



**SOUTH SUBURBAN FAMILY SHELTER, INC.**  
*Comprehensive Services to Victims of Domestic Violence*

# Newsletter

Jennifer Gabrenya, Executive Director Carolyn A. Zakem & Gail Kallend, Editors

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## GUNS, MASS SHOOTINGS, AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: *Using the Tools We Have to Protect Lives*

As a domestic violence advocate, I have developed an almost unconscious process that I go through when I learn of a mass murder. I tell myself to wait. Wait just one more day; wait two more days – because it will come. What will come is the information that the victims were the wife, children, dating partner, family member, or someone in another intimate relationship with the murderer. We will learn that the shooter had a well-known history of domestic disturbance or verbal abuse, or that there were general concerns about their behavior.

It will come out that domestic violence happened first. Perhaps no one ever called the police, or maybe there were several documented incidents of police response. Family and friends will share that they knew that something was wrong. Media will report that the relationship was in the process of ending or had already ended. More often than not, we will learn that more than one person knew about the domestic violence; that more than one person had the opportunity to draw a line and practice accountability.

Devin P. Kelley has been identified as responsible for killing and injuring many people in a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas. He shot them. He had a history of domestic violence, the collected evidence of which is irrefutably clear and significantly lethal. As more information has been made public, we have learned that Kelley was court-martialed for alleged assault on his spouse and child in 2012 including strangulation and severe head trauma. He was consequently discharged for bad conduct. Furthermore, the Air Force failed to appropriately follow procedures that would have prevented Kelley from legally purchasing guns. If fracturing his toddler son's skull failed to cause the military to take action that would have prevented Kelley from accessing lethal weapons, then what will it take? What kind of brutal violence will cause us as a society to use the information we've learned about domestic violence to intervene and block domestic violence offenders from legally purchasing guns?

Many abusers show the violence of which they are capable over and over again, with little or no attempt for accountability. Without consequences they control more, they abuse more, they damage worse. Unchecked abuses of power grow. Victims can be left to struggle alone, often feeling that no one is willing to step in to help them.

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## Run Domestic Violence Out of Town



Jennifer Lindstrom crosses the finish line at the Sept. 24, 2017 Chicago Half Marathon/5K representing SSFS on the Run Domestic Violence Out of Town team.



Marilynn Kellum (left to right) is congratulated by Outreach Coordinator Vicki Meilach after finishing the Oct. 8, 2017 Chicago Marathon. Marilynn ran for SSFS on the Run Domestic Violence Out of Town team.

## From the President of the Board



I am honored to be the incoming president of the Board of Directors of South Suburban Family Shelter. Before telling you how I became interested in domestic violence and involved with SSFS, I want to sincerely thank Verlon Johnson, the outgoing Board president, for her dedication to this organization. Verlon led the Board through some very challenging times - the retirement of the agency's long-time director, Diane Bedrosian, and state fiscal problems that seriously impacted our funding and threatened the very existence of the organization. Through it all, she was tireless in her work on behalf of SSFS, and we sincerely appreciate all that she has done. Thank you, Verlon, for your service to SSFS.

As for me, I've been on the Board of SSFS since 2008, and Vice President since 2012. I am a retired Professor of Psychology at Chicago State University. My involvement with domestic violence dates from the mid-1990's when I was doing research on children witnessing community violence and was asked to join the steering committee of the Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community (IDVAAC). IDVAAC, and the many practitioners who supported us, informed my understanding of domestic violence and gave me a profound appreciation for those who work with victims and survivors. A chance encounter with Diane led to my being on the SSFS Board. These years on the Board have given me an appreciation of the day-to-day operations of our agency, and the realities of providing services to victims.

A recent post on the SSFS Facebook page (which I strongly encourage you to visit) reads:

*SSFS is honored to witness the power inside domestic violence survivors through the work we help them do on their journeys toward safety, health and happiness.*

The work of this agency is incredibly important and I am pleased to be in a position to support that mission.

Esther Jenkins



## From the Executive Director



It can be hard to find gratitude amidst chaos and crisis. However, when we are able to do this we also find peace, strength and the ability to move on. There were several months during the spring and early summer when a parallel process existed between our clients' struggles to survive and thrive and the agency's struggle to do the same, albeit, for very different reasons and in very different ways.

During this time I first found myself in despair. This despair turned to anger and the anger turned into action. Finally action turned into hope and ultimately into joy and peace. As I sit here today in relative stability, I reflect on the lessons we learned and am grateful for the crisis we endured. This crisis pulled us together as a team in a way that would not have happened otherwise. This crisis forced us to look at SSFS and examine who we really are and what is most desperately needed for our community to achieve its fullest potential. We were able to fashion wings with what was available to us and learn to soar on our power.

There is one lesson we wish for all families who come to us. It is the lesson of inner strength and the belief that the POWER to soar already exists within you. I am beyond grateful that we have been reminded of this lesson so that we can continue with renewed vigor to pass it on.

Jennifer Gabrenya



### CALLING ALL ONLINE SHOPPERS

When you shop through **AmazonSmile**, Amazon donates 0.5% of the purchase price to South Suburban Family Shelter.

Use the following link

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/36-3089796>

and support us every time you shop.



## CLIENT WISH LIST

Imagine not only having to make daily decisions about how to keep your children and yourself safe, but also which bills to pay, what appointments to keep, what items you can afford to purchase. Our clients often have to make the difficult choice between purchasing food for their family or gas to drive to and from work. The community has been unbelievably generous in responding to our ongoing wish list throughout the years.

### We have an ongoing need of:

- ❖ Non perishable foods items (no expired or opened containers)
- ❖ Paper products - toilet paper, paper towels, tissues
- ❖ Laundry products
- ❖ Cleaning products
- ❖ Diapers and wipes (all sizes)
- ❖ Toiletries - shampoo, conditioner (for all types of hair - African American, Caucasian and children), body wash, lotion, antiperspirant/deodorant (women and men), foot care products
- ❖ Feminine hygiene products (pads, tampons)
- ❖ Gift cards to Aldi, Target, Walmart, etc.
- ❖ Gas gift cards - for victims to get to their court hearings and counseling sessions

If you would like more information before making a donation, please contact Vicki at 708/794-2140 or [vmeilach@ssfs1.org](mailto:vmeilach@ssfs1.org).

## GUNS, MASS SHOOTINGS, AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: *Using the Tools We Have to Protect Lives*

According to the nonprofit *Everytown for Gun Safety*, 54 % of mass shootings are committed by someone who also shot an intimate partner or relative. What are the reasonable inferences we can draw from that statistic and other related details, and how can we use the information to decrease not only domestic violence, but mass shootings as well?

From media coverage of particularly deadly mass shootings, SSFS has compiled the following table highlighting the perpetrators' history of either or both domestic violence (as perpetrators and/or as child victims) and violence against women.

Incident	Perpetrator(s)	Details of past use of violence
Sutherland Springs, TX, November 2017	Devin P. Kelley	History of assault against spouse and child
Las Vegas, NV, October 2017	Stephen Paddock	History of verbal abuse of girlfriend
Alexandria, VA (Congressional Baseball shooting) June 2017	James Hodgkinson	Multiple calls to police for domestic battery and accusations of having beaten his foster daughter
San Bernardino, CA, April 2017	Cedric Anderson	Murdered ex-girlfriend before killing two NYC police officers
San Bernardino, CA December 2016	Syed Rizwan Farook and Tashfeen Malik	Farook's father verbally and physically abusive to Farook, his siblings, and mother throughout his childhood
Orlando, FL (Pulse Nightclub shooting) June 2016	Omar Mateen	History of physical abuse of ex-wife
Newton, KS, February 2016	Cedric Ford	History of abuse of ex-girlfriend
Colorado Springs, CO, November 2015	Robert Dear	History of domestic violence and harassment of women
Isla Vista, CA, May 2014	Elliot Rodger	History of violence against women, including throwing coffee on two women at a bus stop and attempting to throw women over a ledge
Newtown, CT (Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting) December 2012	Adam Lanza	Matricide, and report of prior death threats to mother
Virginia Tech shooting, April 2007	Cho Seung-Hui	History of stalking

I don't believe Devin Kelley was born a mass murderer. I don't believe he was born an abuser. I do believe he was born with unlimited potential; I do believe there were myriad opportunities for a life of well-being. Along the way, Kelley became a man who chose to abuse his family and a man who committed mass murder.

"Along the way" in anyone's life is where we can effect change if, and only if, we – family, friends, community groups and law enforcement – are willing to pay attention, speak up, and act with compassion. Someone who noticed a change in Kelley's behavior could have shown compassion, talked to him, and supported him in finding and accessing help. There were undoubtedly several ports of entry into his life that would have led to healing for him and prevention of further harm to others.

Intervening in another's violence means that we must be willing to challenge our socialized belief that tells us to stay out of other people's business. We need to see the well being of our community as our collective responsibility, and to boldly and safely challenge those abusing their family members. Each of us brings valuable talents, skills and abilities to help build a strong foundation on which our community can solidly stand.

Jennifer Gabrenya  
Executive Director



### PURPLE POSTERS SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT OUR SERVICES

We are always looking for volunteers to hang our purple informational posters with tear-off strips in restrooms, libraries, salons, coffee shops, grocery stores, restaurants, health clubs, businesses, places of worship, etc. Please help us reach out to victims throughout our south suburban communities who could benefit from our services. For a supply of posters, please contact Vicki at 708/794-2140.



### Matching Gifts Grow Your Dollars

You can significantly increase the value of your donation to SSFS by taking advantage of your employer's Matching Gifts program. Please check with your Human Resources Department to learn if your company will match your contribution to SSFS.

## 5th ANNUAL KARAOKE NIGHT FUNDRAISER A ROUSING SUCCESS

SSFS's **5th Annual Karaoke Night** was a rousing success, bringing in nearly \$4,000 to support our **Prevention Program**. The event drew a big crowd, filling the Speakeasy room at *Copper Still Martini Bar & Lounge* in Homewood, which generously donated the space for our fundraiser.

Guests dined on a buffet of south side favorites including sausage and peppers, mostaccioli, and beef sandwiches donated by *Lassen's Tap* in Homewood. The diverse crowd included guests from all facets of SSFS life: community members, volunteers, Board members, staff, and friends and family.

Karaoke performers hit all the high notes that had the audience singing and dancing along to songs from 90's dance hits to crooner classics and chart toppers. Raffles proved popular as always, with baskets of sports tickets, family friendly workout wear, wine and snacks for date nights and picnics, and more. Many thanks to all our guests, volunteers, donors, and sponsors: *Copper Still Martini Bar & Lounge*, *Lassen's Tap*, *Homewood-Flossmoor Chronicle*, and *The Beverly Review*.



Volunteer Esther Baron at Karaoke Night at Copper Still Martini Bar & Grill on August 31, 2017.



— SAVE THE DATE —

## SPRING GALA 5·5·2018

*Keeping Dreams Alive*



## BACK TO SCHOOL ANGELS RECEIVES OVERWHELMING SUPPORT

Our **Back to School Angels** project was abundantly successful again this year, outfitting over 50 child clients with school supplies. Each child, ranging from preschool through high school, received a back pack filled with items listed by their schools, plus a gift card for incidentals such as gym shoes, uniform, etc.

A recent news story reported that the average cost of school supplies for one child this year is \$345. By providing school supplies, we are alleviating some of the stress and financial burden for our adult clients, and enabling their children to start the school year fully equipped for success.

Volunteer *Linda Schmidt* once again oversaw the Back to School project. In addition to finding “Angels” in the community who would purchase items, Linda set up a “store” where parents brought their children to “shop,” selecting their own school bags and filling them with notebooks, pens, pencils, crayons etc. The kids were so excited to be able to select their own items!

Thank you to Linda for an amazing job overseeing and coordinating this project and all of our special “Angels” who purchased supplies and gave monetary donations to support this project.



Volunteer Linda Schmidt is ready for our children to “shop” for their school supplies.



## ADOPT-A-FAMILY HOLIDAY GIFT PROGRAM



The **Counseling Services** program has been busy planning the annual **Adopt-A-Family Holiday Gift Program** where individuals, families, or businesses purchase gifts for clients and their children. Those who benefit from Adopt-A-Family are experiencing financial hardship as a result of domestic violence. This program helps to make their holiday season more enjoyable as well as provides them with items that are much needed. Each of these families also receives a food basket. This year 32 families participated in the program and we hope to expand in the years to come.

Next year, if you would like to “adopt” a family or an individual for the holidays by purchasing and wrapping gifts, providing food, or making a monetary contribution to the program, please contact us at 708/798-7737.

## HOMWOOD DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGENCY THANKS COMMUNITY FOR GETTING IT THROUGH STATE BUDGET CRISIS

This article by Reporter Donna Vickroy appeared in the September 25, 2017 Daily Southtown. In case you missed it, here is a reprint of the full article.

To read this article online, click the following link: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/daily-southtown/news/ct-sta-vickroy-community-saves-family-shelter-st-0925-20170922-story.html>



The news is full of stories about people mobilizing to help those affected by hurricanes in Texas and Florida, earthquakes in Mexico and political strife around the world.

And those tales of compassion can certainly be uplifting.

But when you see people rise to the rescue of a need right here in this community, well, "it's just awe-inspiring," says Jim Bova, a volunteer with South Suburban Family Shelter, Inc. in Homewood.

Back in November 2016, SSFS executive director Jennifer Gabrenya learned that the agency, which offers services for people harmed or threatened by domestic violence, had lost a large portion of its funding from the state of Illinois.

"We found out that when that stop-gap budget was passed there were no dollars appropriated for the domestic violence grants that we'd signed," she said.

"It was awful because then we knew we weren't going to get paid and we had no idea when we'd get paid because the state can't pay on a contract that the legislature doesn't appropriate any dollars for," she said. "It sent the whole domestic violence community across the state into a tailspin."

And for the people who work at the shelter and those who rely on it for help through the violence, as well as a way out, it could have been devastating.

Gabrenya and the SSSH board agreed they needed to go public.

In January, the shelter began a call-give-tell campaign, asking people to call their legislators and have them pass a budget that included the money it needed; to give whatever they felt comfortable giving whatever way they could; and to tell at least seven other friends to do the same.

She said the agency constantly put out advocacy alerts on social media, reminding the public of the budget shortfall and updating people on efforts to resolve it.

"We created a special area on our website, in our e-news, called advocacy alert," she said.

The response, she said, "was incredible."

The group Action For a Better Tomorrow saw the cry for help, held a fundraiser and donated some \$7,000.

"At the time, that was huge," she said.

Others, including Thornton Township, Lassen's Tap, the Redbird Cafe, Bottle and Bottega, and the Crete-Monee Middle School National Junior Honor Society and Student Council, also rallied for the agency.

The public embraced the shelter's Back to School Angels program, Gabrenya said.

A couple of kids held a lemonade stand and donated the \$56 in profits to the drive.

"Every penny really counted," she said.

"In addition to the supplies, we received nearly \$1,500 in cash donations that we used to purchase things like the calculators and headphones children need. This also allows us to help families replenish supplies during the school year or purchase supplies for children who need to change schools," she said

And then there were the families and individuals in the community who opened their hearts and wallets, she said.

"Whatever we needed, they gave," she said.

Bova said during the food drive, "People donated boxes and boxes and bags and bags of food. Canned goods, cereals. You name anything in a grocery store and it was delivered to the administration office and ultimately

brought back to the counseling office, where it was distributed to those in need.

"This community," he said, "is blessed with generous, compassionate people."

Gabrenya said through the course of the year, the response exceeded all expectations, enabling the agency to not only serve its client base, but expand its reach.

When the budget impasse was resolved this past summer, and the agency finally received payment, Gabrenya said she knew what she had to do.

"We knew we needed to tell people, to let them know that everything that they've been doing for us has helped us to be able to serve a lot of people, given the fact that we had to make some pretty significant cuts," she said. "We wanted them to know that they had a huge impact on the survivors in the community."

In a letter to the public this past month, Gabrenya wrote: "In January SSFS sent a Call to Action into our community... Unsure what the future held for us, we remained committed to serving the members of this community by addressing all aspects of domestic violence.

"Our community answered that call and over the past seven months you have embraced us and held us up. From organized fundraisers to individual donations, from in-kind gifts to volunteer help, YOU have made our work possible in a time of uncertainty. We can feel that you have been pulling for us and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

Because of the support, Gabrenya said, the agency was not only able to minimize the impact on those who needed it, the emergency shelter was able to serve three times as many

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## HOMWOOD DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGENCY THANKS COMMUNITY FOR GETTING IT THROUGH STATE BUDGET CRISIS

people as the previous year. And, she added, counselors saw 40 percent more children this year.

“We maintained nearly 90 percent of the clients that we would typically see in a year,” she said.

In addition to the clients, she said, the people who work and volunteer for the shelter benefited, as well.

“It was one of the things that kept us going, knowing that so many people cared and valued the work we were doing, that they wanted us to be around,” she said.

She said one client in particular was leaving an abusive situation just as she was about to have a baby.

“She had absolutely nothing for the baby, so we put a call out to the community,” Gabrenya said. “And she got absolutely

everything she needed in about two weeks.

“That’s why we feel like we have to say ‘Thank you.’ We wouldn’t be able to do that without the community. We wouldn’t be able to give somebody that kind of support in such an important time of her life,” she said.

The new mom, who asked not to be identified, also wanted to express her gratitude in a statement:

“I have been so truly blessed to be a client at this organization. I have been going through some great challenges in my personal life and the baby donations I received truly came at the right time for me. Thank you greatly,” she said.

Even though many contributions were small, Gabrenya said, “they kept us above water. We never had to dip into

our line of credit, which is amazing. The cash came in all at the right times.”

Gabrenya said the effort proves that there is a personal connection between the community and the agency that has helped so many members of it over the years.

She also said as unreliable as the state legislature has been, there is comfort in knowing the state’s residents are as steadfast and caring as ever.

Bova said he believes many people have an inherent desire to help, whether that help is needed a thousand miles away or a few blocks down the road.

“The generosity of this community is just amazing,” he said. “It just shows you the character of the human spirit when people are in need.”



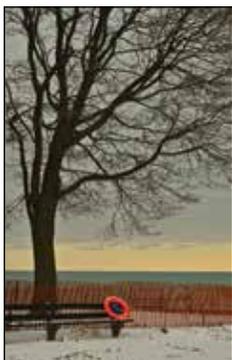
## HOLIDAY GREETINGS AND TRIBUTE CARDS



Our holiday greeting card features an original photo image by Lenore Holt-Darcy taken along Chicago’s lakeshore. The message inside reads: “May the peace and joy of this season be yours throughout the New Year.”

Our tribute card features a photo of a quilt that was designed by SSFS adult and child clients and staff. It was part of a community quilt project sponsored by the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women’s Network. Use it to honor a special occasion, in memory of a loved one, or as a thank you note.

All proceeds from the purchase of these cards benefit victims of domestic violence through services provided by SSFS. Please contact Vicki at 708/794-2140 or vmeilach@ssfs1.org to order cards or for more information.



Holiday Greeting Card



Tribute Card

Enclosed is my tax deductible donation:  
 \$25    \$50    \$100    \$250    \$500    \$\_\_\_\_\_

\$\_\_\_\_\_ for SSFS Tribute Cards (minimum donation of \$5 per card).  
Please send me \_\_\_\_\_ card(s).

\$\_\_\_\_\_ for Holiday Greeting Cards (\$10 per package of 10 cards).

Check enclosed in the amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_ made payable to SSFS.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please clip and mail to:**  
**SSFS • P.O. Box 937 • Homewood, IL 60430**

## HOMEWOOD FALL FEST SUPPORTS SSFS

SSFS was honored to be the designated charitable recipient of donations generated by the Chili Cook Off tasting and the Pumpkin Patch at the Homewood Fall Fest on Saturday, September 16, 2017. Donations from this community event totaled \$1,510, proving once again what a great community we have in Home Sweet Homewood! Outreach Coordinator Vicki Meilach organized volunteers to serve chili to the tasters for the Chili Cook Off, and to assist families choosing pumpkins at the Pumpkin Patch. Thank you to Mayor Hofeld for designating SSFS for this charitable effort!



Volunteers Linda, Sheryl, and Diane (L to R) get ready to open the gate to chili tasters at the Homewood Fall Fest.



Ready for Halloween with our decorated pumpkins from the Pumpkin Patch.



## SSFS HOSTING A PRODUCTION OF THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES

SSFS will be producing *The Vagina Monologues* early next year. We are ready to bring Eve Ensler's original show back to the south suburbs since our production five years ago.

There will be a single performance at Prairie State College on Saturday, February 17, 2018 at 7:30 pm. The show will be directed by Marie Goulet and produced by Yvonne Oldaker, both very talented Homewood residents. All proceeds will benefit South Suburban Family Shelter.

If you would like more information about being part of the cast, please contact our director, Marie Goulet at [mariegoulet1976@gmail.com](mailto:mariegoulet1976@gmail.com). No acting experience is necessary! For all other production inquiries, please contact Kerry Hill ([khill@ssfs1.org](mailto:khill@ssfs1.org)) or Vicki Meilach ([vmeilach@ssfs1.org](mailto:vmeilach@ssfs1.org)).

For more information about *The Vagina Monologues* and the global movement to end violence against women and girls, visit [www.vday.org](http://www.vday.org).

## CELL PHONE COLLECTION

Please donate your cell phone to SSFS when you upgrade or replace it.

To find out where you can donate your phone or to suggest collection sites, contact Vicki at 708/794-2140 or [vmeilach@ssfs1.org](mailto:vmeilach@ssfs1.org).



## Did You Know...

### THAT FROM JANUARY THROUGH JUNE 2017 WE PROVIDED SERVICES TO 1,080 ADULT VICTIMS AND 100 CHILDREN?

- our 24-hour Hotline answered 700 calls?
- we provided Emergency Shelter to 12 adults and their 23 children?
- our Prevention Specialists made 377 presentations to 8,398 elementary, junior high, and high school students?
- our Hospital Advocates spoke to 24,897 women and men in four south suburban emergency rooms and three urgent aid clinics, identified 4,302 as having been victims of domestic violence at some time in their lives, and provided 460 with immediate assistance?
- Project RENEW provided economic, educational and/or housing assistance to 36 adult victims and their children?
- the Partner Abuse Intervention Program facilitated 214 group sessions with 176 participants?
- our Court Advocates at the Markham Courthouse helped 183 victims obtain an Order of Protection, and provided information on DV law to 454 victims?
- the Sanctuary served 12 families who were homeless due to foreclosure, economic hardship, or domestic violence, including 27 children?
- the Counseling program provided direct services to 257 adult clients and 68 children?

South Suburban Family Shelter offers services for victims of domestic abuse regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, or age.