

National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Introduction and Organizational History

The National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women was established in response to a growing need for a more effective and organized approach to justice issues affecting battered women who have killed or assaulted their abusers while attempting to protect themselves against brutal and life-threatening violence or who have been coerced into crime. Founded in 1987, the Clearinghouse is the first and only national organization devoted to providing critical assistance, resources, and support to battered women who, as a result of their victimization and survival efforts, face prosecution by the same criminal justice system that previously failed to protect them from their abuser's violence.

The National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women seeks to prevent the double victimization of battered women charged with crimes by providing comprehensive services to them and to members of their defense teams. The National Clearinghouse staff provides direct technical assistance and consultation to defense teams nationally; offers a comprehensive resource bank of information regarding battered women's defense issues; provides direct support to battered women in prison; coordinates a national network of advocates working with battered women defendants; and provides training both to members of the criminal justice community and to the public at large regarding the unique experiences of battered women defendants.

During 1987 the Clearinghouse established a national office in Philadelphia, hired full-time staff, obtained funding support through foundations and individual contributors, and became fully operational. Since that time, the National Clearinghouse has been a hub of activity.

In the past six years, the Clearinghouse has grown into a major national resource, information, and advocacy center. Never again, due in large part to the efforts of the National Clearinghouse, will battered women who are facing trial or are currently incarcerated be "out of sight", and therefore "out of mind." Now battered women who have been charged with crimes are included on many social justice agendas across the country thanks to the National Clearinghouse's continued efforts to ensure that battered women defendants remain a national priority.

The Board, Advisory Council, and Staff of the National Clearinghouse are a major strength of the organization. Its members not only include many of the leading national experts in the field, but also reflect the diversity of groups working on battered women's defense issues. This group includes defense attorneys, expert witnesses, jury trial consultants, domestic violence survivors, and battered women's activists. The Board and Advisory Council members of the National Clearinghouse provide technical assistance, collaborate on research tasks, and assist in developing training curricula and resource materials.