

Battered-wife group gains in bid for funds

By Nadine Joseph
Staff Writer

A feminist group that has been caring for battered wives for eight years has received preliminary approval for state funds, winning out over the Bergen County antipoverty agency.

The state Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) is expected to award \$86,000 to Shelter Our Sisters (SOS), the Hackensack-based group that was involved in a court battle with the city. A Superior Court judge in July had ordered SOS leader Sandy Ramos not to use her home at 133 Cedar Ave. as a shelter for battered wives.

Federal funds used

According to DYFS sources, a state advisory committee recommended that SOS receive the funds instead of the Bergen Community Action Program (CAP) because of the feminist group's long experience with battered wives.

Since May, CAP has operated a \$174,000 program for battered wives with federal funds. The program has had to house women in hotels because it hasn't been able to establish a shelter. The CAP program is funded only for a year.

'Tug-of-war'

The recommendation follows what observers describe as a political tug-of-war between SOS and the county freeholders, who support CAP's plan to operate shelters for battered wives in Bergen County.

The two groups had submitted rival proposals for a state-funded regional shelter to the Bergen County Coalition for Title 20. The county coalition makes recommendations to the state advisory committee, which sends a proposal to the DYFS for final approval.

According to minutes of a county meeting, the coalition members criticized duplication of services by SOS and CAP.



Sandy Ramos

Canadian shelters studied

One of the coalition members wanted to know why CAP had investigated shelters in Toronto when an existing agency, SOS, was providing the services in Bergen County. Ruth Dawson, another coalition member, asked why a second program had been initiated by CAP despite the existence of SOS.

The coalition voted 6 to 3 to urge the freeholders to give the feminist group the matching funds required to get funds.

The freeholders refused to fund SOS in May, but they approved a CAP proposal to get a \$174,000 federal grant from the U.S. Department of Labor.

Site opposed

Since then, CAP has been trying to establish a county shelter in a 22-room boarding house on Union Street in Hackensack. Hackensack officials, confronted by public opposition, have refused to accept the shelter.

SOS members and supporters of SOS have been angered all along at the freeholders' selection of CAP and the slow progress toward helping battered wives.

Ms. Ramos, who runs the SOS center, appeared before the freeholders earlier this year when her shelter was closed by court order and criticized the county for its failure to establish a new shelter.