

# The Freeman Flash

NOVEMBER 2013

ELIZABETH FREEMAN CENTER'S OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

ISSUE XXIV

## Putting it all on the Line



As part of Elizabeth Freeman Center's October efforts for Domestic Violence Awareness Month, EFC's Nakeida Bethel-Smith led a Berkshire Community College forum and engaged students and staff in a weeklong clothesline project. Students created a gallery of t-shirts with messages about domestic violence to bring attention to the many ways domestic violence affects us all. In an email afterward, Nakeida reflected on the week's events, noting:

*....I met a lot of survivors who weren't afraid to share their stories, so many of them who talked about how we helped them tremendously. [On] a domestic violence panel Thursday, ...one young woman spoke about being a child witness and how she received services through our shelter. Every story was moving, heartbreaking, powerful, and at the same time, one of triumph.... it's stories like these that rejuvenate me to continue with prevention education. A common theme throughout each of their stories was they wanted to live. They encouraged others in the audience to know they are strong enough, courageous enough to leave, and most importantly, that they are not alone...*



## Phoning a Friend

Elizabeth Freeman Center is the proud recipient of a \$10,000 grant from the Verizon Foundation to support our prevention education work in area middle and high schools. We thank Verizon for recognizing the importance of educating our youth about healthy relationships, respect, and how to recognize abuse dynamics – this work is so important to breaking the cycle of violence.

Verizon also donates money to Elizabeth Freeman Center for each used cellphone we send to them (so please bring us your used phones!) and provides us with refurbished emergency cellphones through its HopeLine program. For clients without a phone or whose phone might be monitored by an abuser, these phones are a vital lifeline.



**Pittsfield** - 43 Francis Ave.  
(413) 499-2425  
**Gt. Barrington** - 40 Railroad St.  
(413) 429-8190  
**North Adams** - 85 Main St.  
(413) 663-7459  
**24 hour hotline 1-866-401-2425**



## EFC is on the Web!



Get ready, world, Elizabeth Freeman Center is now online! Visit [www.elizabethfreemancenter.org](http://www.elizabethfreemancenter.org) today - you can learn about our services, read up on our history, browse our upcoming events, donate, and find out about ways to get involved. Special thanks to Enrico Spada for working with us to design such a beautiful and easy to use site. Note that the site has an escape bar if you have to leave it quickly.

## The Gift of Giving

Hanukkah is just around the corner, and Christmas and Kwanzaa aren't far behind! In this



Deborah Ronglien

spirit, we ask that you consider becoming a sponsor in our **Holiday Project** to help ensure that our clients and their children are able to enjoy the holidays this season.

Because survivors often flee violence with few possessions and may be far from home or support, this time of year can be difficult. Our Holiday Project passes a client's wish list along to a sponsor, who scours the stores for good deals on items like bed sheets and children's toys to provide to the client and her family. Call Linda S. at (413) 499-2425 to brighten the mood and lighten the load of a survivor this season.

Supported locally by: Berkshire United Way • Northern Berkshire United Way • Williamstown Community Chest • City of Pittsfield • Verizon Foundation • Town of Great Barrington • Berkshire Life Charitable Foundation • Women's Fund of W. Mass. • Aria Foundation • The Green Foundation • Berkshire Bank Foundation • Many community members, groups, businesses, and towns •

## Volunteer Appreciation



Elizabeth Freeman Center shelter residents and other clients created beautiful gratitude key chains to present to our volunteers.

On October 22, Elizabeth Freeman Center held a volunteer appreciation event to honor over 40 volunteers who give their time and effort to support our clients and our work. Volunteers staff our hotline, organize donations, do community outreach, and provide childcare and host other fun activities with the children in our shelter, among many other things. All complete a 40-hour hotline training prior to volunteering and continue to receive training throughout each year. Thank you to all our volunteers, past and present, you are the lifeblood of our organization!

### “Mumbet”: Part IV

With the help of local author Jana Laiz, we continue our series on the life of Elizabeth Freeman:

It is spring in 1781, and with new growth comes hope. Mumbet's arm has finally healed. The Massachusetts Constitution has been ratified - its principle that “all men are created free and equal” is now law. Knowing this, Mumbet makes the most important decision of her life. She can no longer live as a slave.



One market day, Little Bet at her side, she walks to Sheffield to ask the young lawyer Theodore Sedgwick to help her sue for her freedom under the new laws of the land. He agrees to take on her case, but tells her that as a woman she has few rights, so she should find another slave, a man, to sue along with her. That night, under cover of darkness, Mumbet seeks out Brom, a fellow slave, owned by Colonel Ashley's son, General Ashley. He agrees to join the suit.

Soon after, sheriffs arrive with writs of replevin issued to both Colonel and General Ashley, demanding the return of stolen property, that of Bet and Brom, to themselves. Both men argue that they are the lawful owners of said property and refuse to release their slaves without a bond. Days later, another writ is issued along with a bond, and Colonel Ashley has no choice but to allow Mumbet to leave until her case is tried in court.

Taking her daughter and meager belongings, Mumbet leaves the Ashley house and walks to the Sedgwicks, where she stays until the trial.

On August 21, 1781, *Brom & Bett vs. Ashley* is on the docket in the Great Barrington Court. The courthouse is packed with abolitionists and slave owners alike. Colonel Ashley's lawyers argue that Brom and Bet “are and were at the time of the original writ, the legal Negro servants of the said John Ashley during their lives.” Sedgwick argues that there was no law in Massachusetts that clearly established slavery in the first place, and that even if there were, the new Massachusetts Constitution would revoke it.

The trial lasts two full days and by its end, the judge and jury are convinced. Mumbet and Brom are free.

### Mass Legislature's Welfare Reform Wages War on the Poor

On November 8, without hearings or public discussion, the MA House Ways and Means Committee fast-tracked a welfare reform bill that had only been released on November 6th. The Senate passed a similar bill, through a similar fast-track process, in June. In spite of the incredible efforts of progressive legislators, including ours in the Berkshires (THANK YOU!), to fix the most egregious provisions, on the whole the bills increase barriers to aid rather than address the real needs of families living in poverty, seeming to conform to an old activist saying that our welfare system doesn't wage war on poverty, it wages war on the poor.

Access to help can mean the difference between safety and harm. Though we know that domestic violence exists at all economic levels, most victims suffer a precipitous drop in income due to the loss of the abuser's income, interruptions in employment, disruption of school and family support, or loss of child care. Too often families must turn to welfare benefits to survive, which are 60% below the poverty level. For a mother with two children, that's \$633 a month or \$7,596 a year. Studies have found that two thirds of those receiving welfare benefits are survivors of violence.

While the poverty rate in Massachusetts is 10.7%, the poverty rate for single parents with children, mostly moms with kids, is over 30%. Moms with kids are not poor because they like living in poverty. They are not poor because they are lazy or cheats or have too many children. Studies consistently show that women with children are poor due to violence, the emotional and physical injuries of violence, family responsibilities, the lack of transportation, the lack of child care, the dismal rate of child support payment, housing instability, disrupted education, and the lack of living wage jobs and leave policies. 99.99% of welfare benefits are properly paid and 99.98% of those who receive benefits are eligible.

Victims suffer abuse longer or return to the abuser if they cannot feed and shelter their children. If we are serious about helping victims escape and recover from violence, then we must stop “blaming the victim” and adopt serious and meaningful welfare reform.

