**Save lives of women and children victims of violence in Serbia**

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue in Serbia – until today, in 2015, 30 women in Serbia died as a result of domestic violence, more than in whole 2014.

Counseling Against Family Violence (CAFV) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization established in the Republic of Serbia in 1996. CAFV provides shelter and support services to victims of family violence, operating 3 safe houses (shelters)in the Belgrade, Serbia area.

Shelters are saving lives of women in Serbia, and we currently have 30 women and 27 children at the safe houses.

In the period from 2009-2014, 644 women and 719 children were sheltered in safe houses operated by CAFV.

CAFV also provides vocational, social and psychological support services to victims of domestic violence. In addition, lawyer is providing legal counseling services to victims of domestic violence once a week.

Research shows that legal aid to victims is the most influential support service in lowering the rate of domestic violence. Our rich experience with victims in Serbia has highlighted the harsh realities facing them. Victims, particularly women are trapped by their circumstances, frequently enduring their life threatening relationship since they do not believe they have any alternatives for survival. Victims are often of low income, and without skills enabling them to obtain employment to support themselves, and their children. They are not familiar with their rights in respect to assets, support, or protection from violence. Even those who might afford legal assistance are not able to access funds. Frequently, victims are either intimidated by the legal system or simply do not know how to find a lawyer who might help them.

In 2013 CAFV, though a project supported by United State Agency for International Development (USAID) grant, has established a legal aid network designed to provide legal counseling and support to victims of domestic violence throughout Serbia. Most victims have little information regarding their legal rights, including those relating to assets, support, and child custody; do not have the means to retain a lawyer, and often are intimidated by the legal system. In order to overcome this problem CAFV has identified 40 qualified lawyers, across Serbia, to be available to provide legal services, focusing in particular on under-served areas. Lawyers were given training on the social dynamics of family violence, supplemented by training on the nuances of the state of the law on family-related issues. Information regarding the availability of legal aid was distributed through courts, police stations, social welfare offices, and health centers.

The program has turned out to be highly successful. The number of victims requesting assistance has climbed consistently, as formal and informal word of the program has circulated. The USAID recognized the project as a “success story” in efforts to improve human rights in Serbia.

One victim shared her story: “Ever since I was 18, I suffered abuse from my husband, who is an alcoholic. When our children also became victims of his aggressive behavior, I wanted to break away from the agony that we were living in. However, I had no support. It is only through this project … and with the help of expert lawyers I was able to seek protection from violence, and was given an opportunity to start a fight to protect those rights that I was denied my whole life, putting up with beating, insults and humiliations every day. Now I know that with the right advice and support from the experts, I have become strong enough to last through the court proceedings, fully aware that I must not blame myself for the violence I have suffered.”

All activities that CAFV is providing to the victims of family violence are supported only through donations and project financing. In addition to that, grant supporting the network is expiring soon, and additional funds are needed to sustain and, hopefully, expand the successful network. It is our hope that through donations from citizens and organizations concerned with the plight of victims we can continue, and even expand, the legal aid network. Moreover, donation can also help in providing shelter (meals, hygiene, utilities, etc.) to more women and children victims of violence that are running away from violence in order to save their lives.

This project will:

1. Continue to provide shelter and save lives of women and children victims of violence –

In period of 6 months through this project it is planned to shelter in safe houses 25 women and 25 children victims of violence

1. Continue to provide free legal aid through established and expanded legal aid network –

In this period of 6 months we plan to provided legal services to 100 victims of family violence - not only in Belgrade but in whole Serbia

1. Continue to provide vocational, social and psychological support to victims of family violence not only in safe houses but in CAFV as well
2. Continue to work on creating environment of zero tolerance towards family violence – it is planned to work with the media as well as other important stakeholders (centers for social work, police, ministries etc.)

**Budget**

1. 25 women and 25 children x 15$ x 90 days (app stay in safe house) = 33 750$
2. According to previous experience providing legal aid to 100 women and operating the network will cost around 16000$(legal assistance counseling and drafting on complaint = 60$ and counseling and drafting two or more complaints = 120$, organization of one meeting, etc.)
3. Provision of social psychological support will be based on monthly consultancy - 2(workers – one social worker and one psychologist ) x 200$ per x 6 months = 2400$

Total

**52150$**