

## Batterers get help

By ELIZABETH DONOVAN

**MEN WHO BATTER THEIR** wives or girlfriends may have access to self-help groups aimed at preventing violence and the attitudes that perpetuate it.

Proposal co-ordinator Ken Belanger says the Association for the Prevention of Domestic Violence received a favourable response from the federal government.

Belanger says he's convinced of the need for such a group. In the past two years, Belanger, a professional counsellor, has been inundated with phone calls from both battered women and their husbands asking for help.

"The need was banging on the door and no one was addressing it," says Belanger.

Local statistics seem to indicate an increase in visible domestic violence. Bryony House, a temporary shelter for battered women and their children, in 1983 sheltered 180 women and 207 children. Last year there were 200 women and 246 children, increasing the occupancy rate from 100 to 101 per cent.

An APDV proposal differs from the models it evolved from. The project objectives seek to change the behavior of both the victim and the perpetrator of the violence.

"The men and the women will be in separate groups, but I think

its important we look at gender role relations and how it affects both men and women. Often the victim of abuse has been prepared through life to be a victim. There must be an attempt made to unlearn that role as well as stopping the violence," he says.

Belanger says the onus is on the man to first take responsibility for his actions. But the focus is not only to eliminate the violent behavior, but to challenge those norms in society that perpetuate violence towards women.

"Value changes have to come about. That's why the group approach is so effective. Since attitudes usually form in groups, the group can be used to subvert what was learned when men were younger," says Belanger.

Belanger is also aware of the problems in the therapeutic approach.

"It's certainly difficult to make the distinction between a man who beats the woman he lives with, from hitting a woman who lives next door."

Belanger says the problem may be inherent in the language we use to describe a criminal.

"Some of them have been victimized themselves, 70 per cent of batterers are abused as children. It does not mean they should not be punished, but there is a problem when no attempt is made to help change the violent behavior."



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