

## Sukkah of Peace Event

On October 16, 2003, JF&CS offered a community-wide event celebrating the work of Kol Isha. The Sukkah of Peace Event was held at Temple Israel in Boston and was sponsored by Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC), Women of Reform Judaism at Temple Israel, Women's Philanthropy at CJP, as well as several private donors.

The event focused on the community's efforts to build a "sukkat shalom," or shelter of peace. As a "sukkat shalom," Kol Isha has provided a refuge of support and safety from domestic violence for over 130 women throughout Greater Boston. In a candle lighting ceremony lead by Amy Chartock, event chair, parallels were drawn between the temporary structures in which the Israelites lived when fleeing the oppression of slavery in Egypt, and the temporary shelters victims live in when fleeing an abusive relationship.

The keynote speaker was Carol Goodman Kaufman, author of *Sins of Omission*, a new book about domestic violence in the Jewish community. The event was to have included a speech delivered by a Jewish survivor of domestic violence who had received services from Kol Isha. However, she was not able to participate in the event due to threats she received from her ex-husband. Nicole Lesser, director of Kol Isha, delivered the text of this survivor's speech in her absence.

If you are interested in purchasing a copy of Carol Goodman Kaufman's book, *Sins of Omission*, contact Nicole at 617-558-1278.

## Mom and Her Two-Day-Old Baby Brought To Safety



Sandra is a 31-year-old woman who was referred to Kol Isha by her therapist because of her husband's daily emotional and physical abuse. When she began working with the program, she was 8 months pregnant. The abuse was so bad she often slept in the hallway of her apartment building to try to get away. Kol Isha staff discussed her options to stay or leave before the baby was born, and created a few different safety and crisis plans, but the barriers to leave were too difficult for Sandra to overcome.

Staff went to visit Sandra in the hospital the day after she gave birth to the baby, and returned the following day as she prepared to leave the hospital. Sandra disclosed that she was terrified to go home, fearing that her husband may hurt or even rape her. Our advocate suggested that she could stay at a temporary safe home to rest for a few days so she could make a decision about her future, which now included a two-day-old baby. She agreed to go to the safe home; however, there were many obstacles to get through before that could happen. The biggest challenge was that her husband would be there in less than twenty minutes.

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helping her to cope with conflicting feelings  
and helping her to heal.*

The incredible staff at the hospital responded immediately and she was discharged without his knowledge. They switched her room and gave her a new last name, while a car waited for her in the back of the hospital to pick her up and drive her to the safe home. Kol Isha provided a car seat as well as some gift certificates for clothing and food as she had to flee with nothing. She left the hospital through the back door and drove to safety.

Sandra now needed to make a more permanent plan, and after four nights in the safe home, she remembered what it felt like to be safe at night. Again, her advocate discussed options. Sandra was able to get into a shelter thanks to Kol Isha and receive even more support. Kol Isha continues to work with Sandra daily, helping her to cope with conflicting feelings and helping her to heal.

## Welcome,

*Clients often say to me, "I could not do this without you." Sometimes this is said as a thank you, and other times it is said with a touch of embarrassment. I always tell clients that if it were easy to leave an abusive relationship, there would not be the incredible network of providers across the state, set up to provide the comprehensive services needed to get safe. It is important that everyone know, clients and community members alike, that it is extremely complicated to break free from abuse, and that it is almost impossible to do alone.*

*The same is true for those of us who provide these services. Without the support of our colleagues within JF&CS, other domestic violence providers and our community partners, Kol Isha could never provide the comprehensive, culturally competent and religiously sensitive services that we have been providing for the last four years. Through our collaborations with shelters, hospitals, pro-bono legal service programs, court victim advocates, police departments, coalitions, as well as agency and private donors, we are able to provide our clients with numerous services including counseling, safety planning, financial assistance, legal and medical assistance and support groups.*

*In this newsletter, we highlight some of the fabulous people and organizations that work closely with us to help weave the safety net for victims of domestic violence. They are extremely generous with their time, guidance and support and always work cooperatively to meet the needs of victims. I am honored to be a part of this safety net and am grateful for all the assistance that our partners provide.*

Sincerely,



Nicole Lesser  
Director of Kol Isha

## Up Close with Amy Chartock



When Amy Chartock was invited to chair the Sukkah of Peace Event honoring Kol Isha, it seemed like the natural culmination of so many years of involvement both with Women's Division of CJP and the domestic violence arena. Trained as a social worker, Amy's introduction to domestic violence came when she worked on women's health at Brigham and Women's Hospital. Her connection to the issue of domestic violence in the Jewish community was initially forged through her work in Women's Division of CJP. As a volunteer, Amy got involved with programming which brought Israeli domestic violence professionals to Boston to participate in a professional conference addressing best practices for domestic violence service providers in Israel. This conference was an early demonstration to the lay community in Boston that domestic violence is an issue in the Jewish community. Of her own experience coming to terms with this reality, Amy says, "Originally, I saw it as not in my backyard. At some point, I made a transition to seeing it as happening in my community."

It was around the time of this conference that Amy was asked to represent Women's Division on the Interfaith Committee of the Governor's Council on Domestic Violence. Kol Isha was in its infancy when she began work on the Governor's Council and Amy was invited to come in and brainstorm on future events and opportunities for additional support. She eventually became a member of Kol Isha's Resource Advisory Committee, which works to ensure that the program continues to address growing service demands.

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Amy praises Kol Isha for being "progressive," citing its work on teen dating violence. She sees Kol Isha's efforts to educate young people in high school on appropriate relationship behaviors as "right on the mark with its proactive approach." In Kol Isha's case, it has been so successful at outreach that it has been flooded with requests for services since its inception. Amy sees helping people to understand the complex nature of abuse, fundraising and legal services as the main challenges facing domestic violence service organizations. Organizations such as Kol Isha need access to ample legal advice — either pro bono, or reasonably priced — to adequately service its population.

Summing up her relationship with Kol Isha, Amy says, "Recovering from domestic violence seems like an insurmountable task to me. I think it just gnaws at that vulnerability [that we all feel]. When I hear these stories, I think there by the grace of G-d go I."

## Kol Isha Awarded MOVA Grant

Kol Isha was recently awarded a \$57,000 grant from the Massachusetts Office of Victims Assistance (MOVA) so JF&CS can continue to meet the growing needs of Jewish and Russian victims of domestic violence. Through this grant, Kol Isha was able to hire an additional full-time domestic violence specialist. Kol Isha's newest staffer, Judith Schneider Nunez, conducts domestic violence counseling for individual clients and plays a critical role in Kol Isha's outreach and advocacy programs. In January, Judith began facilitating new support groups for Jewish women with controlling partners and will soon offer another support group for Jewish female teens.

She is also implementing the Kol Isha Teen Safe Program which empowers young people in opposite or same-sex relationships to choose these relationships based on mutual respect, to recognize patterns of communication that are healthy versus controlling, and to see the direct influence that the media and our culture have on their concepts of the "ideal relationship." In collaboration with Jewish day schools, synagogues, regional youth groups, Teen JCC and college Hillels, Kol Isha's Teen Safe Program reaches out to our youth wherever Jewish teens can be found.

## New Initiatives at Kol Isha: The Family Court Project

Over the last few months, Kol Isha has turned its attention to the complex problem of the treatment of victims of domestic violence in custody dispute cases involving child sexual abuse. All too often, the family courts are failing to protect children from physical and sexual abuse by the same person who is battering their mother. Frequently, spouse abusers and child abusers convince family court officials that the battered woman is an unfit parent, leveling false claims out of anger and feelings of vengeance. The result is the award of sole custody of the child to the abusing parent. Kol Isha is working to address this problem by seeking out opportunities, such as the Governor's Commission on Sexual and Domestic Violence, to collaborate with other organizations working in the sphere of domestic violence and child physical and sexual violence.

## Jewish Women International: Pursuing Truth, Justice and Righteousness: A Call to Action. The First International Conference on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community

Nicole Lesser, director of Kol Isha, was invited to participate in a panel presentation and discussion highlighting the role of the Jewish community in response to domestic abuse at JWI's international conference in Baltimore, MD. Nicole spoke about the history of the Jewish Domestic Violence Coalition of Greater Boston and shared strategies for successful interagency collaboration, along with Harriet Kantrowitz, past president of the Coalition.

## Teen Action Campaign

Kol Isha has been asked to join the National Advisory Board of the Teen Action Campaign to end relationship violence. The Teen Action Campaign is a media campaign focused on teen relationship violence created through collaboration with teens. In addition to outdoor billboard materials, TV and print ads, printed collateral materials have been developed for the campaign and are available to teens for use in creating peer leadership programs in their schools. National Advisory Board members are collaborating on plans for launching this innovative effort nationally. For a look at the Teen Action Campaign, please visit its website at [www.seeitandstopit.org](http://www.seeitandstopit.org).



## Governor's Commission on Sexual and Domestic Violence

Marina Livshits, Psy.D., Russian domestic violence specialist at Kol Isha, and Nicole Lesser, director of Kol Isha, recently joined the Governor's Commission on Sexual and Domestic Violence. Nicole represents Kol Isha on the Child and Adolescent Committee, while Marina sits on the Immigrant and Refugee Committee. Their participation on the Governor's Commission brings Kol Isha to the table, working with people from all over Massachusetts, on state level issues and initiatives related to sexual and domestic violence.

# Kol Isha and Its Partners

Kol Isha is pleased to collaborate in its mission with a number of community organizations. Together, Kol Isha and its partners and supporters provide a host of services and resources for victims of domestic violence. Listed below are some examples of collaborations which are invaluable to Kol Isha in serving its clients.

## Women's Division of Combined Jewish Philanthropies

A long-time supporter of Kol Isha, Women's Division of CJP jumpstarted the program by bringing together individual donors from the community committed to this issue. As an organization, CJP participates in education and outreach on issues of domestic violence in the Jewish community. Most recently, Women's Division of CJP co-sponsored and publicized the Sukkah of Peace event.

## Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center

A member of the Jewish Domestic Violence Coalition of Greater Boston, BIDMC also has a direct partnership with Kol Isha through its Center for Violence Prevention. The Center's Safe Transition Program and Rape Crisis Program uniquely position BIDMC to provide an emergency response to domestic violence

victims. Through a close reciprocal relationship, BIDMC and Kol Isha refer clients to each other's support groups and offer cross-consultation. Through this complimentary relationship, BIDMC and Kol Isha offer comprehensive services to domestic violence survivors in the form of crisis response offered by BIDMC and long-term assistance provided by Kol Isha.

## REACH

Kol Isha and REACH, formerly the Support Committee for Battered Women, have enjoyed a long collaboration. Currently, REACH (Refuge Education Advocacy and Change), a local shelter for victims of domestic violence, co-facilitates support groups with Kol Isha. Most recently, Kol Isha and REACH offered the Support Group for Jewish Women with Controlling Partners. REACH also safely shelters Kol Isha's Russian clients enabling these women to remain in Boston's Russian speaking community.

## Greater Boston Legal Services and Women's Bar Foundation

Kol Isha works closely with Greater Boston Legal Services and the Women's Bar Foundation to secure pro-bono domestic violence attorneys for Kol Isha's clients.

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