

**Ashe County Partnership for Children Alerts Public to Potential Confusion
Regarding Domestic Violence Program**

According to information recently presented to the board of directors of the Ashe County Partnership for Children (ACPC), there is a new organization operating in the county that has a similar name to the Partnership's domestic violence program but is not affiliated with the organization. For the past 14 years the ACPC has successfully operated "A Safe Home for Everyone," commonly known by the acronym ASHE, a program that assists victims of domestic violence in our community. Currently the ASHE program provides counseling services, a secure shelter for clients, a thrift store that is a fundraising element of the program, and advocacy for victims and their families.

In the past week, the Partnership has learned that a newly incorporated non-profit entity has registered with the North Carolina Secretary of State under the name of A Safe Home for Everyone, Inc. Though the ACPC board has little information on the organizational structure or individuals involved with this new group, it is concerned that there may be confusion in the community between the two, similarly-named groups.

"A Safe Home for Everyone is a program that the Ashe Partnership has been proud to successfully run for 14 years," said Patricia Calloway, board chair of ACPC. "With the broad financial support of the community and many grantors on the local, regional, and state level, our staff and many, many volunteers have nurtured and grown the ASHE program. We are proud of the many services that we offer and, particularly, for the support that made possible the secure shelter that is available in our community. We are, of course, anxious now that many of our donors and the community at-large may be confused by this new entity in Ashe County, one that has a name similar to our program but is no way affiliated with our organization.

"While we are concerned that our donor community may be confused by this new organization," she continued, "our biggest fear is that the victims of domestic violence and those organizations and individuals who refer women and men to ASHE will be confused, as well. The real tragedy of this would be that a victim of violence was confused about how to contact us and was to remain in a violent situation that led to further harm or even worse. We want to assure everyone that our services are unchanged and that they can count on ASHE to provide the quality services that are needed in trying and difficult circumstances."

The ACPC's ASHE program was initiated by a group of community members in the mid-1990s who began to discuss the need for a domestic violence prevention and advocacy in Ashe County. At the time, victims of abuse were forced to go to Watauga County for assistance, leaving many unable to access needed services and protection. The original group approached the Ashe Partnership about leading the program and the organization's board enthusiastically responded.

As one of the first external programs of the ACPC, one of the initial challenges of the program was operating within the stringent fiscal and accounting measures required by the North Carolina Partnership for Children. Explained current ACPC treasurer Chris Robinson, the Ashe Partnership operates like many non-profits in most regards, but because of the amount of state funds that the organization receives it must meet accounting requirements that far exceed those of similarly-sized groups. "The North Carolina Partnership for Children demands strict accounting of all funds, be those from the state, from grants, or from individuals," he continued. "We are held to the highest possible standards and audited on an annual basis. That applies equally to our state-funded programs and to our internally-developed programs, such as ASHE. These standards go above and beyond the requirements of many non-profits, but we feel strongly that they ensure the fiscal soundness of our programs and ensure that the board is meeting its fiduciary responsibilities for oversight of all funds, something we all take very seriously. The results of our audits show the viability of the organization and the effective manner in which we live up to the public trust."

With a newly-formed agency in the community with a name similar to a program of the Partnership, Calloway and her board are concerned with the opportunity for confusion among the community and, particularly, the clients of ASHE. "We really have no insight as to the mission or goals of this newly-formed A Safe Home for Everyone, Inc.," she said. "What we do want to do is assure the public that our mission has not changed and our services remain the same. The ASHE program is still operated by the Ashe County Partnership for Children and our goal is to assist the victims of domestic violence as effectively as possible."

The Ashe Partnership's "A Safe Home for Everyone" (ASHE) program can be contacted at 982-8851. There is also a 24-hour crisis line at 336-246-5430 for victims to contact the program. For more information on the Ashe Partnership for Children, call 336-982-4588 or visit its website at www.ashechildren.org.

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