beth, 11, has had braces since April.

"It hasn't been a problem at all. Friends say it makes her look older, more like a teenager. Colors? Yes, she has purple rubber bands."

How do metal and rubber bands go from dreaded to desired?

"The orthodontic experience used to be more brutal," says pediatric dentist and orthodontist Stephen Cohen. "It's a lot kinder now."

"Movies, magazines and television show everyone with nice teeth. Kids see that they don't have nice teeth and they want them."

Kinder includes using far less metal than in the past. And that metal is no longer stainless steel but usually a gentler and stronger material.

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Brushing up on teeth

A daily dental hygiene routine is vital to maintaining healthy teeth and gums. The following is a basic guide. Ask your dentist before adding oral irrigators or other dental products.

Recommended regimen

- ✓ Brush for at least two minutes in the morning and before bedtime, and ideally after lunch.
- ✓ Floss daily to remove plaque, a sticky substance formed by bacteria in the mouth.
- ✓ Get a professional dental cleaning and exam every six months.



Nutrition

- Limit sugar and starch-rich foods, as they increase plaque production.
- Be sure your diet meets recommended daily amounts of vitamin C and calcium.

Quick tip

Bacteria buildup in the mouth causes bad breath, decay and gum disease. To disrupt bacterial activity and ward off oral problems, floss every day.



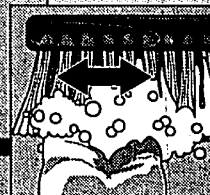
Special situations

- **Braces:** Conscientious cleaning and plaque removal are key. Irrigators will help with cleaning and fluoride rinses can ward off plaque buildup.

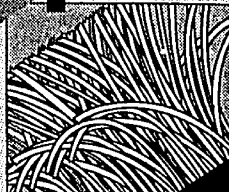
- Be sure to rinse plaque and food particles from your toothbrush after each use.

How to brush

- With a wet toothbrush, systematically massage all gum tissue using a rhythmic, shimming motion.
- Do the same to palate, tongue and insides of cheeks.



- With toothpaste on brush, use a back-and-forth scrubbing motion on sides and chewing surfaces of teeth.



- Toothbrushes have three-to-six-month life span. Replace your brush as soon as it frays or begins to lose its original shape.
- Ask your dentist if you should consider a contoured toothbrush.

Chicago Tribune/Flick Tuma and Deborah Rissing Baurac

Sources: Dr. Sheryl Beltrane, DDS, national ADA consumer adviser; Warner-Lambert Co.

'Interval House turned our lives around'

Continued from page J1

abused woman or a man who abuses his partner.

"If I didn't have faith in future change, I wouldn't still be slogging away in this area," says Trudy Don, executive director of the association of transition shelters. She worked at Interval House for 8½ years, signing on three months after it began operation. "But we still have a long way to go."

"When we started out, nobody believed wife assault was a problem, but nobody would dare say that today. However, we are still dealing with repercussions and not root causes."

"It's not just an issue of some husbands beating up some wives. It's about a system that doesn't give women the same rights and freedoms and opportunities as men."

When the small band of women who organized Interval House got together, they had no idea what they were setting in motion.

They were young and most of them had been doing some kind of social services work or volunteering with agencies in one capacity or another.

What the founding group envisioned, various members recall, was a temporary place of respite for women and kids suffering any kind of housing cri-

sis.

There was only one Metro-run shelter in the Toronto area at that time and it helped out families facing a whole range of problems. Moreover, it was institutional and provided no counselling and support.

The founding mothers, as it were, successfully applied for a \$30,000 provincial job creation grant and set up shop in a house on Spadina Rd., for which the United Way gave them funds for first and last month's rent. They scrounged around for furnishings, and painted and renovated with more energy than expertise. The 12 staff members who signed on chipped in \$5 each to stock the kitchen.

Contrary to their game plan, what they soon found was that most of the women who came to Interval House were fleeing abusive relationships. Within a year, its mandate was changed and it became a self-described shelter for battered women.

"When we were planning Interval House, we didn't understand that violence was such a major factor in women's lives," recalls Zimmer, who had just finished a year of law school at the time and was looking for a new direction.

"We all had heard some stories before, but we had never really put them all together."

"We hadn't realized how vast the phenomenon was."

Darlene Lawson, who also helped lay the groundwork for Interval House, recalls being shocked.

"We started uncovering the tip of a huge iceberg that we had never imagined existed, one whose magnitude we may still have not yet fully comprehended," says Lawson, who now works for a provincial cabinet member.

She stayed at Interval House for a year before returning to university to get a master's degree in social work.

She subsequently worked for two years at the Vanier Centre for Women, a correctional institution, and spent another nine years as the executive director of the Elizabeth Fry Society in Toronto.

"As more and more women came to the shelter and told their stories — about fleeing in taxis, about fearing for their lives, about having nowhere else to turn — we started to clue in to the prevalence of domestic violence," Lawson remembers. "We began asking questions and the experiences poured out."

The women who founded Interval House didn't see themselves as pioneers, says Nadine

Chan, who joined the shelter as fundraising co-ordinator in 1985.

"They were filling a gap. It was not a matter of consciousness-raising but a matter of survival that they were tackling."

The shelter operated on a shoestring for years, relying on per diem funding from Metro and getting small grants here and there.

Zimmer started devoting most of her time to organized fundraising in 1981 and the group began receiving more regular funding from the provincial Ministry of Community and Social Services in 1983.

Today, Interval House has a budget of \$1.2 million. Half of it is covered by contributions from some 10,000 donors. The balance is funded by a variety of

Metro, provincial and United Way grants. There are 15 paid staff members.

The house, on which the mortgage was recently retired, has 22 beds. Only women with children are accepted. About 150 people found shelter there last year, with the average stay lasting six to eight weeks.

There is also a second-stage housing unit suitable for one or two families. Women generally reside there for up to two years.

Almost 1,500 crisis calls were also fielded last year through Interval House's 24-hour, seven-day-a-week telephone distress counselling service. An ex-resident outreach program kept in touch with another 1,800 individuals.

"If it hadn't been for Interval House, my mother probably

would have been sent by my father back to Pakistan or to India, along with us. We'd have had no future," says 22-year-old Ashfa Qureshi, who was 7 when her mother sought safety at the shelter with her and her older brother. They stayed for about a year.

Her mother, she recalls, was a recent immigrant. Married off at a young age, she had never held a job before and she barely spoke English.

"Thanks to the help of the women there, I saw my mother go from a lonely, despairing woman, timid and weak, to a strong-minded, independent woman," says Qureshi, who is studying medical law at McMaster University.

"Interval House turned our lives around."

'Metal mouth' trendy for kids

Continued from page J1

ger nickel-titanium alloy first used in aerospace technology.

So the metal is gentler, there is less of it and it is attached in a very different way.

"I've been in it 30 years now, and when I was trained you had to fit gold bands, fabricated individually, around each tooth, solder them and put attachments on the surface of those bands," Profit says.

That process would take a long series of one- to two-hour appointments.

"Today, we don't use bands much any more," he says. "We used bonded brackets placed directly on each tooth. We can do it in two appointments."

While there's less pain for the patient, there remains pain for the paying parent. Braces are not cheap. However, the price has not risen astronomically over the years.

"Orthodontic treatment in

the late '40s cost more than my dad's new car," Profit says. "And the orthodontist probably earned it. Well, it's still considered expensive today, but if you compare it to a Chevrolet, it's cheap."

Possessing a naked grin is almost out of the ordinary because so many children have braces. No one notices a "tin grin" if everyone has a "tin grin." And secondly, the braces of today, with their rubber bands and nickel-titanium alloy, are often available in different colors.

When Marnie Fleishman, 9, first got braces last summer, her mother didn't think it could possibly turn out this way. She was "a total wreck," says Marcy Fleishman, 37.

"She's a sensitive little girl. She's shy. We were really scared. And she was scared to go to camp that day."

"But she didn't get a negative response. Her friends

were envious."

Forrest Williams "didn't have any concerns about getting braces. It was more of a concern not getting braces," says his mother Debbie. "He had a terrible protrusion. His front teeth stuck out. His friends called him 'Rabbit.' He's been asking about braces for a year."

"Well, he got them in May, and the protrusion has lessened already."

Not every child loves braces. But kids, dentists and parents give the impression that they have become almost ordinary, perhaps even "cool."

Listen to Marc Simon, 12, student president of his school and a wearer of braces since December.

"A lot of kids have them," he says. "You just go with the flow. Get regular braces, get them on, get them off. Not a big deal."

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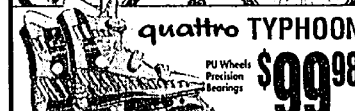
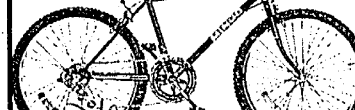
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