

SOS chairman looks to outside mediator

By Tricia Duffy
Staff Writer

TEANECK - The board of directors of Shelter Our Sisters (SOS) will consider calling in a third party to help negotiate a bitter dispute with its executive director which had culminated in a move for her dismissal, according to its chairman.

"It had been mentioned that an independent third party be brought in to examine both sides," chairman Ronald D'Angelo said last week. "If there is antagonism, and the director views us as enemies, perhaps a third party could neutralize those feelings and we would be able to negotiate, to come to a resolution. It has not been presented to the board, but I hope it will. It definitely has to be explored."

SOS founder Sandra Ramos rejected a board request in November that she

resign from her post as executive director and instead threatened a lawsuit if she were fired. A letter of dismissal, expected by Ms. Ramos for the past month, has not materialized, and D'Angelo now says it may never see the light of day.

But another member of the board, who did not wish to be named, reported two weeks ago that the consensus to dismiss Ms. Ramos had not changed. D'Angelo would not comment on those allegations.

Although a Jan. 8 board session has been tentatively set, the chairman said that Ms. Ramos's status will not be discussed at that time. He said he has "no idea at this point" what action the board will take.

Ramos willing

Ms. Ramos said Monday that she would "certainly be willing" to subject

the dispute to "fair and just" mediation. She has received no formal communication from the board on either its intention to dismiss her or the possibility of negotiations, she said.

"From what I have seen, the board is dedicated to continue what they're doing. They don't even talk to me. From the feeling I have gotten from them, they are adamant about firing me," Ms. Ramos said. "He (D'Angelo) could just be saying that as a ploy, but I would certainly be willing to do it, if they are serious."

Ms. Ramos complained that the board took away most of her administrative duties during recent changes in her job description, and that it has created an unnecessary bureaucracy which no longer responds to the emergency needs of battered women. She will negotiate under "open" circumstances for "a program which is warm and caring," she said.

Mrs. Ramos suggested board member Frances Treanor as a mediator "because she is fair and I respect her." Ms. Treanor and Loretta Weinberg are the only two board members who do not support her dismissal, according to Ms. Ramos.

D'Angelo last week pointed out that Ms. Ramos had created the board of directors "as a necessary evil" in order to make SOS eligible for government funding. She had originally named "friends" to the board, the chairman said, thinking that "she could do what she wanted to do and the board would cover for her."

Overwhelming interest

"She may think that the institutionalization of the program was not her own creation, but it was," D'Angelo said. "In most cases it is the board of directors which selects the executive director, not the other way around."

Ms. Ramos is "accountable" to the board, the chairman added, with the board, in turn, accountable to "whoever funds the organization." The Bergen County Board of Freeholders could "eliminate" the board if it wished, he

suggested.

D'Angelo acknowledged a barrage of letters and telephone inquiries "from everyone including The New York Times" about Ms. Ramos's status.

"At this point I am responding to her response. The reports are going back and forth," he said. "It's overwhelming — the amount of people involved at this point," he added. "I can answer only one inquiry a day. That is all I have the time for."

SOS, established in 1970 by Ms. Ramos in her Hackensack residence, is now a \$500,000 a year agency which oversees homes in both Teaneck and Ramsey. It receives funding from The United Way, the Bergen County Community Development program and federal Title 20 grants.

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