The Network Against Sexual and Domestic Abuse sadly says goodbye to Natasha Collins, our 2008-2009 AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer. We will miss Natasha and the laughter she brings to the office every day. She did amazing work for us this year, with her main project being establishing a peer education program and curriculum about dating violence and healthy relationships in Belgrade Middle and High School (see page 2). Natasha’s last day at The Network is July 16. Join us in thanking her for everything she gave to The Network this year. We wish you all the best in your next adventure, Natasha!

Quite a bit, we think. After extensive market research, our suspicion that The Network is a confusing name that is not immediately recognizable in the community was confirmed. So The Network began an undertaking with Classic Ink (www.classicink.biz), to give ourselves a makeover. The project includes not only a new name, but a logo, brand, and marketing strategy as well—basically a whole new identity for The Network!

The first phase of this process is complete, including the market research and choosing a new name. Stay tuned for the unveiling of our new name this fall!

We are excited about the future and the plans being developed that will create a more powerful presence, and help us help even more people, in the Gallatin Valley community. Thank you to everyone in the community who has provided input and participated in the research phase of this project. We can’t wait to share the “new Network” with all of you. And thank you, Classic Ink, for your generosity, endless time and energy, and passion for The Network and this project!

Domestic Violence and the Recession
A talk with The Network’s Legal Advocate about the impact of the economic downturn on services and need.

BY NATASHA COLLINS

Every day we hear about the widespread ripple effects of the current economic situation. Perhaps it comes as no surprise that a rise in domestic violence incidents, as noted by The Network and other domestic violence agencies, should be added to the list. Domestic violence advocates are quick to point out that an economic downturn does not cause abuse—abuse is a widespread issue in any economic climate—but that it may be the trigger that escalates an abusive situation and puts victims in added danger. Barriers facing victims who try to leave their abusers are also multiplied in a weak economy. These include fear of homelessness (most homeless women are domestic violence survivors), inability to provide for or keep their children, and lack of employment opportunities.

No one knows the increased demand for assistance and resources during these uncertain times better than The Network’s Legal Advocate, Krystal Redmond-Sherrill. Unlike other Network staff, her office is located in the Law and Justice Center, and while Krystal is not an attorney, she offers clients her expertise navigating the legal system surrounding protective orders (OPs). While a great tool for helping keep some victims of abuse safe, the process for obtaining an OP can be confusing and, at times, alienating.

(Continued on page 4)
Throughout the year, The Network has been training middle and high school age students in peer education so they gain the skills to teach other students in a classroom setting. The Belgrade program was very successful over the 2008-2009 school year, with every Belgrade Middle School 7th and 8th grade student receiving bullying and media education, and every freshman at Belgrade High School learning about domestic and dating abuse.

In addition to these trainings, The Network compiled information through surveys in these schools regarding the prevalence of teen dating violence. Unfortunately the survey results were not surprising, with 44% of Belgrade High School freshmen having either directly witnessed or been victims of abuse. Given these results, we would expect the number of students who know someone who has been a victim, but have not necessarily witnessed the abuse directly, to be even higher. This is evidence that there is a need for further education and support for students on this topic.

The good news is that the peer educators did an excellent job and most students learned more about what to do if they witness, or are victims of, this crime. 79% of freshmen said they would feel “very confident” or “confident” in helping a friend get out of an abusive relationship after these presentations. Students were also very receptive to this type of education, with about 70% of students reporting that they preferred the student-taught peer education model to a traditional, adult-led class about these issues.

Not only were the peer educators effective in informing their peers about dating violence, but they were also successful in increasing awareness of community resources, such as The Network. Without a prompt, about 40% of students named The Network as a resource to which they would refer a friend experiencing dating or domestic violence issues.

Local surveys also indicate that high school girls experience relationship violence at double the rate of high school boys, a reality paralleling national data. In fact, 62% of Belgrade High School freshman girls had been victims or directly witnessed abuse, as compared to 29% of boys who had been victims of, or witnessed, abuse.

Next year, The Network hopes to expand dating violence education to other schools in the Gallatin Valley, as well as compile more specific and detailed data as to the nature of this abuse. This information will help ensure that we are providing the information that students need most.
The Network announces the 8th Annual Drop & Trot benefit event on Saturday, September 26, 2009 at 9am. Drop & Trot has become a favorite event in the Gallatin Valley and this year we have an option for everyone. Choose from a family fun run/dog jog (or walk!), 5K with (optional) pushups that deduct time, or 10K on a beautiful town course—all while raising funds to support survivors of domestic abuse. And dogs are welcome at any of the three events! Drop & Trot participants may register online at www.active.com. Registration fee is $25 in advance and $35 on or after September 21 (includes a t-shirt). All events begin and end at Bogert Park in Bozeman. An award ceremony will follow with age group and overall winner awards. Course maps are available at www.thenetworkmt.org. Join us for another great day at Bogert!

How can you support our work?

The shelter is always in need of items that will enhance the lives of the families that stay with us. All donations are appreciated and used by women and children in need. Due to the small size of our shelter, we are unable to store large quantities of items, such as clothing, and therefore are occasionally unable to accept certain donations. If you are able to help provide any of the following items, please contact Heather at 586-4111. Thank you.
- trac phones
- pre-paid phone cards
- toilet paper
- unopened cleaning supplies
- laundry detergent

We also accept used cell phone donations at any time. We have a drop-off site at Insty-Prints in downtown Bozeman (39 South Tracy) or contact us at 586-7689 and we will arrange a pick-up.

Introducing Britney Meiers: The Network’s 2009-2010 AmeriCorps VISTA

Hello All,

As you know, Natasha’s VISTA year at The Network is coming to an end. I’m Britney and I was selected to take over the position. Though I know I have some big shoes to fill, I am excited to get started on the peer education program that she has put so much time and effort into.

I was born and raised in Southwest Colorado in the town of Durango where I graduated from high school in 2006. Our school district offered a fast-track program where high school students could start taking classes at our local college, Fort Lewis. Upon graduation from high school I was itching to get as far from home as possible and was accepted to the University of Hawaii at Hilo on the Big Island. After only one semester my funds were dwindling and I could hardly afford to live in paradise any longer, so I found my way back home to Durango, where I finished my BA in psychology at Fort Lewis in May of 2009 with honors.

During my college career I volunteered with our local Planned Parenthood in the Education Department working with our community. I was also active in the school club, Uniting Students thru Wellness, where we advocated healthy lifestyles to our peers on campus. Some things that I enjoy are running, reading, writing, hiking, singing (even though some would prefer I didn’t), and laughing.

I feel very honored to have been selected to be the next VISTA member for The Network Against Sexual and Domestic Abuse. Thank you, and if you have any further questions don’t hesitate to get in touch with me at The Network. Looking forward to meeting everyone! Brit Meiers
Domestic Violence and the Recession continued

“It’s crucial for people in domestic violence situations to feel supported because they don’t have anyone else to turn to. They are often isolated and don’t have the support of friends or family.” Krystal pointed out.

Since the economic downturn, Krystal has had an even more challenging task than before, with an influx of clients requiring help with orders of protection. As of May, The Network had already helped with 217 temporary and permanent orders this fiscal year, 55 more than the number of orders of protection granted last year at this time. Conversely, the number of shelter nights spent in The Network’s safe house has dropped. In fact, when compared to March of last year, the shelter only housed victims for 231 nights through March 2009, as opposed to last year’s 1559 nights.

These numbers are evidence of what The Network suspected: that while women are less inclined to leave their homes and come into shelter, due to fear of eventual homelessness or poverty, more are seeking orders of protection. OPs prohibit abusers from entering the victim’s residence, a measure that can keep victims safer in their home. “Resources are scarce so you can’t just pick up and walk,” according to Krystal.

Krystal says that there are not as many options available to victims of domestic violence as there might have been before the economic downturn. Victims are often trapped in their situation due to increased financial dependence on their abuser. She works to make victims aware of their options, and show them that there is still hope and support even during difficult economic times. Krystal even sits in court with clients to provide them with support and advocacy. “The more resources and ammunition they have the better off they’ll be and the more sustainable and able to stay out of that abusive household,” she said.

Krystal sees the need for legal advocacy as something necessary to the success of victims of domestic violence. “If this position wasn’t there, there’d be a huge number of people who would just be handed paper work and told, ‘here you go.’ You’d be amazed at the number of people who don’t know they can go to The Network or get other support,” she said.

Krystal not only helps clients with orders of protection, but also refers them to the free counseling, support groups, and shelter The Network provides. She also connects clients with other community resources, such as supervised visitation with Hearts and Homes and housing assistance through HRDC. Ultimately, no matter the economic situation, her primary goal is the safety and success of her clients. “I think people deserve to be safe in their home and deserve to know there are some resources available to them.”

The Network’s Newest Volunteers

We are excited to welcome our newest group of volunteers to The Network. Five women completed the most recent training at the end of May, and we are thrilled to have them join The Network team!

Please join us in welcoming Melissa, Kelly, Liz, Cailin, and Stacy. This group of volunteers is full of energy, enthusiasm, and compassion — thank you all for sharing your time and talent with our clients and residents!

While our newest volunteers are shadowing staff and becoming accustomed to The Network, they jumped in with both feet to help build a new garden at the shelter. Thank you especially to Melissa, Kelly, and Cailin for all your work (and sweat!) toward creating this place for our residents to enjoy during their stay.

Thank you also to Langohr’s Flowerland, Cashman Nursery, and Kenyon Noble for donating all the supplies that made our new garden possible!