Breaking Silence, Building the Movement

Annual Report and Newsletter
OVER thirty-five years ago, a few small yet visionary seeds were planted which produced what has now become, as of our thirty-sixth year anniversary in 2009, an energized, thriving, community-based non-profit known as San Francisco Women Against Rape (SFWAR). From the organization’s inception, these seeds of hope were nurtured by an unwavering conviction that achieving a world without rape is possible, if the foundations for such violence—sexism, racism, classism/poverty, homophobia, and other debasing societal practices—are confronted and eradicated.

To survive and continue to evolve as SFWAR has, all the while facing the need for organizational growth, increasing funding and other challenges over the course of three and one-half decades of commitment to anti-rape and related anti-oppression direct service, education, advocacy and grassroots community-building, is indeed remarkable. As SFWAR co-founder Diana Block wrote in her recently published memoir, “Arm the Spirit: A Woman’s Journey Underground and Back,” “[i]n the beginning….[t]here were few models for us to draw upon, so we had to hammer out our own. We developed a three-pronged program to embody the different aspects of what we thought needed to be done…” These three key things were establishing a rape crisis line, a temporary shelter for women needing to get away from aggressive situations, and community education.

However, the tools needed to do this very important and much needed work over the course of time are substantial. What started out over thirty-five years ago as a basic rape crisis counseling hotline, temporary shelter and education-focused grassroots collective staffed by a handful of volunteers is now a community-based non-profit organization with a 10-person paid-staff and over 75 volunteers providing services to more than 7,500 individuals each year.

While SFWAR continues to provide vital services to survivors who are victims of rape and sexual assault, we have also responded in a timely manner to the shifting landscape of increasing challenges some of the most vulnerable populations face. With the launch of our Community Initiatives Program, SFWAR now seeks to provide more focused support services to those communities that face a disproportionately high rate of sexual violence (i.e. youth, immigrant women, queer women of color, the formerly incarcerated, and those who are marginally housed/homeless). We at SFWAR find ourselves incredibly proud, honored, and simultaneously more challenged to meet head on an increasingly complex and complicated array of socio-economic and political issues that make the need to stop violence against women and all individuals all the more pressing.

While the fundamental mission of SFWAR to do anti-rape work in various affected communities has remained unchanged over the years, we now ask ourselves, and also all of you, how can such work best be accomplished as we near the close of the first decade of the twenty-first century? Indeed, part of the solution lies in working together and committing ourselves to being more engaged in public service and community projects, whether this engagement be through a donation of money or time, or both where possible, to organizations like SFWAR.

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In 2008, I was honored to facilitate an 8-week writing workshop with survivors, the Fearless Words workshop, and then assist in the organizing of the 12th Annual Artists Against Rape. The women who participated in Fearless Words ranged in age, race, class, sexual orientation and experience with writing and experience with trauma. We used Pat Schneider’s Amherst Writers and Artists (AWA) workshop method (as described in her book Writing Alone and With Others). In these workshops, we build trust in a space in which we hold ourselves and each other in confidence. Writers have the structure and possibility of exercises offered by someone else, and the freedom of interpretation and play. We can then choose to read aloud our new writing, or not. If and when we choose to share what we’ve written, we know we will receive a warm and strong hearing that focuses on the artistry of our words, our language, our imagery. We ourselves aren’t deconstructed, analyzed or pathologized.

Here we were, a group of women who, given all our differences, were never meant to hear one another’s deep and true voices or hold one another’s stories. We risked tellings that had never before found their way into language. Do you know how that shifts the bedrock of us, allows for more light to get in, allows more love and possibility to pass through into us?

The transformative power of writing is evoked by the old chant/song about bread and roses: “Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses!”[1] Both aspects are necessary food for survival. We are healed, transformed, when we’re empowered to speak deeply and are witnessed fully in that speech. Art saves like medicine and splints and fortifying meals and laughter and tinctures; it’s catastrophic and tender, helps us each—through our words—lay tenacious palms onto scarred and healing bellies.

It was enough for some of the Fearless Words participants to write stories in a group and to read them aloud, for that is performance.

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Looking back through photos from previous years of Artists Against Rape, I am struck by the impact of the event; how Artists Against Rape is a transformative space, unique and absolutely necessary in the healing of communities and in strengthening the movement against sexual violence. I see the ripple effect where when one person speaks out against sexual violence it validates and encourages others to break their silence and then, more healing can then happen. I am in awe of the beauty and power of words, movement, and visual art.

Artists Against Rape (previously Poets Against Rape) came to life in 1997, birthed by the SFVAR’s writing group, Fearless Words. It was a chance for participants of the group to share their work with loved ones. However, the ripple began, and soon after the small intimate showcase grew into a community event with over 300 folks coming to support and speak out against sexual violence.

We extend deep gratitude and appreciate to the performers over the last 12 years for their courage and strength and for allowing us to be a part of their healing process. Thank you to San Francisco Arts Commision for funding the event, to the generous donors of the silent auction, the volunteers who make this possible, and to you, the supporters, for coming out to witness this work.

Over the last 12 years, Artists Against Rape has built an anti-violence movement that prioritizes survivors, people of color, people with disabilities, immigrants, low income individuals, queer people, youth and others who have historically been marginalized or silenced. Please join us in 2010 as we continue this tradition of breaking the silence and fostering healing through the arts.
"I wish I could say that standing on the stage at Artists Against Rape made me feel powerful but it didn't. As I stood and read the letters I'd sent to my best friend and his family 7 years after he raped me, I allowed myself only a feeling of accomplishment. I was glad people heard me, I was glad that I spoke but it did not nourish me in the same way it had other performers. Being on that stage was simply a way of sharing a possibility, an option for healing.

In fact it wasn't until about a month later, when all the artists gathered to watch the footage from the event, that I allowed myself to feel anything at all. I entered the room with trepidation, but as the video played I slowly came undone. For the first time I heard what we were saying. I watched the people who surrounded me speak, sing and embody truth. With each performance I shed a piece of armor and then there was me. Me on that stage, reading those letters. And for the first time in 7 years, after speaking that truth countless times, after becoming a counselor at SFWAR and after standing on that stage, I realized that I had survived. Sometimes the power comes later."

-- Blythe Barnow, performer
Artists Against Rape 2008 & SFWAR Volunteer

CANNIBALS OF JUAREZ

There is hate burning in the flesh of a deep seeded tradition of misogyny and oppression
blood is sucked from the young to feed the patriarchal cannibals who lurk in the maleficent shadows licking their chops and dreaming of power
a thick, contrived power to fuel erections satisfied by the screams of the miraposas trying to survive the labyrinth of fear that swallows women who are loved by mothers but the cannibals cannot see their tears, They don't care that their delicate dusty wings are mixing with dirt and garbage They don't understand that the wombs they rob are as sacred as the one that produced them This violent system must burn in the inferno ignited by blood soaked hands and from the ashes of dusty bones and ideas rise a bold and radiant phoenix with warm feathers that caress the cocoons of unborn butterflies twitching with anticipation as they prepare to emerge from the old silk

-- Kate Abarbanel, performer Artists Against Rape 2008. Her photograph "Delicate Dusty Wings" is related to her poem "Cannibals of Juarez."
When I moved to San Francisco, I wanted to continue to do anti-rape work, but I wanted to go beyond a narrow feminist framework. From the beginning, the San Francisco group [San Francisco Women Against Rape] was determined to integrate our analysis of the patriarchal function of rape with our developing understanding of race and class in the U.S. There were few models for us to draw upon, so we had to hammer out our own.

We developed a three-pronged program to embody the different aspects of what we thought needed to be done. Our first priority was to set up an actual physical space, a protective center where we could house a rape crisis hotline and which could serve as a temporary shelter for women needing to get away from aggressive situations. Unless we could offer support to real women experiencing violence, our theoretical efforts to fight rape would be empty and ungrounded.

At the same time, we believed that education was crucial. We didn’t want to merely help women after-the-fact; we wanted to prevent rape by educating about the embedded male supremacist attitudes and structures which supported rape in the society. Through education women would raise their consciousness and become empowered to develop collective strategies for ending rape.

Finally, we envisioned community self-defense as a militant, collective alternative to reliance on the police.

The education part was the easiest.

Setting up a rape center was more challenging. We each committed a sizable amount from the salaries of our part-time jobs but still we didn’t have enough to pay for rent, security deposit and a phone for our center. The recently formed Vanguard Fund came to the rescue with an enormous $5,000 for seed money.

We found a small funky apartment in the Mission District. We told the landlord we were starting a secretarial service to cover the fact that many women would be coming in and out. We didn’t dare admit the real purpose for the apartment for fear he wouldn’t rent to us. Besides, the secretive aspect connected with our sense that we were setting up a truly radical, alternative space.

We did admit to the phone company that we were setting up a rape hotline however; we wanted our phone number to have the letters RAPE in it. Once we started advertising our 647-RAPE number in free papers and on bulletin boards around the city we quickly began to get a steady stream of calls. We were jubilant at first, but soon the reality of what we had undertaken began to hit us. We had committed ourselves to staffing not only a hotline but a shelter when necessary. None of us had formal training as counselors - we had believed that our political consciousness and empathy would be enough to carry us through. However, the women who were calling were usually in a state of great upheaval. Some had been subject to years of abuse which had taken their toll on their physical and mental health. None of our members spoke Spanish, yet we were getting lots of calls from women who lived in the majority Latino Mission district.

Then there was the problem of our relationship with the police. We had to come up with a way to balance a woman’s right to determine her own options with our own political distaste for the police as the enforcement arm of a system we abhorred. We decided to explain what a woman’s options were to her, and if she decided to go to the police we would accompany her in order to assure that she was correctly treated.

As SFWAR grew rapidly, our on-paper unity began to fray.

As we were trying to sort out our various priorities, a case emerged which crystallized the contradictions among us. In 1974, Inez Garcia, a Chicana woman, was charged with killing a man who held her down while his friend raped her. In response, Third World women, the radical lesbian community, and a feminist lawyer, Susan Jordan, rallied to Inez’s support. The issues seemed clear cut to me. A Latina woman was being threatened with a long prison sentence because she had defended herself against rape. She was being targeted because of her race, her class and her assertion of her right to self-defense.

Her case encapsulated all the principles that SFWAR claimed
to espouse and it seemed logical to me that SFWAR would join the mobilization for Inez. However, many members were now engrossed in the task of providing services to rape victims and were reluctant to take on another issue. Others feared that involvement with Inez’s case would jeopardize the fragile working relationship that was being built with the police which could directly help the women who called us for support.

The debates we were having in SFWAR mirrored those brewing in the anti-rape movement nationally.

While some sectors of the anti-rape movement took up the challenge to fight rape on an anti-racist basis (in the cases of Inez Garcia, JoAnn Little, and Yvonne Wanrowevi) most Rape Crisis Centers began to receive a large amount of funding from the government and developed their programs in conjunction with the police and other aspects of law enforcement.

In SFWAR, our disagreements about Inez overlapped with other disagreements which had begun to polarize the group. We argued about the relationship of direct service to women who had been raped versus the need to organize a more militant self-defense network. We disagreed about whether SFWAR should join the new socialist-feminist women’s union or whether an association with such an organization would turn off women who were not leftists. And we debated whether we should focus exclusively on anti-rape work or also involve ourselves with community coalitions to fight police brutality and end the war. Our personal relationships grew more and more tangled, charged and tense. The original energy of collective purpose had evaporated.

In 2003, SFWAR held a 30th anniversary event which several of us founding members attended. Having been out of touch with each other for years, it was wonderful to come together again for this memorable occasion. Afterwards, four of us got together to reminisce. We all remembered the emotional meeting in early 1975 when the majority of the original group decided to leave the organization.

It jolted me to realize how oblivious I had been back then to the group of women who had pledged themselves to continue SFWAR.

Over the next twenty years, immersed in other political struggles, I hardly even thought back on the significance of the experience or wondered what had happened to SFWAR. It wasn’t until I returned to the Bay Area in the nineties that I learned that SFWAR had gone through various metamorphoses and had survived many upheavals. It was now self-consciously led by women of color and, unlike many other rape crisis centers across the country, it was committed to racial justice as a fundamental principle. The organization continued to grapple with some of the same contradictions we had confronted decades before. Thirty years later, I could take pride in the political foundations we had originally laid out and respect the creative methods that a new generation was undertaking to advance a radical vision of anti-rape work in another era. ■

This is an excerpt from the forthcoming memoir by Diana Block. Published by AK Press, March 2009. For more info visit www.akpress.org & www.armthespirit.com.
SFWR reached over 7,678 people through our Annual Events, Direct Services, and Prevention Education Programs.

24-HOUR CRISIS LINE
SFWR served 1,789 people on the crisis line during the 2007-2008 fiscal year, providing crisis intervention support to 572 survivors of sexual assault. Certified counselors are available 24-hours a day to offer crisis counseling and community referrals. Multi-lingual counselors are also available to provide services in Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tagalog, Japanese, Arabic, Farsi, and Russian.

ADULT AND YOUTH EDUCATION
Our Community Initiatives Program provided prevention education to 5,617 people last year. We organized 21 rape prevention presentations reaching 581 people and 3 self-defense classes for 105 individuals; tabled 20 festivals, fairs and community events reaching 2,100 people; and conducted 19 presentations for 268 professionals serving diverse communities.

Through STAND (Student Talking about Non-violent Dating), SFWR conducted 103 classroom presentations to over 2,262 youth & 131 adults and held 4 eight-week support groups reaching 25 young women and 22 young men. We trained 25 youth to be peer educators; these youth facilitate sexual assault prevention education presentations for their peers. Additionally, we provided technical assistance to 3 schools and community

based organizations serving youth attended by 98 total students, school staff, and service providers.

CASE MANAGEMENT / ADVOCACY
Advocates act as a liaison between survivors and medical, legal and social systems, with the goal of supporting and empowering survivors of sexual assault. We provide community resources and advocacy related to sexual assault and offer accompaniments to legal proceedings, medical appointments, and meetings with social service providers. During the 2007-2008 fiscal year, SFWR also had medical advocates on-call 24-hours to provide medical accompaniment to survivors at San Francisco General Hospital.

Our advocacy supported 21 survivors at the hospital and helped 85 survivors navigate complex legal and social service systems.

COUNSELING
SFWR’s Counseling Program provides free and confidential short term in-person peer counseling to survivors, their friends and family members. In 2007-2008, 99 survivors and 9 significant others received in-person counseling. We also offered 3 series of 8-week support groups to a total of 16 survivors. Both Our Bodies Give Voice, a support group for survivors with disabilities, and Fearless Words, a creative writing group for survivors of sexual violence, were offered. SFWR also provides survivors referrals for long-term clinical counseling and support groups. In April 2008, we began to offer a weekly free ear acupuncture detoxification clinic for SFWR clients, volunteers and staff. Furthermore, the Counseling Program continues building its capacity to offer survivors somatics healing modalities.

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES
The Community Initiatives (CI) Program encompasses both our adult and youth rape prevention education efforts and adds the component of supporting communities in mobilizing to confront (and ultimately end) rape. Based on an extensive community mapping process conducted in 2006, it was decided to initially focus our community organizing efforts on one geographic community – the Mission District. Moreover, there were five identity-based groups who were prioritized in this phase of CI; these groups were prioritized based on the high rates of sexual violence they experience. These groups are youth, immigrants of Latin descent, women who are marginally housed or homeless,

“I think it makes me feel safe, being that I can trust someone like SFWR. SFWR is not a business, it’s a person. SFWR is not a thing, not a company, not a piece of paper nor property; it’s a person. I love and trust SFWR...I am alive today because of her: SAN FRANCISCO WOMEN AGAINST RAPE” – Survivor, 2005
queer women of color, and formerly incarcerated women. The CI program has conducted 4 focus groups with 15 women residing in SRO (single room occupancy) hotels, 12 immigrant women of Latin descent, and 6 immigrant men of Latin descent to assess existing and needed community responses to sexual violence. Moreover, we convened 4 meetings of our 9 member Community Task Force to review, analyze, and interpret these focus group findings.

**COALITION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING**

In order to address all aspects of sexual violence, SFWAR works in collaboration with multi-disciplinary organizations. Examples include the San Francisco Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), Expect Respect San Francisco (ERSF), and the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA).

Toward our goal of organizing to end sexual violence with prioritized communities of the Mission District, we continue to strengthen our collaborations with communities of Latin descent. In April 2008, SFWAR initiated a Spanish language popular education training series. This 9-session series for Spanish-speaking adult women, called the Group on Gender, Violence and Health, was a collaborative effort led by San Francisco Women Against Rape, WOMAN Inc., Mujeres Unidas y Activas, and La Colectiva de La Raza Central Legal; speakers from other organizations including Generation FIVE, Programa de Hombres Contra la Violencia Intrafamiliar (POCOVI) and the Child Trauma Research Project of San Francisco General Hospital were also invited to present topics to the group. Twenty-eight women attended the first group meeting and demonstrated strong enthusiasm for the personal growth and community-building this training series facilitated.

**FUNDRAISING**

In 2007-2008, the SFWAR Development Program continued to focus on grassroots fundraising. We raised $23,573 through our annual Phone Bank and Canvass, reaching over 2,500 people. In December 2007, we sent a Holiday Mailing to approximately 2,500 people. This effort, coupled with the mailing of our Newsletter and Annual Report, raised over $7,500 to support our crisis intervention services. Private Foundations donated over $46,000. She Who Laughs Lasts, a night of comedy and healing through laughter, raised just under $3,300 through entrance donations, and Dine for a Change, a day where restaurants donate a portion of their proceeds to SFWAR, raised nearly $8,000. Drawing from a small group of new and long time donors our Major Donor Campaign raised $15,560. SFWAR put on our third annual WALK Against Rape in April 2008, which raised over $36,000. Over $11,000 was donated by individuals and groups who held Special Events benefiting SFWAR. Finally, we want to thank our faithful Monthly Sustainers who donated $15,560 this year. SFWAR thanks everyone who has given so generously this year. Your support allows us to provide critical services to survivors of rape and sexual assault, while we simultaneously work to end sexual violence.

**VOLUNTEERS AND INTERNS**

SFWAR is alive and thriving because of the commitment of 75 volunteers. Volunteers staff the sexual assault crisis line, offer in-person peer counseling, join committees to assist with events like Artist Against Rape, and provide administrative office support.

During the 2007-2008 fiscal year, 42 volunteers graduated and became state-certified sexual assault counselors. After an intensive 80-hour certification training, volunteers are required to participate in continuing education via counselor support meetings held monthly. In 2007-2008, SFWAR offered 13 counselor support meetings and 4 support meetings for volunteers providing in-person peer counseling. In addition, throughout the year 11 interns offered support to the Volunteers & Hotline Program, Counseling Program, Community Initiatives and Development Program.
(continued from page 3)

For some it felt possible to continue into Artists Against Rape—and for some, that movement will be possible next year, so long as we stay in touch, ask again. There is a longitudinal pathway between Fearless Words and Artists Against Rape, with artists returning from previous years to provide guidance or legwork, previous participants in one or another become performers, MCs, volunteers.

The skin of Artists Against Rape 2008 was a texture of survival and resilience, and the performers enacted revelation and reconstruction, heart-breaking and soul-heart mending. In this country, we rarely get to engage in communal acts of witness, of shape-shifting and hope. These artists gathered in song and spoken word, in movement and in stillness, to shine light through the many facets of the realities of rape and sexual violence.

Two days after Artists Against Rape 2008, I wrote the following in a writing workshop, responding to the prompt “Sometimes art can’t save you.” Sometimes art can’t save you, but today is not one of those days. Today is a day when art is a balm on the burn, when art is the meticulous promise of a sunlight through fog, when art is the redbuds peering out from under the last persistent April snows. Art did that. Art and women and transformed masculinity and candlelight and a viscous kind of vision and a roomful of open ears and beating hearts and hope. What kind of saving does art provide? The kind that jumps up and down on its insoles when we find the right metaphor to evoke an experience that wouldn’t otherwise have language. Where we tell a story and there’s someone around to really listen to that story. That’s the art like food that fills the belly with the bread of “you’re not alone” and “look at how gorgeous we have always been” and “oh, so that’s how you describe it—I never heard anyone else say that before.” I mean the kind of saving that matters.

Footnote:
GET INVOLVED

BECOME A RAPE CRISIS COUNSELOR!

RAPE CRISIS COUNSELOR TRAINING
May 2 - June 21
Applications due April 4, 2009
Contact Teresa Martyny at teresamartyny@sfwar.org
or at 415 861 2024 ext. 319
For details or to download an application
visit www.sfwar.org/volunteers

DONATE NOW!
- DONATE MONTHLY! Monthly sustainer guarantee our services are available 24-hours a day, all year long. Donation envelope enclosed.
- Round up your old clothes and items around the house you no longer need and bring them to COMMUNITY THRIFT (23 Valencia St, Mission District). Donate in SFWAR’s name and a percentage of the proceeds benefit SFWAR directly!
- Donate an old car to DONATE-FOR-CHARITY. www.donateforcharity.com or call toll free 1 866 392 4486
- Ask your job about matching gifts to double the impact of your donation.

WALK AGAINST RAPE!
APRIL 25, 2009 10:00 am
Start: Justin Herman Plaza
Finish: Mission Dolores Park
5 K walk, with rally and festival at finish!
Participate in this year’s Walk Against Rape. You can create a team of friends, co-workers and/or family and WALK!
To register go to www.firstgiving.com/sfwar or call Janet Upadhye at 415 861 2024 ext. 301.

DINE--for-a-CHANGE!
JUNE 4, 2009
Gather some friends and eat at one of the participating restaurants and a portion of the proceeds benefits SFWAR! For a list of restaurants, visit www.sfwar.org in May.

Become a restaurant liaison, and represent SFWAR at one of these restaurants. Contact Erica Guajardo Johnson at 415 861 2024 ext. 305 for details.

CHECK IT OUT

BLUE COVERS

Blue Covers is an experimental visual poem that re-imagines the journey from childhood sexual abuse, where the lover, trauma and the possibility of healing all exist within the space of a moment. Blue Covers was featured as part of Artists Against Rape 2008.
SF WAR would like to acknowledge the Interns, Volunteers, Corporations, Foundations and Local Businesses and Donors who supported us during the fiscal year July 1, 2007–June 30, 2008.

Thank you for your support!

VOLUNTEERS & INTERNS

MAJOR DONORS

DONORS
UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL

SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH

4TH ANNUAL WALK AGAINST RAPE
Saturday, April 25th, 2009
Start Line: Justin Herman Plaza 10 am
Finish Line: Mission Dolores Park 12:30 p.m.
A festival will be held at the Finish Line.
To register visit www.firstgiving.com/sfwar or call Janet Upadhye at 415 861 2024 ext 301.

VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Friday & Saturday, March 13 & 14, 8 p.m.
Intersection for the Arts
446 Valencia Street, San Francisco
www.theintersection.org
hosted by V-day

Thursday, April 16 at 7:30 p.m.
Castro Theatre
429 Castro Street, San Francisco
To purchase ticket ahead go to www.ticketweb.com
hosted by V-Day
Portion of show proceeds benefits SFWAR

RAPE CRISIS COUNSELOR APPLICATIONS DUE
Saturday, April 4, 2009
Visit www.sfwar.org/volunteers for application or
call Teresa Marlyn at 415 861 2024 ext 319
TRAINING BEGINS MAY 2ND

MAY

RAPE CRISIS COUNSELOR TRAINING BEGINS
May 2 - June 21

SELF-DEFENSE COURSE
Check www.sfwar.org for details in April.

JUNE

DINE-for-a-CHANGE
Eat at one of the participating restaurants and a portion of the
proceeds benefits SFWAR. For participating restaurants,
visit www.sfwar.org or call Erica Guajardo Johnson
at 415 861 2024 ext 305.