A First Hand Look at Volunteering at Safe Passage

by Jennifer Friedman ('01)

I started working at Safe Passage this fall. I was attracted to working in a battered women's shelter because the work we do there is very immediate in that you interact with people directly and you can see the difference you are making.

Safe Passage requires all of its volunteers to undergo a thirty hour training, during which we learned about the nature of domestic violence through a feminist analysis, discussed the nature of abuse and the many varieties of abuse (i.e. physical, emotional, financial, sexual, etc.); why women stay in abusive relationships; how the legal system works; sensitivity to particular populations that are battered, especially disabled women and lesbian battering; child witness to violence and how to work with kids in the shelter; how to work on the hotline; and issues of diversity and white privilege. The training was an opportunity to learn about these issues, but also a way through which we became acquainted with how the organization works and the various different staff members who work in Safe Passage.

Safe Passage is set up in a way that is very flexible and receptive to different people's special interests. There is shelter work, both working with the kids in the house and/or the women; hotline work, which consists of everything from giving out resources, offering emotional support to the women who call, helping out a family member who suspects their daughter/sister/friend is being abused, or helping a woman in immediate danger figure out how to leave and finding her room in a shelter; and of course, office work, which might consist of filing, making xerox copies. There are also other less regular volunteer cont. on page 2

A Note from Our Chair

by Elinor Mattern

Smithies continue to amaze me. Along with classes, meetings, work and everything else, hundreds of Smith students find the time to volunteer every semester. It is inspiring to be surrounded by human beings who seek out connections with their community like that. Keep up the good work!

Tutors Needed for MCAS!

by Ruth Wilson

We know what you may be thinking...It's already the beginning of March and I'm over-committed. Before you completely reject volunteering this semester, there are many volunteer agencies that would love for you to volunteer just once or twice. Think of how much of a difference 2 hours on a Saturday morning would make to a young child who may not get to spend much quality time with a positive adult role model, or an adult who has trouble reading. A few hours can make a difference in your life and in someone else's. Think about it.

One great opportunity right now is tutoring Saturday mornings from 10-11:30 at the Northampton High School to help Seniors study for the MCAS exam. Call Donna Waterman at 587-1332 if interested. Or, call S.O.S. (x4595) to find a volunteer opportunity that works for you.
opportunities. Volunteers are needed to help out at public events and fundraisers from time to time.

Although initially I expected to work in the office and on the hotline, after spending time in the shelter, I fell in love with the children there. Now I spend almost all my volunteer time there hanging out with the kids during house meetings or when their moms' are around but just need some time off. I babysit when a woman needs to be away from the house to take care of herself, like appearing in court or going to look at a house to move to. In the past, the kids and I have gone bowling, seen a storyteller at Smith, gone out to ice cream, and gone to the YMCA. The children are really fun to hang out with, although they often take a lot of patience and understanding. Often the older children are dealing with a lot of pain and anger. No matter what age, I try to offer a supportive, gentle, patient presence.

One tricky aspect of working with the children, especially while their mothers are in the house, is being an authority figure while respecting the parenting style and authority of their mothers. I believe that it is very important to recognize the relationship between a survivor of abuse and her children, even if I don't always agree with it.

Another difficult part of working at the shelter is saying goodbye. I learned how hard that can be recently after a family I had grown particularly close to and who had been living in the shelter for a really long time finally found a new home. I was glad they were going to have their own house and build a new life, but it was so hard to say goodbye.

Although I have only been working at Safe Passage for this academic year, I have really gotten attached to my work there and my relationships within the organization. It is really rewarding to see the children's eyes light up and be excited to see me and hear the gratification in their moms' voices, thanking me for helping them out. But it is even more important to understand that they give me more than I could ever give them. The children and the women in the shelter are so strong and resilient. They have retained their love for each other and their ability to love and trust outsiders even through the most horrible of circumstances. They are not victims: they are survivors, they laugh and heal and play and enjoy life.

For more information about volunteering at Safe Passage, contact the SOS office at x4595.

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Fund Drive Kick Off and Update!
by Vandana Nakka

This year's SOS Fund Drive, Children Affected by Domestic Violence, has gotten off to a great start, beginning with a Community Ed. Luncheon on Friday February 13th, where guest speakers Dr. Cynthia Monahan, and Jennifer Friedman '01, a volunteer at a local shelter, Safe Passage, shared experiences and stories with a packed roomful of more than 30 Smithies. On February 15th, Dr. Monahan returned to Smith once more, with Mr. Lou Rudolph from the United Way, for a special meeting with SOS House Reps, where they were given a briefing on the drive and some fundraising tips as well as providing background on childhood trauma and treatment.

Our next event, scheduled for the evening of Wednesday, March 7th, was a benefit fundraiser program featuring various talents from students in different performing arts groups on campus, including music, dance, and much, much more. It took place in Sweeney Concert Hall. All proceeds went to the fund drive, whose target is to help children in domestic violence situations seek and receive the sort of help and care that they need.

We hope that with all of your help, and support, we can keep up the enthusiasm until the very end!

"I say if it is going to be done, let’s do it. Let’s not put it in the hands of fate."
--Anita Baker
Community Service Fair a Success!
by Eliza Brink

The spring S.O.S. Community Service Fair was a huge success. About thirty agencies were represented at the fair, and the turnout of students was very impressive. The Fair’s main strength is the range of volunteer opportunities that it presents to students. At this fair, this diversity of agencies was especially apparent. We had some of the agencies that are always popular with Smith students, such as YWCA, the Greenfield Animal Shelter and Necessities/Necesidades (now called Safe Passage), but we also welcomed some new agencies that have not been represented by S.O.S. in the past such as the Institute for Science and Interdisciplinary Studies (ISIS), the Massachusetts Anti-Stigma Campaign, and the Arts Explorium. It is especially important that Smith students know that these newly affiliated agencies offer volunteer opportunities.

ISIS is an agency that “makes science more democratic, inclusive, values-explicit, and puts it to work serving people in local and international communities.” It has worked with such projects as the Secoya Survival Project in Ecuador, the Military Waste Cleanup project, and the renewable energy project.

The Anti-Stigma Campaign is an organization that does educational illness. It also leads workshops, monitors the media. It is looking for a center for hands-on exploration in the arts and sciences. It is looking for volunteers in three areas: “example setters” – people who engage in their own work/play and are available to inspire others; “orientation guides” – people who receive special training in skill areas and provide direction to one or two people at a time in those areas; and volunteers to help catalogue books.

Finally, the Arts Explorium is an agency that does educational illness. It also leads workshops, monitors the media. It is looking for a center for hands-on exploration in the arts and sciences. It is looking for volunteers in three areas: “example setters” – people who engage in their own work/play and are available to inspire others; “orientation guides” – people who receive special training in skill areas and provide direction to one or two people at a time in those areas; and volunteers to help catalogue books.

The agencies that were represented at the Fair were very appreciative of all the students who attended. Here are just some of the many comments made:

"What a great resource for our volunteer program!" --Donna Waterman, VINS
"It has been great meeting eager volunteers!" --Susan Bellantuoni, Greenfield Animal Shelter
"A great evening with great interest--lots of wonderful people!" --Nicole Horton, Hamilton Learning Center

We appreciate all of the agency representatives who came to talk to Smith students about volunteer opportunities, as well as all of the students affiliated with SOS. If you are interested in volunteering at any of these agencies, please contact the S.O.S. office at x4595 or arrange to meet with Director of Volunteer Services Tiertza-Leah Shwartz x2758.
Become a part of the S.O.S. Board!

Are you interested in planning and coordinating S.O.S. activities next year? Then apply to be on the 2001-2002 student Board! There are ten positions and two internships available; pick up an application in the S.O.S. office. Applications are due March 16th, so hurry! Questions? Call the S.O.S. office x4595 or x2759.

Dates to Remember!

Fund Drive:
February 15- March 15

Community Education Luncheons:
April 10th (Noon to 1:00PM)

CSIP applications!
Smith College Community Service Internship Program applications are now available in the S.O.S. office. CSIP combines action, reflection, and learning to provide students with an intensive, community-based internship at a local non-profit for 4-6 hours per week. $2,000 stipend for the year. Questions? x4595