



MARY BYRON
FOUNDATION

"Celebrating Solutions"
Nomination Form

Legal Name of Organization AMERICAN WOMEN OVERSEAS (AWOS)

Address 3300 NW 185TH #133

City/State/Zip PORTLAND, OR 97229

Contact Person PAULA LUCAS

Title EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Phone number (503) 846-8748 Fax number (503) 907-6554

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Description of organization AWOS PROVIDES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVENTION AND CRISIS SERVICES TO ALL AMERICAN WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN WHILE LIVING OVERSEAS AND UPON THEIR RETURN TO THE USA.
Geographical area served WHERE EVER AMERICANS RESIDE OVERSEAS AND THEIR REPATRIATION AREA

Is organization tax-exempt under IRS 501 (c) (3) guidelines? yes no

If no, is your organization a public agency/unit of government? yes no

Signature of contact person P. Lucas

Date Sept 10, 2002 /

Please send Program Outline with Nomination Form to:

Mary Byron Foundation, Inc.
10401 Linn Station Road, Suite 200
Louisville, KY 40223-3842

Or email us at: grants@marybyronfoundation.org



**American Women Overseas
International Toll Free Domestic Violence Crisis Line
& Domestic Violence Fund**

1. Describe the mission of your organization in five sentences or less.

AWOS' mission is to provide domestic violence intervention and crisis services to all American women and their children who are victims of domestic violence and abuse while living overseas and upon their return to the USA. AWOS is pursuing this mission by three critical objectives:

Resources

1. To provide resources to American domestic violence victims overseas that will enable them to break the cycle of violence, to enable the American mother to remove her children from the abusive household by supporting them in their decision to leave their abuser, and to have a new life in safety from continued violence and abuse back in the USA.

Relief

2. To provide information to the victims to reduce the effects of trauma and reduce unpreparedness, and provide training and education to those handling their cases to build awareness and sensitivity to the specific issues involved when abused American women and children flee domestic violence and return to the USA.

Release

3. To provide the logistics for the repatriation of abused women and children to the US and the needed services to legally secure the jurisdiction of the children, temporary housing, job training and employment while exercising all safety and security precautions, protecting the American children from being abducted to a foreign country.

2. Describe the innovative aspects of the program you are submitting for consideration.

To the best of our knowledge, AWOS is the only agency in the US founded to specifically assist battered American women and children, civilians and military families, in crisis overseas and upon their return to the USA, enabling them to break the cycle of violence.

There is a stark contrast between the availability of victim advocacy services for battered women and children living in the USA and battered American women and children living overseas.



Battered American military wives/girlfriends contact AWOS stating they are afraid to report the abuse within the Military circuit because victim advocates at military facilities cannot provide confidential services in the same manner as their civilian counterparts in the USA.

AWOS was established to address the dimensions and complexity of being an American woman or child abused in a foreign country via our website www.awoscentral.com and via the International Toll Free Domestic Violence Crisis Line, 866-USWOMEN, the only such line in existence in the USA. This crisis line can be accessed anywhere in the world by Americans by contacting their regional AT&T operator and ask to be connected.

Currently, the crisis line operates from 10pm until 6am PST, Monday through Friday, with a vision of being operational 24 hours per day when funding permits. Crisis emails are responded to within 24 hours of receipt irregardless of the day received. AWOS serves all American women and children irregardless of race or religion.

3a. Describe your program's implementation.

Paula Lucas founded the organization in April 1999, after she fled the Middle East, and her abusive husband of 15 years, returning to the United States with her three children and a single suitcase. Lucas had repeatedly asked for help from the American Embassy. Embassy staff was sympathetic to her problem, but offered no domestic violence advocacy, no safety planning, and no resources for her to access. She had no alternative but to survive and flee the country on her own when there was an opportunity. That opportunity took 3 years from the time she first contacted the American Embassy. Once back "home", Lucas faced tremendous legal obstacles and incurred huge legal fees fighting for the right to keep her American children in the United States.

Lucas founded the organization based on what she had wished had been available as an abused American women, along with her children, in a foreign country. Backed by a strong Marketing, Advertising and Public Relations career and her numerous contacts in Europe, the Far East and the Middle East, Lucas established the website, www.awoscentral.com, by December 1999 and began outreach efforts via the Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas, Expatriate Groups, National Domestic Violence Agencies and the US State Department.

By March 2000 the organization received tax exempt status, and by April 2001 Lucas and her team of volunteers had secured enough seed money to launch the international toll free domestic violence crisis line, 866-USWOMEN

3b. What barriers did your organization have to overcome?

Barrier: Outreach. Efforts are worldwide and therefore progress is gradual. The Bureau of Consular Affairs states there are over 3.7 million civilians overseas (July, 1999). However, this is



only a count of American citizens registered with American Embassies overseas. Unofficial estimates reach 6 million. The US Dept. of Defense states there are approximately 500,000 military personnel overseas. Our priority is to reach as deeply and widely as possible into the American expatriate communities and raise awareness of the services AWOS offers to battered American women and children to help them realize that they do have alternatives to living a life of violence and can break the cycle.

Barrier: Accurate Demographics. Getting accurate population statistics is difficult as American citizens living overseas are not included in the census.

Barrier: Funding. The organization does not fit into funding guidelines of most grantors in the USA as most are restricted geographically or consider our program to be international. Grantors that fund international projects, don't consider us International because we only serve Americans. However, we received our first foundation money this year and several grants are pending.

Barrier: Our clients face international abduction charges. Within the US, the importance of removing a child from an abusive household is recognized to the point that the state will take action to remove the child from the mother if she does not remove the child from an abusive father. (AWOS recognizes that mothers can also be abusive, but the vast majority of domestic violence cases involve the father/significant other as the perpetrator.)

Additional legal problems begin when American women cross international borders with their children to flee from domestic violence and abuse. They are in violation of the Hague Convention on Child Abduction that states "the abductor must return the children to the place of habitual residence." The Hague Convention was written without any consideration to the hardships the mother and her children suffer, nor the domestic violence they endure at the hands of the abuser, and assume the spouse who flees is always at fault, and is not acting in the best interest of the children. She is considered as an "abductor," and therefore, guilty of a crime. Due to lack of proof of abuse, or her failure to access legal redress in the country she fled, she may be forced to return her children to the abuser in the foreign country even after a long and expensive legal battle and even in cases where the abuser resides in a country that is not party to the Hague Convention.

3c. How did you Marshal the necessary resources for implementation?

Perseverance knowing that battered American women and children living in overseas populations are isolated, may not speak the national language, have no family close by, no validations and are often subjected to systemic abuse, and no agency exists to address this problem.



Networking with other crisis intervention organizations and the internet have been key components to our success. The willingness of volunteers to donate their time and efforts for the cause has also been a huge factor in our progress.

How do you know your program works? Site two examples.

Example 1. We have been working since March 2002 with an abused American woman and her four children residing in a European country. In her particular situation, her husband had hidden the US passports of the children to prevent her from taking the children out of the country. The US Embassy will not issue new passports without both parents being physically present at the Embassy and both giving permission.

In this case, we advised the woman to be patient, to report the abuse to the US Embassy and continue to gather evidence of abuse including photographs of the bruises on the children, as she had not previously documented any abuse. In July 2002 her husband was arrested on child abuse charges and she had months of evidence to support the case.

After consulting with the US Embassy, and with the abuse charges against her husband, the woman is now seeking divorce and sole custody of her children in the foreign country. Her lawyer anticipates this process to be completed by December 2002 and she will be free to leave the country and return to the USA.

Example 2. An American woman contacted us in June 2002. She was planning to flee the foreign country she was in with her daughter but was unsure of the consequences. We advised her on a course of action based on the details of her particular situation including the documentation she should bring back to the USA including proof of abuse.

She returned in August 2002 and her husband has filed international kidnapping charges against her, however, with the documentation she has, we are confident he will not be successful in his charges and she will be able to stay in the USA with her child and seek divorce and sole custody in a US Court.

5. Who are your key partners? What are their roles?

FAWCO. The Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas Inc. is an international network of 76 independent clubs with a combined membership of over 17,000 women in 34 countries worldwide. It serves as a support network for American women living and working abroad and is



particularly active in the fields of U.S. citizens' concerns, education, environmental protection, and women and children's rights. This group has been instrumental in our outreach efforts.

Portland State University Student Group. This group was formed in Spring of 2002 and assists with outreach through the Women's Resource Centers based in Universities throughout the USA.

Network of Volunteer Country Coordinators. We have established a network of American women living overseas who help with outreach and crisis intervention in their respective countries including Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, England, the Netherlands, Ireland and Argentina. We are continuing to expand this network with the hope of establishing country coordinators in every country around the world.

Washington County, Oregon. The county provides the organization with in-kind office space, the use of all office equipment, telephone calls & faxes (within the USA).

6. Could/should your program be replicated in other areas of the country? Why?

Yes. Each State should implement a program. Americans that move overseas maintain Federal Voting rights in the congressional district of the State they last resided in. However, if they are abused overseas and need to flee the abuse, they have no access to resources in the last congressional district they resided in to help them while in crisis.

Women who cross international borders to flee domestic violence, and who have not received assistance in terms of safety planning, domestic violence advocacy or legal preparedness, typically do not have medical records, photos of abuse or other documentation with them. The proof remains in the country they have fled. Distance, language barriers and bias to the nationality of the abuser can all be obstacles to retrieving the required information.

In addition, American women often do not seek legal redress in the country they are fleeing, because "At the moment of separation or attempted separation ... the batterer's quest for control often becomes most acutely violent and potentially lethal. (Martha R. Mahoney, *Legal Images of Battered Women: Redefining the Issue of Separation*, 1991.) Her only hope is to increase the geographical distance to reduce the likelihood of violence and to seek refuge. I.e. Typically in her last place of residence in the USA.

Therefore, we would like to see each State replicate a program that represent battered American women and children that have relocated from their state to a foreign country, and offer them resources and advice based upon the domestic violence laws in that State in relation to their ability to flee a foreign country to escape abuse and stop the cycle of violence.



Answers to additional specific questions:

1. What is the number of active volunteers of employees in your program?

In the Portland, Oregon area we have an average of 6 active volunteers year round. In the Summer we have 10 interns for 8 weeks through Portland State University.

We have a network of country coordinators located in various countries around the world, of which approximately 12 are active at this time.

We have 3 active volunteers in the United States in places other than Portland, Oregon.

There is only one full time employee, Paula Lucas, Founder and Executive Director, who was able to take a salary starting in 2003 due to the funding received in the last quarter of 2002.

2. What is the number of clients served by your program?

Our target civilian population is estimated between 3.7 million and 6 million.

Our target military population is estimated at ½ million.

Getting accurate population statistics is difficult as American citizens living overseas are not included in the census. In addition, there is no mechanism in place to track American citizens leaving the USA and going to live in foreign countries

Please see item 4 a) on page one for a breakdown of clients served in 2002.

3. What method of evaluation is your program utilizing?

- Web site statistics – tracking the number of visitors coming onto the website and the countries they are coming in from.
- Tracking the Increase in crisis line calls and crisis emails in relation to outreach efforts. (i.e. If an outreach mailing has gone out to American Women's Clubs in France in April, have crisis calls/crisis emails subsequently increased from France?).
- Feedback from cooperating regional agencies on the perceived benefits of the materials/methods used to reach domestic violence victims.
- Follow-up on how, or if, collaborative agencies are actively participating.
- Asking clients, (when and if appropriate) how they heard about the domestic violence services we offer.

4. Copy of our Domestic Violence training manual enclosed