



Annual Report about the Work of the Safe House for Women and Children Victims of Domestic Violence for 2008

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I. Introductory Analysis with Overview of the Previous Period

Safe House for Women and Children Victims of Domestic Violence in region of Banja Luka was founded on the initiative of NGO "United Women" Banja Luka, and was opened for the first beneficiaries on 12 February 2007, when all working conditions were met, and initial financing of the Safe House was secured.

On 14 March 2007, Safe House Banja Luka received Decision of Department for Social Affairs of City Administration Banja Luka that confirmed fulfillment of conditions related to premises, equipment, and professional staff for opening and work of the Safe House, with written approval of the Ministry of Health and Social Care of Republika Srpska.

In accordance with this Decision, Safe House in Banja Luka became the first object of this type and purpose that received working authorization. Additionally, on 7 March 2007, Ministry of Health and Social Care of Republika Srpska issued approval on House Rules and Regulations of the Safe House, in accordance with the Article 14, Paragraph 2 of Rule Book about Methodology and Place of Securing Protection of a Victim of Domestic Violence (Official Gazette of Republika Srpska, No. 97/06). In the same year, safe houses in Modriča and Prijedor received working authorization.

Financing of the work of the Safe House in Banja Luka for 2007 was coming from two sources – from the City Administration Banja Luka and local centers for social work. The City Administration Banja Luka allocated financial resources in amount of 40% of the Safe House annual budget, while 60% of resources were allocated by the authorized centers for social work where women and children beneficiaries of the Safe House have registered permanent residence. Centers for social work were covering the costs on daily basis of 25 BAM per beneficiary.

In 2007, beneficiaries of the Safe House were 48 persons - 22 women and 26 children from the area of Banja Luka, Laktaši, Kneževi, Bratunac, Prijedor, Gradiška, East Sarajevo, Ugljevik, Kotor Varoš and Gacko. Centers for Social Work Laktaši, East Sarajevo, Bratunac, Kneževi, Kotor Varoš and Prijedor did not cover the costs for women and children beneficiaries of the Safe House Banja Luka with the permanent residence in the area of their municipalities, justifying it with lack of contract that defines their responsibilities, and the fact that they did not participate in the procedure of accommodating victims of violence in the Safe House Banja Luka.

The fact of insufficient budgets in other municipalities to cover social services for victims of violence motivated United Women Banja Luka to continue activities on public advocacy and lobbying for identifying systemic solution for financing of the safe houses in Republika Srpska. Model of financing was based on securing 70% of total costs from the entity budget, while 30% would be allocated from the public budgets of local communities. This financing model caused increased number of women and children beneficiaries that were sheltered in the Safe House, in relation to the same period of the 2007. In 2008, period of stay and number of persons that were sheltered in the Safe House Banja Luka increased for almost 50% in relation to the 2007.

During the first half of 2008, work of the Safe House Banja Luka was complex due to the lack of financial resources for running costs of the shelter. We did not receive financial resources on time due to slow income of resources in the public budgets and administrative obstacles. On the other hand, during that period the public was informed about financing of the shelter and releasing burden of covering the accommodation costs from the local communities, so we encountered fast fill in of the accommodation capacities. Professional staff of the United Women Banja Luka and the Safe House Banja Luka was using all the possible ways to secure needed food and hygiene material for women and children beneficiaries.

Different approach of the professional staff of the centers for social work in assisting women beneficiaries of the Safe House at the beginning of their stay influenced largely their empowerment and making decision to return to a family. Due to that, all women beneficiaries, which were largely victims of physical violence from their partners, had the same treatment in relation to their parental rights over children. For the whole period of accommodation in the Safe House, abusers where having communication with children, despite the fact that fathers were, in majority of cases, partially or completely neglecting their parental responsibilities prior to the accommodation of children in the Safe

House. Proposal of the Safe House personnel to restrict the communication of abuser with children at least for initial two weeks of accommodation in the Safe House in order to enable children to get used to a new environment and conditions was never taken into consideration. Additionally, we proposed that women beneficiaries of the Safe House, with their own consent, stay isolated from the contacts with abuser in the premises of the centers for social work for regular procedure of reconciliation during a certain initial period after accommodation in the Safe House. The chain that is completely missing in the multi-disciplinary approach to fighting domestic violence is lack of work with abusers. There are no mechanisms for implementation of the some special protection measures aimed to remove potential causes of abusive behavior.

During this period, women beneficiaries from numerous cities of Republika Srpska used services of the Safe House Banja Luka, as follows: Banja Luka, Kneževi, Gradiška, Kotor Varoš, Čelinac, Laktaši, Ribnik, Srbac, Mrkonjić Grad, Zvornik, and a woman beneficiary from the territory of Republic of Serbia.

II. Structure of Employees and Engaged Personnel in the Safe House Banja Luka

Employees:

1. Coordinator of the Safe House – full time
2. Social Worker – full time
3. Four nurses – full time
4. Housekeeper – full time
5. Lawyer – Attorney, engaged per need, based on the Contract
6. Clinical psychologist, engaged per need, based on the Contract
7. Accountant – Financial manager of United Women Banja Luka, 40% of working time
8. Bookkeeper – bookkeeping bureau paid based on provided services
9. Auditor – contracting the auditing firm at the end of financial year

Coordinator, social worker, and housekeeper are employed based on eight hours working time per day in the period from 07:00 A.M. to 03:00 P.M., every working day. Four nurses are working based on the principle of four working shifts, in order to provide professional assistance to the women and children beneficiaries during 24 hours period. Lawyer – attorney and clinical psychologist are engaged based on need for work with beneficiaries. During the stay in the Safe House Banja Luka, all women and children beneficiaries have secured medical assistance and care during 24 hours period, as well as legal, psychological, and psychosocial assistance, based on need.

III. Security of the Safe House Banja Luka Premises

According to the Bylaw on Methodology and Place of Ensuring Security of a Victim of Violence (Official Gazette of RS, No. 97/2006) it is planned for premises of a safe house to have 24 hours police protection. However, the Ministry of Interior Affairs of Republika Srpska is not authorized to ensure security for premises of this type, and we need significant financial resources to hire a private security agency, for which we cannot pay. Ministry of Interior Affairs of RS obliged to provide patrol service during 24 hours and act upon calls from the Safe House Banja Luka, in accordance with its authorities.

During 2008, the Safe House Banja Luka did not solve the issue of permanent security of premises. Police officers were conducting regular daily field visits of the Safe House Banja Luka premises. Forming of a new police station and sector authorized for the area where the Safe House Banja Luka is located made easier daily monitoring of the situation and information share with the police about individual cases. Upon admittance of a victim and her children in the Safe House Banja Luka, the personnel was informing the police station and submitting all needed data. Immediately upon admittance of women beneficiaries and their accompanying children, the Safe House Banja Luka personnel was conducting assessment of security level for a victim, and possibility for repeated violence in a case of contacting with an abuser. In several cases, it happened that abusers were directly coming in front of the

Safe House Banja Luka or making threatening telephone calls to victims of violence that are sheltered in the Safe House Banja Luka or threatening to personnel of the Safe House. Upon warnings and calls to the police, majority of threats stopped.

In two cases, police conducted measures of increased monitoring and protection within the premises by a duty police patrol in duration of three days. In one case, police officers arrested an abuser in front of the Safe House Banja Luka, acting upon a call from the Safe House personnel. After police interrogation procedure, harassment toward a victim and personnel of the Safe House Banja Luka stopped. During the period when the Safe House Banja Luka sheltered a woman victim of trafficking, police patrol was providing security measures and monitoring for a certain period in order to prevent possibility of obstructing the investigation.

In 2008, the Safe House team had regular weekly meetings with representatives of police aimed to improve multi-disciplinary approach, as well as to plan future measures for each individual case.

IV. Procedure for Accommodation in the Safe House Banja Luka

Women and children survivors of the domestic violence can be accommodated in the Safe House on several ways, depending of their place of residence. Decision for sheltering women victims with the place of residence on the territory of Banja Luka is made by the Team for Providing Assistance and Support for Victims of Domestic Violence. This Team exists since 1 May 2007, and is composed of women and men representatives of the Center for Social Work Banja Luka, Center for Public Security (police) Banja Luka, and NGO "United Women" Banja Luka. The Team conducts field interventions during 24 hours, 7 days a week. Upon call of the police, members of the Team are informed and go to the field intervention to conduct assistance and support for a victim of violence. If the Team assess that violence could be repeated during upcoming period and could affect a victim, the decision is made to shelter a woman victim and accompanying children in the Safe House Banja Luka.

Women victims of domestic violence with place of residence in other local communities are accommodated in the Safe House Banja Luka based on assessment of NGO "United Women" Banja Luka team, and authorized center for social work is informed subsequently. In 2008, number of reported women victims of violence from other local communities was higher in relation to 2007, and we took into consideration only urgent cases, where real danger for repetition of violence and direct threat to a victim's security existed, as well as cases when a woman victim of violence did not have any alternate shelter.

Some women beneficiaries were sheltered to the Safe House Banja Luka based on decision of the authorized centers for social work, which assessed that further stay of women victims in a violent relationship was not possible, and consulted with the Safe House Banja Luka personnel. In one case, a woman beneficiary with a minor child from territory of Republic of Serbia was sheltered in the Safe House Banja Luka, and police and Department for Foreigners was informed immediately. Based on our assessment and decision of the Department for Foreigners, the woman beneficiary and her child left Banja Luka with adequate attendance, and were sheltered to the safe house in Republic of Serbia.

In cooperation with the women and men professionals from the Center for Social Work Banja Luka, the Safe House Banja Luka team is making all decisions related to the extending accommodation of women and children beneficiaries, temporary leaves of women beneficiaries from the shelter aimed to acquire certain rights, as well as decisions related to termination and end of accommodation for women and children beneficiaries.

V. Activities of the Safe House Banja Luka

V.1 Overview

Upon receiving shelter in the Safe House Banja Luka, women beneficiaries are signing the contract about accommodation, and are introduced to all house rules in the Safe House Banja Luka, officially approved by the Ministry of Health and Social Care of Republika Srpska. All persons sheltered in the Safe House Banja Luka have secured medical assistance and care, legal, psychological, psychosocial assistance, and obligatory participation in working and occupational therapy during a whole period of stay in the Safe House. All women beneficiaries and their dependant children are receiving their room for sleep, rest, and storage of personal belongings.

Professional team of the Safe House Banja Luka is providing assistance to women beneficiaries and their dependant children every working day from 7:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. while nurses are present during 24 hours every day in case of need for assistance and solving eventual problems. Professional team of the Safe House Banja Luka conducted daily conversations with women and children beneficiaries in order to monitor their situation and empower them to have easier and faster reintegration in a society. Depending on number of persons sheltered in the Safe House, a female clinical psychologist is planning her visits and individual and group work with women and children beneficiaries.

Women and men professionals from the Center for Social Work Banja Luka also provided support through conducting the needs assessment for sheltering women and children victims of violence in the Safe House. In communication with the professionals from the Center for Social Work, we are still noticing different approach to women that survived violence. Attitude of the centers for social work is to preserve family and return of a victim and children to a violent husband or partner. We must emphasize that some women beneficiaries were staying in the Safe House Banja Luka for a shorter period than needed for their full recovery and empowerment.

In two cases, authorized center for social work did not approve sheltering the children of women beneficiaries that survived violence, because they created negative opinion about the women based on the statements of abusers. Social workers from these centers were making continuous pressure and using different methods to convince women to return home with excuses that children are suffering too much and wish for their mothers to come home at any price. These cases ended with women returning to violent families in order to be with their children, despite the doubt that violence would end.

Professional team was making security assessment for each case in relation to temporary exit from the Safe House. If the assessment is that there is no possibility for communication of a woman victim with an abuser, she continues with her job also during her stay in the Safe House. In one case, an abuser continued to harass a woman victim of violence at their workplace, which resulted with termination of her contract with an employer. During 2008, negative security assessment was made for three women beneficiaries of the Safe House, and in agreement with their employers, they used annual vacation, or sickness leave, in cases that injuries occurred as consequence of violence they survived.

Children of school age were transferred to the school with which the Safe House Banja Luka has agreement about work with children. In twelve cases, there was a need for children to be transferred from their schools to a school nearest to the Safe House Banja Luka location. The transfer was conducted within 24 hours, so children were immediately continuing with education without backlog with lectures. Upon enrolment into the new school, the Safe House Banja Luka personnel was informing a school pedagogue about specific details of violence against children that occurred in each case, and how to react if abuser attempts to communicate with a child. Through communications with school representatives, the Safe House Banja Luka professional team monitors continuously the situation of each child. If the security screening signalizes that abuser would likely attempt to communicate with children, the Safe House team is providing transport and escorting of children to their school.

In two cases, children of high school age transferred to a school in Banja Luka that corresponded to the educational profile of their previous schools. In a period of the highest overcrowd for the day care and

kindergartens in Banja Luka, two pre-school children were enrolled thanks to the contacts of Safe House personnel.

V.2 Psychosocial Support and Assistance

During accommodation in the Safe House Banja Luka, Individual counseling is conducted for each beneficiary twice per week as a minimum. The Safe House team is taking social anamnesis, which consist of written form of a genetic chart with comprehensive family tree, as well as support and living conditions. Key objectives of psychosocial support during accommodation in the Safe House Banja Luka are to provide support to women and children beneficiaries to keep contacts with primary family and emphasizing importance of good social network.

Professional team of the Safe House Banja Luka is working with all women beneficiaries and their children on empowering, but also healing consequences of violence through advisory-therapeutic work, individual and group counseling, and work based on the principle of helping-self-help. Some cases were requiring work with entire family of a woman beneficiary in order to identify the best solution. In majority of cases, this work contributed to the re-establishing emotional closeness of families. However, full support was missing; due to lack of awareness about domestic violence and deep-rooted attitude that woman should be silent and suffer to preserve family. Very often, women beneficiaries were hiding violence or details about it, so other members of a family were not aware about its intensity. Support of a family members and their understanding plays a major role in recover of a woman survivor of violence and her children.

One of the most important, but also the most difficult objectives and tasks during a stay of women beneficiaries in the Safe House is to work on identifying exit strategy. We are working to prepare women for independent life together with their children. After certain period of stay in the Safe House, each woman beneficiary is receiving support in seeking employment trough monitoring newspaper ads, inquiries with contacts, or registering with employment agency. In case of identifying and finding job, the Safe House personnel assists women beneficiaries to found housing, depending on their available resources. In several occasions, the Safe House team succeeded to assist women beneficiaries that left the Safe House to acquire house appliances and furniture through various donations.

V.3 Working and Occupational Therapy

Women beneficiaries of the Safe House are required to keep clean the rooms they use in the Safe House. Each Monday, the Safe House team is preparing the schedule of planned daily activities as a form of working and occupational therapy. The therapy consist of certain indoor and out door activities repeated on daily basis, once a week, or just once within certain time period. Everyday activities include cleaning of common rooms and preparing meals. Each woman beneficiary is on duty per schedule for preparing meals for a day. Housekeeper and nurses are preparing weekly plan of meals that corresponds to nutritional needs of women and children beneficiaries. In accordance with weekly plan, the Safe House personnel are planning purchasing of needed groceries and hygiene material. Meetings with women beneficiaries are organized once a week or more often, depending on need or emerging issues of women beneficiaries.

As a part of working-occupational therapy, art workshops of working on glass, wood, and ceramics were organized. Special ecologic colors on water basis were used for glass and ceramics, napkins for work with napkin technique, frost, contour colors, and other materials needed for work. Since very beginning of the workshops, women beneficiaries and older children showed great interest, because of positive results within a short period. Art workshops were organized twice a week in duration from two to four hours with constant presence of professional staff that was providing instructions for work. During 2008, 25 women beneficiaries and 6 children were involved in art workshops, which represent increase comparing to last year, when the number of participants was significantly smaller. The art workshops were well received by women and children beneficiaries as they bring relaxation and possibility for them to forget current problems that are constant burden. Some women beneficiaries also received some money for their art workshop products that were sold during exhibition and sale organized in the Safe House during 2008.

Children sheltered in the Safe House have assistance of professional staff in terms of acquiring new skills and knowledge. Majority of children sheltered in the Safe House were not victims of direct violence, however they witnessed daily violence between abusers and their mothers. In four cases, their fathers exposed children to direct physical and psychological violence. Some children did not show changes in behavior as results of their exposure to violence. During playing and drawings on free topics, children showed certain consequences and exposure to direct or indirect violence.

Professional staff was also organizing various workshops adjusted to children when it was possible to create groups. Professional staff also works individually and in groups with children sheltered in the Safe House in order to enable learning process on various topics and acquiring positive habits. Depending on volume of daily activities, a beneficiary was always scheduled to watch on children. Workshops were mostly organized in afternoon hours, in duration from 15 to 120 minutes.

Activities conducted in work with children are including four educational areas: physical and health education, cognitive development, creative culture and work, and socially emotional development.

Since large group of children was sheltered in the Safe House Banja Luka during 2008, workshops with children were organized in age groups, as follows:

- Children age 3-5 (drawing workshops, writing, memory exercise, dancing, various social games, etc.),
- Children age 5-8 (collage paper and patches workshops, breadboarding, various educational workshops, such as hygiene habits, physical exercises, preparing panels, chalk drawing, etc.)
- Children age 12-16 (educational workshops, mostly on following topics "AIDS/HIV", "Vitamins", "History of Computers", "Culture of Behavior on Public Place", "Parts of Computer", "People's Proverbs", etc.)

V.4 Health Services and Care

During 2008, the Safe House Banja Luka was covered with 24 hours duty shifts of medical nurses, as women beneficiaries due to possible arrival of women beneficiaries in the night period. Upon arrival to the Safe House, the personnel is taking anamnesis data – health situation, to record current health problems or diseases for which a woman beneficiary is already taking medical therapy, and the medical document that proves it.

During a stay in the Safe House Banja Luka, women beneficiaries have regular visits to specialist medical check ups, in order to receive specific medical therapy, or to continue with already prescribed therapy. The most frequently visited specialist ordinations are radiology, cardiology, neurology, psychiatry, and pediatric. Women and children beneficiaries always go on specialist check ups accompanied with a duty shift nurse, and she controls medical therapy that women and children are taking. The most frequent medical interventions during night were febrile conditions of a small children and accommodation of new women beneficiaries in the Safe House.

When conducting visits to medical institutions, all medical records were continuously collected for all women and children beneficiaries, in order to be supporting evidence in possible judicial processes. According to the agreement with Dom Zdravljva Banja Luka, all women and children beneficiaries of the Safe House are registered in the Family Medicine Center for the region that territorially covers the Safe House location. If there is a need, women and children beneficiaries are visiting family medicine doctors to take medical prescriptions and requests for specialists' medical check ups.

As a part of breast cancer early detection and prevention initiative, all women beneficiaries of the Safe House Banja Luka had possibility to have ultra sound check up in Dr. Grubor Ordination. Check ups were organized as a part of humanitarian action initiated by the city board of Party for Democratic Progress. Ten women beneficiaries of the Safe House Banja Luka used this opportunity during 2008.

In accordance to the plan, the Safe House personnel were purchasing medicine and other related materials for the need of provisional ambulance. The most frequently used medicine were painkillers, sedatives,

anti-pyretic, specific symptomatic therapy for specific cardiologic, neurological, and other diseases, as well as medical material.

For a certain period during 2008, several children under one year of age were accommodated in the Safe House Banja Luka, and they were subjects of special care consisting of following activities:

- Monitoring regular feeding, sleeping and hygiene of babies,
- Counseling of mothers, if some changes occur in development of babies,
- Visiting Center for Vaccination in Banja Luka for regular vaccination of babies sheltered in the Safe House.

Women and children beneficiaries of the Safe House had regular visits to dentist in cases of major tooth pain. Due to bad hygiene habits of mouth and teethes, the Safe House personnel conducted regular control and worked on increasing health culture about importance of continuous hygiene of mouths and teethes. Medical personnel were conducting daily control of hygiene habits, bathing, and washing teethes and hands.

VI. Characteristics of Women Beneficiaries of the Safe House Banja Luka

In the period from 1 January 2008 until 31 December 2008, seventy (70) persons were sheltered in the Safe House Banja Luka – thirty four (34) women and thirty six (36) children. The number of women and children beneficiaries of the Safe House Banja Luka shows tendency of increasing for almost 50% in relation to the same period in 2007. This increase is largely result of change in a way of financing running costs of the safe houses in Republika Srpska, which released burden from the local communities from which women and children beneficiaries were coming from.

Beside beneficiaries of the Safe House from Banja Luka area, we sheltered women and children victims of violence from the area of Laktaši, Kotor Varoš, Gradiška, Kneževo, Zvornik, Čelinac, Srbac, Ribnik, Mrkonjić Grad, and a woman from Subotica, with citizenship of Republic of Serbia. One underage girl, victim of trafficking, was sheltered in the Safe House Banja Luka for a short period in 2008, in cooperation with police and public prosecutor's office.

In majority of cases, women were exposed to violence by their spouses and common law partners. In two cases, women were victims of violence committed by their sons. In a case of victim of trafficking, other, unknown people exposed a girl to violence and different forms of abuse.

The largest percentage of women (55%) were victims of long-term violence and abuse, within a period longer than 10 years, while 30% of women beneficiaries were exposed to violence during a period of several months. Based on previous experiences, it can be noticed that younger women are more likely to report violence within a short period after it occurred, as result of increased public awareness about this issue. Contrary to that, middle age women and older women are reporting violence after they exhausted all other methods to stop it. In 35% of cases, women beneficiaries of the Safe House Banja Luka were reporting violence after a few months of suffering violent torture by their abusers.

Period of stay of women beneficiaries of the Safe House Banja Luka was from one day up to three months, depending on identifying adequate solution for women beneficiaries. Women that decided to return to the abuser or to a family where violence occurred were leaving the Safe House after one to two weeks of staying in the shelter. Certain number of women was staying in the shelter for longer period, and upon leaving the Safe House, they started new life with their children. Fifteen (15) women beneficiaries were staying in the shelter for a period of two weeks, eight (8) women were staying for the period between 15 to 45 days, while twelve (12) women beneficiaries were staying in the Safe House for the period of three months. In two cases, women beneficiaries extended their stay in the shelter after three months period, due to complicated personal security situation and lack of possibility for finding any solution.

In 2008, women beneficiaries of the Safe House Banja Luka were between 16 and 75 years of age. The largest percentage of women (30%) fitted under age group of 30 to 39 years of age. 55% of women beneficiaries have high school education, while 30% of women beneficiaries have only elementary school level education. Two women beneficiaries did not have any formal education, while one woman beneficiary had lower level of university education.

Out of total number of women beneficiaries, twenty six (26) women were unemployed, while six (6) women beneficiaries had regular monthly income on some basis. During accommodation in the Safe House, two (2) women beneficiaries lost their jobs. Ten (10) women beneficiaries of the Safe House Banja Luka were sheltered together with their two children, while seven (7) women beneficiaries stayed in the Safe House together with one child. Fourteen (14) women beneficiaries were sheltered without children, as due to direct life threats they were forced to leave children with abuser. Largest number of children (11) sheltered in the Safe House was from 14 to 18 years of age, while ten children were from 8 to 13 years of age. Two babies less than a year old were also sheltered in the Safe House together with their mothers, and due to that we needed to purchase special equipment.

Twenty seven (27) women beneficiaries did not have visible injuries that required medical assistance. In two cases, women beneficiaries had heavy physical injuries. Other women beneficiaries that required medical care had light physical injuries in a form of bruises and contusions. Majority of women beneficiaries did not have their own housing, and abusers were staying in the common property. Support from the family members consisted of psychosocial support, while any other assistance was not possible. This was influencing status quo in position of women victims. Because of that, it was difficult to identify an exit strategy, especially in situations when women beneficiaries were staying in the Safe House only for a short period.

VII. Evaluation of Work with Women Beneficiaries of the Safe House Banja Luka

Every two weeks of a stay in the Safe House Banja Luka, women beneficiaries were filling in the evaluation questionnaires, with objective of examining their satisfaction with services offered in the Safe House, and conducting activities aimed to improve work of the shelter. The questionnaire consisted of nine (9) questions with free answers.

Responses on the first question related to the arrival in the Safe House mostly reflected fear and uncertainty. Majority of women beneficiaries said they perceived it as escape from situations of violence. Some of the women felt insecure at the beginning because of lack of information about work and possibilities offered by the Safe House. However, after the first few days they were changing perception about the shelter. Largest insecurity was consequence of fear from reaction of children on staying in the shelter, and bad adaptation to a new environment.

All women beneficiaries said they were satisfied with accommodation, food, and services offered within the Safe House. Majority of women beneficiaries said they equally value all activities, while some women beneficiaries said they benefited the most from individual counseling and working and occupational therapy. Major issue that women beneficiaries were facing was worrying for their existence after leaving the Safe House, finding employment, and adequate housing.

VIII. Identifying Exit Strategies for Women Beneficiaries of the Safe House Banja Luka

VIII.1 Employment of Women Beneficiaries

Our experiences with women beneficiaries are positive, as until now we succeeded to identify certain solutions for exit strategies in the best interests of women and children. Our work with women and children beneficiaries does not end once they leave the shelter, and we extend to work with them for one year in order to support their further independence and monitoring their situation. In follow up communication with women beneficiaries, we noticed that those women who find employment during

their stay in the Safe House kept their jobs, and some unemployed women beneficiaries succeeded to find adequate jobs.

Identifying exit strategies was difficult in situations when women victims of violence are not supported by their family and friends, and when adequate assistance of official institutions is missing. In these situations, women beneficiaries of the Safe House have increased feelings of helplessness.

Lack of education of women beneficiaries of the Safe House is also one of key obstacles in identifying exit strategies related to finding employment. In 2008, majority of women that were sheltered in the Safe House Banja Luka have high school degree, or finished just elementary school, and two women are without any formal education. One woman beneficiary has some university level education.

When searching for exit strategies for women beneficiaries, we were supported by some private entrepreneurs, but these were unfortunately rare situations. During the first year of work of the Safe House Banja Luka, we established cooperation with Employment Agency SPEKTAR from Banja Luka. However, weak results in finding employment for women beneficiaries were influenced by small offer of available jobs at the employment market and high demand for qualified workers with higher level of education. Twenty-six (26) women beneficiaries that were sheltered in the Safe House during 2008 were unemployed, and for nine (9) women we succeeded to find some kind of jobs during their stay in the shelter, or upon their leave from the Safe House.

In cooperation with Humanitarian Association "Partner" Banja Luka, three (3) women beneficiaries of the Safe House find jobs of home assistants. "Partner" also assisted us to find job for a son of one women beneficiary of the Safe House, after they left the Safe House. Based on previous cooperation with Shoe Factory "BEMA", we succeeded to find employment for three women beneficiaries – two women were employed in direct production, while one woman beneficiary got a job with higher level of education, based on her previous experience in this field.

VIII.2 Securing Housing for Women Beneficiaries

Majority of women beneficiaries did not have their own housing, as abusers were staying in the house. Women beneficiaries that acquired a common property with spouse during marriage also could not acquire their rights during their period of stay in the Safe House, due to durable court procedures. Position of some women beneficiaries was additionally complicated with loans related to common property they could not access and use with their children. In majority of situations, women did not have registered ownership over land or houses they acquired together with their husbands during marriage, as these were registered on some of family members of abuser or previous owners. Family members of women victims were supporting them on psychosocial level, while any other assistance was missing. During 2008, we succeeded to find adequate housing for eleven (11) women beneficiaries, and they initiated independent life with their children. Nineteen (19) women beneficiaries returned to their previous environment or started living with some of the relatives, after they left shelter.

IX. Other Activities

During 2008, the Safe House Banja Luka was implementing the project "Mother's Hand for Mother's Smile," supported by the Ministry for Local Management and Self-governance in government of Republika Srpska. Objective of the project was to train women beneficiaries for work on painting of different handicrafts through organizing creative workshops. During the project implementation, we organized four types of workshops that focused on glass painting, and painting on ceramics, wood, and candles. These workshops were organized as a part of working and occupational therapy on a daily basis in duration of 2 to 3 hours.

Together with the Safe House personnel, children beneficiaries of the Safe House Banja Luka visited redaction of daily newspapers PRESS, and learned about its daily activities. Women and men representatives of PRESS organized visit to the Safe House as a part of Sent Nicolas holidays, and brought presents for children beneficiaries with visit of Santa Claus. This is second year that PRESS redaction supports the Safe House Banja Luka in enabling children to have brighter winter holidays.

Gender Center of Government of Republika Srpska and the Ministry for Family, Youth and Sport in Government of Republika Srpska, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, organized exhibition of photographs on the theme "Violence Against Women." The exhibition was organized in the hall of the People's Assembly of Republika Srpska, and was visited by numerous persons from public and political life. Thanks to Spomenka Krunic, Director of the Gender Center of RS and Nada Lipovac, Deputy Minister in the Ministry for Family, Youth, and Sport of RS, the Safe House Banja Luka organized sale of glass and wooden handicrafts made by women beneficiaries of the shelter. Part of the money from sold handicrafts was given to women beneficiaries that participated in making handicrafts, and rest of the money was used for purchasing material needed for production of handicrafts.

During 2008, Brankica Tesanovic and Elena Gulmadova, from OSCE Regional Office in Banja Luka, visited the Safe House Banja Luka several times as Chairs of the Working Group for Combating Trafficking of People in Banja Luka area. Representative of the Safe House Banja Luka was regularly informing the Working Group about work of the shelter and situation of women and children beneficiaries. OSCE showed special interest for individual cases of domestic violence when urgent procedure of official institutions was missing. As a part of OSCE monitoring of judicial processes, they monitored some judicial procedures related to women that survived domestic violence.

In June 2008, representative of the Safe House Banja Luka participated on seminar for psychologists "Theory and Practice," and presented the work of "United Women" and the Safe House Banja Luka, as well as services offered by the shelter. Participants of the seminar were women and men representatives of various public institutions, and they exchanged experiences from daily work.

As civil society representative, the Safe House Banja Luka team member participated in drafting the Strategy for Development of a Family in Republika Srpska together with the women and men representatives of official institutions in RS. This public policy document was initiated by the Ministry for Family, Youth, and Sport of Republika Srpska. Together with the representative of center for social work, the Safe House representative focused on the area of socially pathological behavior in a society, and issue of domestic violence.

Representative of the Safe House Banja Luka was invited by the "Youth and Health Project in the Balkans" supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to participate in preparation of the brochure for school age children with title "Isn't Smile Better?", focusing on peer violence and gender based violence among youth people. In May 2008, as a part of this project, Youth Forum on Violence was organized in Banja Luka, and representative of the Safe House Banja Luka held a lecture on topic "Domestic Violence." Participants of the Youth Forum on Violence were women and men teachers, pedagogues, school directors, psychologists, and boys and girls students of elementary schools.

In the period from January to February 2008, construction work was organized in the Safe House Banja Luka to set up hydro-isolation around house ground. A Firm "Bital" from Banja Luka did the construction work.

In December 2008, thanks to the one-time support of Gender Center of RS Government, Firm "Arge Engineering" initiated work on reconstruction of the shelter, related to wall painting, façade painting, reconstruction of the house yard, and basement adaptation, with objective of getting additional space for working and occupational therapy. Due to the bad weather conditions, these activities will be completed at the beginning of 2009. Beside that, support of the Gender Center of RS enabled us to purchase a new vehicle type "Škoda Fabia" for the needs of the Safe House Banja Luka, which will help us in transport and accompany women and children beneficiaries on different locations (e.g. visits to specialists medical exams, vaccination of children, school, center for social work, etc.)

IX. Contacts and Cooperation with Official Institutions and Private Companies

During 2008, the Safe House Banja Luka team reached agreement with the City Administration of Banja Luka, Sector of Civil Protection, about continuous providing of water by the Firefighter's Society for the needs of women beneficiaries of the Safe House. In the Safe House location, there is no city water network, and majority of inhabitants are securing water from natural resources. Since the Safe House capacity is twenty-one (21) persons and presence of children, our needs for clean water are big. Water is used for hygiene needs of women and children beneficiaries, house cleaning, washing laundry, and other needs, and cannot be used as drinking water. In December 2008, the Water Factory Banja Luka initiated preparations for connecting the area on city water supply system, and this will be implemented during 2009.

“Eko Team” Banja Luka, which is conducting cleaning of city rives shores, assisted the Safe House team with cleaning the house yard and part near river Vrbas in the close surroundings of the Safe House.

All purchase of groceries and hygiene material for the Safe House was conducted in the company TROPIC, until this firm was sold. During selling phase, changing, name of the Company, and take over by the buyer, all contracts with buyers that were using account payment system were annulled, with possibility of renewal and change. We did not use this possibility, due to slow administration. Since that period, all purchases are conducted in INTEREX Company, and we made a new purchasing contract.

In cooperation with the Center for Social Work Banja Luka, Women's Association "Duga" organized free one - month courses of tailoring and computers for seven (7) women beneficiaries of the Safe House.

During the first half of 2008, the Safe House Banja Luka did not have secured financing for normal work and services due to slow income in the public budget, and obstacles in the process of transferring finances on the Safe House account. During this period, we were purchasing necessary groceries and hygiene material in Private Grocery Shop “Skorić” near the Safe House location, and finalized payment after we acquired finances on the Safe House account.

In February and July 2008, nongovernmental organization “Genesis” Banja Luka secured large donation for the Safe House Banja Luka consisting of bed sheets, wardrobe, and diapers for babies and adult persons. These were used for needs of all women beneficiaries that were currently using the Safe House Banja Luka, as well as support for women former beneficiaries of the shelter, based on their needs.

In March and April 2008, Bakery “Manja” Banja Luka was providing bread and other bakery products for women and children beneficiaries of the Safe House. During that period, we also received donations of women and men individuals, citizens of Banja Luka that provided support in food, wardrobe, and furniture for the Safe House.

In June 2008, owner of pool “Šeher” from Banja Luka secured hundred free pool tickets, which were used by children beneficiaries of the Safe House in that period.

In June 2008, thanks to the nongovernmental organization "Most" Banja Luka, the Safe House received donation in wardrobe, provided by the Protestant Church. Donation was distributed to women former beneficiaries of the Safe House, based on their needs.

In 2008, the Safe House Banja Luka was supported by Postal Service of Republika Srpska, which intended to place wooden and glass handicrafts of women from the Safe House in their gift shops. However, due to administrative obstacles, their initiative was not implemented in the practice. The problem was that the Safe House is registered as the project of non-profit organization "United Women" Banja Luka, and we would need to legally change purpose of the organization.

The Safe House Banja Luka is distanced seven (7) kilometers from the city center. This is the reason why we approached the Transport Firm „Čivčija Tours“, and the owner promised that the monthly buses pass

for children from the Safe House will be 50% of regular monthly price for school children. Based on this agreement, the price of monthly buses pass for school children from the Safe House Banja Luka was 6.00 BAM instead of 12.00 BAM. However, during 2008, the transport firm that operates in the Safe House area changed, and any decision about reducing the price of monthly buses pass for the Safe House beneficiaries should be adopted by the Ministry for Family, Youth, and Sport of RS Government. In the moment of preparing this Report, we still did not receive response on our request related to this matter sent to the Ministry.

In October 2008, Lindsey Korver and Marion van der Bent-Meesters, representatives of EUFOR, LOT Mrkonjić Grad participated in the race as a part of the project "Women Run for Women". They fundraised for replacing house floor in the shelter, purchasing machine for washing dishes, children's equipments and tools for play. On that way, they contributed in making the life easier for women and children in the Safe House.

Major problem for identifying good exit strategies is to find employment that would enable women beneficiaries to continue with normal life with their children after they leave the shelter. During 2007, we reached agreement with Employment Agency "Spektar" from Banja Luka to register all unemployed women beneficiaries of the Safe House in database of the Agency. Women beneficiaries had the opportunity to get job, depending of their qualifications and previous working experience, as well as requirements of employers. In 2008, the Safe House team reached agreement with the Humanitarian Association "Partner" Banja Luka and Shoe Factory "Bema", and they employed several women beneficiaries of the shelter.

City Board of the Party for Democratic Progress (PDP) Banja Luka visited the Safe House as the part of "16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence", organized each year worldwide - from global to local level - in the period from 25 November, the International Day of Fighting Violence Against Women, and 10 December, the International Human Rights Day. On that occasion, ten (10) women beneficiaries of the Safe House had the opportunity to get ultra sound check up of breasts aimed for prevention and early detection of breast cancer. The check ups were organized in the Private Medical Ordination "Dr. Grubor". Marinko Umičević, Director of the Shoe Factory "Bema" and delegate in the City Assembly Banja Luka also visited the Safe House, and brought shoes for children beneficiaries, and suitable presents for women beneficiaries of the shelter. In December 2008, Mr. Umičević initiated discussion in the City Assembly about the issue of security protection of the Safe House premises. The Administrative Service of Banja Luka contacted us, as they wanted to know all details about lack of security measures. Outcome of this initiative will be visible hopefully during 2009.

As a part of Sent Nicolas holidays, redaction of daily newspapers "Press" visited the Safe House, and brought presents for children beneficiaries. In December 2008, "Delta" Company organized Christmas Program for all children beneficiaries of the Safe House during 2008. Children had the opportunity to see theatre play performed by Youth Theater "DIS" from Banja Luka, and received presents from the Santa Claus.

X. Media Activities

During 2008, the Safe House team and members of "United Women" Banja Luka continuously promoted the work of the Safe House in media, and possibilities for assistance for women and children to end the circle of violence. We placed emphasis on raising public awareness about the issue of domestic violence and encouraging victims of violence and their helpers to report violence.

As during the previous years, electronic and printed media in Bosnia and Herzegovina were showing high interest for the issue of domestic violence, and contributed into increasing awareness about the issue and reporting violence by women and men citizens. Media were especially interested for testimonies of individual women survivors of domestic violence. In four cases, women beneficiaries of the Safe House accepted on their responsibility to share their experiences of domestic violence with the public. Special media attention was directed on the case when, on a Children's Rights Day, a father beat his daughter on her way from the school to the Safe House, as he wanted her mother and her to return home. Her

mother, beneficiary of the Safe House, wanted to end the long agony and try to solve the problem, and shared her testimony with some media, which had positive influence on her case.

As negative experience with media, we would like to emphasize when a female journalist from one printed media twisted the statement of the Safe House team member, and used inappropriate and unacceptable presentation of communication of the Safe House personnel with the public institutions.

In further text, we will present overview of the media activities per months:

January 2008

- Daily Newspapers “Vecernje Novosti” – Article “Tight Roof for the Rescue.” The article about increased number of women beneficiaries in the Safe House. Statement given by Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator.
- Daily Newspapers “Dnevni Avaz” – Article on the anniversary of the work of the Safe House Banja Luka, as well as positive and negative experiences in the work of the Safe House. Statement given by Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator.

February 2008

- Daily Newspapers “Glas Srpske” – Article “Safe in the Safe House” related to change of financing model for the current year. Statement given by Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator.
- BH RADIO – Radio Program about the issue of domestic violence and services provided by the Safe House. Statement given by Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator.

March 2008

Press Center Banja Luka – Press conference on the International Women’s Day, with emphasis on the issue of domestic violence. Presenters on the Conference were Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator, Aleksandra Radeta Stegić – Secretary of “United Women” Banja Luka and Andelko Đokić, a social worker from the Center for Social Work Banja Luka. Alternative Television Banja Luka, Radio Television of Republika Srpska, and daily newspapers “Glas Srpske” covered the Conference.

- Radio Television of Republika Srpska – News report about exhibition on the topic “Violence Against Women” in the People’s Assembly of Republika Srpska, organized by the Ministry for Family, Youth, and Sport of Republika Srpska and Gender Center of RS Government, in cooperation with the Council of Europe.
- Alternative Television of Banja Luka – In the Central News, statement of Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator, on ways of psychological violence. The statement was related to the case of child abuse by parents.
- Alternative Television of Banja Luka - In the Central News, statement of Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator, about Pre-draft of the Law on Social Protection of RS and amendment submitted by “United Women” Banja Luka aimed to secure recognition of women survivors of domestic violence as special social category.

April 2008

- Radio of Republika Srpska – Radio Program “Influence of Nongovernmental Organizations on a Society.” Participants were Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator, and Lidija Živanović, Executive Director of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly Banja Luka. Radio Program emphasized positive side of civil sector, with numerous calls of women and men participants.

City Guide INTERMEZZO – Article about the issue of domestic violence, ways of helping victims, work of the Safe House and obstacles for identifying exit strategies for women beneficiaries when they leave the shelter. Statement given by Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator.

May 2008

- Daily Newspapers “Glas Srpske” – Article about financing of the safe houses in Republika Srpska. Statement given by Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator.
- Alternative Television Banja Luka – TV Program “Dossier” broadcasted the statement of Nada Golubović, President of “United Women” Banja Luka and Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator, about the work of the shelter.
- Television Liberty – TV program about domestic violence and providing assistance for women in the shelter. The statement given by the social worker from the Safe House Banja Luka.

June 2008

- Radio Television of Republika Srpska – As a part of TV Program “Panorama of Banja Luka” the story about domestic violence. The statement given by the social worker from the Safe House Banja Luka.

July 2008

- Daily Newspapers “Euro Blic” – Article about physical and psychological abuse of children in Republika Srpska. Statement given by the social worker of the Safe House Banja Luka.

August 2008

- Daily Newspapers “Glas Srpske” – Article about the work of the Safe House Banja Luka. Statement given by the social worker of the Safe House Banja Luka.

November 2008

- Television “Bel” – As a part of TV program “22 Hours” the story was broadcasted about the visit of City board of the Party for Democratic Progress to the Safe House Banja Luka. Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator talked about the issues in the work of the Safe House.
- Daily Newspapers “Fokus” and “Nezavisne Novine” – Article “Hand of Support for Victims of Domestic Violence”, about the visit of the City Board of Party for Democratic Progress to the Safe House Banja Luka. Statement given by Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator.
- Alternative Television Banja Luka – As a part of central news program, the story was broadcasted about the case of beating up a young girl beneficiary of the Safe House by her father on a way from school to the shelter. A mother of beaten girl, also beneficiary of the shelter made a statement, as well as Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator, and Lana Jajčević, Lawyer in “United Women” Banja Luka.

December 2008

- Daily Newspapers “Vecernje Novosti” – Article “Tight Budget of the Safe House,” about envisaged financial support for the Safe House Banja Luka for upcoming period. Statement given by Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator.
- Daily Newspapers “Press” – Article “Violent Husband is threatening to Me Also in the Safe House.” The statements given by B.S., a woman beneficiary of the shelter, and Amela Bašić-Tomić, the Safe House Coordinator.

Banja Luka, 17 February 2009

Nada Golubović, President of the “United Women” Banja Luka