

For battered wives, a safe place to stay

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terers and the wives. "Their childhood stories are horrendous," she says. "The men are frightened, ineffective, unhappy people. Both the men and women don't have friends and are lonely."

That's why she is trying to form a couples group and a men's group. "These men are hurting, too," she says. "They can't express their feelings and communicate, and groups are often less threatening than one-on-one therapy where someone is singled out."

But the lack of money and of job skills continues to block independence for the women. "They don't have power, they can't even hire a lawyer to get their children back," she says.

The children are also a deep concern. "The children of violence suffer terribly," she says. Every single child needs help. They're nervous,

"What we want them to do is to feel good about themselves. If people feel good about themselves, they don't need to take their insecurities out on one another."

— Laurie Michel.

insecure, and frightened. Many have already been battered themselves."

An abuser can be of any profession and any type personality, says Ms. Ramos, the 40-year-old founder of SOS. "They're victims themselves and cowards. Ninety-three percent of them were battered as children. The macho types let you know where they stand. But it's the doctors, lawyers, professionals who are so deceiving and charming, you wouldn't believe they are violent. Then when they go to court they have friends to help their case."

Ms. Ramos, who is divorced, began taking battered women into her home in 1970, pestered, then campaigned until the Bergen County Board of Freeholders funded a center four years ago. She is still fighting.

"My salary is under \$17,000 and I'm director," she says. Mostly she is concerned about the fact that it is the only shelter. "Space is at a premium here," she says. "And the wives we're getting are just the tip of the iceberg in the problem of wife battering."

"I guess we could use everything — except roaches," Ms. Ramos says as she waters an African violet plant in her tiny office. "Donations of money, food, and community support from peo-

says a 27-year-old woman who stabbed her friend with scissors after he had dangled the window by her feet.

Although some drawbacks exist — screaming children racing around and all thefts — most of the women are grateful. Ramos fought for the shelter.

"I'm learning about my feelings and the fact that there are different types of people," says one woman. "I used to give, give, whenever I needed help, all I got was

ple who can donate a room as a second-stage house when the women are ready to leave here."

Donations of clothing come in from women's clubs. The clothing is sold at the shelter's thrift shop at 673 Cedar Lane, Teaneck — after the women have sorted through it.

Meanwhile, everyone takes a turn at the cooking and the cleaning up at the shelter. No dating is allowed.

"You're supposed to be getting peace of mind, thinking about what you're going to do with your life and especially with your kids,"