

**COMMUNITY ACTION**

Supervised visitation/safe exchange center to open in Auburn this summer

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“Children of batterers can be at just as much risk psychologically, sexually, and even physically after the couple splits up as they were when the family was still together. In fact, many children experience the most dangerous victimization from the abuser at this point.” — Lundy Bancroft, seasoned workshop leader, consultant and author on domestic abuse and child abuse

When a relationship with an abusive partner ends, the violence, stalking and intimidation often escalate, thereby making the post-separation period a dangerous time for victims of domestic violence. Adult victims are at further risk when they have children in common with their batterer. Court-ordered visitations and exchanges can sometimes offer the batterer an opportunity to further the abusive behavior, leaving the victim vulnerable to verbal and/or physical violence. Additionally, this behavior is often times carried out in front of the children, making them witnesses to what could be a traumatic incident.

In order to increase victim and children safety, Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency, in partnership with Cayuga County, applied for and received funding from the Office on Violence Against Women to open a new supervised visitation/safe exchange center. The center policies and procedures have been guided by feedback from potential participants in the program through a community needs assessment and input from the consulting committee, which includes representatives from Cayuga County, local courts, law enforcement agencies, lawyers and other human service agencies in the community. After a yearlong planning process, the center is nearing its opening.

The supervised visitation/safe exchange center will provide a monitored, supervised location to facilitate visitation and exchange of children in situations involving domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, child abuse or stalking. The project goal is to keep victimized adults and children safe from batterers' violence and abusive tactics for the duration of the co-parenting relationship. CSCAA's Domestic Violence Services component provides years of knowledge and experience working in the field of domestic violence. Through this understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking, the impact of domestic violence on children and the importance of holding offenders accountable for their actions, this component has proven to be a natural fit for the implementation of the Supervised Visitation/Safe Exchange Program.

The primary goal of the center is to provide access to a safe, monitored location for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and/or child abuse to drop off/pick up their children for visitation/exchange with an abusive former partner. The program's second goal is to reduce children's vulnerability to violence and trauma before, during

and after visitations and exchanges. The center will enhance the safety of the children and adult victims in these situations, filling a current gap in services in our county.

The center is expected to open in the summer of 2013 and will be open approximately 20 hours per week, operating weeknights and weekend days/evenings. If you have any questions about the center contact Vicky Meyers, the center supervisor, at 255-1703 ext. 158.