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Agencies provide counseling, information and referral Support services for women

By Chris McCubbin
Staff Reporter

There was a time, not too long ago, when a woman with a problem was on her own. She might be able to turn to her mother, or to a friend. But more likely the only place a woman could go for help was her husband, clergyman or some other male.

Today women have a lot more options. Many organizations and agencies exist in Lincoln where women can go to get help from other women.

A good place to start is the Women's Resource Center, in the Nebraska Union. In addition to a library of over 1,000 volumes and an extensive file of articles, papers and pamphlets on women's issues, the WRC provides a referral service for women with legal, psychological, health and other needs.

Katherine Araujo, WRC coordinator, said the center was established in 1970 by students who saw a need for dialogue about women's issues, and who wanted to create a safe, free environment for women.

The WRC is part of the University Program Council, so in addition to its educational mission, it's also home to a programming committee that brings women's writers, musicians and speakers to campus.

"I would love it if any woman walked into the Women's Resource Center and immediately felt comfortable," Araujo said. The center has been renovated over the summer, so now "it's a very pleasant facility to just be in," Araujo said.

The Nebraska Commission on the Status of Women, 301 Centennial Mall South, is "here for the women and children of the state of Nebraska," Jill Staberg, the commission's acting director, said.

Two years ago the commission, a state agency, was defunded by the state legislature, severely limiting the center's projects, Staberg said. However, the center still provides advocacy and referral services for Nebraska women. Staberg said the center's biggest mission is taking crisis calls from women "stuck in the system" — women who just want to return to school or who are being abused, or who are coping with divorce — and providing them with immediate support and referring them to where they can get help.

The commission's policy and support decisions are made by 30 commissioners, from across the state who are appointed by the governor for three-year terms.

The Lincoln/Lancaster Commission on the Status of Women, 901 P St, Room 330 is a separate organization from the state commission. Sue Ellen Wall, the commissioner's executive director, said the commission is technically an advisory board to the city and county board, but the commission's information is available to any interested party.

Most of the commission's energies are directed into fact-finding committees and violence against women. The commission also publishes informational booklets.

In addition to 28 volunteer commis-

sioners the commission also has more than 250 committee members, Wall said.

The national League of Women Voters was established in 1922, and the Lincoln chapter formed shortly thereafter.

The league, headquartered at 808 P St., Suite 207, exists to promote political responsibility by informing and educating citizens and helping them participate in the democratic process, said Sherry Miller, league president.

In addition to conducting voter registration drives and monitoring organizational elections and conducting educational programs on current political issues, Miller said the league also monitors governmental policies on corrections, national resources, child care, women's rights and other issues.

The YWCA, 1432 N St., has been part of Lincoln for over 100 years. The YWCA started as a service and residence for young women in need of a temporary, safe and inexpensive place to stay. The Lincoln YWCA closed its residence in 1980, but it still provides services for women and their families, Elizabeth Meyer, the executive director said.

The YWCA offers counseling, career counseling and support for women in transition, fitness and recreational activities for children through senior citizens, and an extensive child care program including comprehensive programs for pregnant and parenting teens and part-time child care for women who might need a short break from the rigors of motherhood.

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Equality under the law?

Compiled By Jim Rogers

Major legal decisions regarding women:

An Act for Regulating and Orderly Celebrating of Marriages, 1640, with revisions 1672 and 1702 (Connecticut): This statute required public notice and celebration of wedding ceremonies, prohibited a wide assortment of inter-relational marriages and granted courts the power to assign up to one-third of the estate to the wife in case of a void marriage.

An Act Relating to Bills of Divorce, (Connecticut) 1667: Connecticut enacted the earliest divorce laws in America. A bill of divorce could be granted in the case of adultery, fraudulent marriage contract or desertion.

An Act Concerning the Dowry Widows, 1672 (Connecticut): Widows were granted a "life estate" (use for the life of the widow) in fixed property. Dowry rights became weaker during the nineteenth century as a result of the decreased holding of real estate as a form of wealth. Without women's property acts, married women's situations became more unsettled as the impact of these laws were sapped.

Resolutions, Woman's Rights Convention, July 19th and 20th, 1848, Seneca Fall, N.Y.: "Resolved, that we petition our state legislature for our right to the elective franchise, every year, until our prayer be granted." "Resolved . . . woman being taxed equally with man, ought not to be

deprived of an equal representation in the government."

Declaration of Sentiments, Woman's Right's Convention, August 2, 1848, (Rochester, N.Y.): "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal . . .

"The history of mankind is the history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object an absolute tyranny over her."

Married Women's Property Act, 1860 (New York): This statute extended the economic rights of women to include the right to make contracts independent of her husband's approval, to take on debts, and made such obligations not binding upon a husband's property. It also declared women joint guardians of their children.

Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1868): "No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States . . ."

Bradevill v. Illinois (1873): Mr. Justice Bradley, in a concurring opinion wrote, "The claim that under the 14th Amendment of the Constitution . . . (laws) can no longer be set up as a barrier against the right of females to pursue any lawful employment . . . assumes that it is one of the privileges and immunities of women as citizens to engage in any and every profession, occupation or employment in civil life.

"It certainly cannot be affirmed, as a historical fact, that this has ever been established as one of the fundamental

privileges and immunities of the sex . . . The natural and proper timidity and delicacy which belongs to the female sex evidently unfits it for many occupations of civil life."

Act for the Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of Obscene Literature and Article of Immoral Use. (Law of the 42nd Congress): The statute prohibited possession of obscenity as well as any literature or instruments relating to preventing conception or inducing abortion.

Minor v. Happersett, 1875 (U.S. Supreme Court): "The Constitution does not define the privileges and immunities of citizens . . . If suffrage (for women) was intended to be included within (the Constitution's) obligations, language better adapted to express that intent would most certainly have been employed . . . No argument as to the woman's need of suffrage can be considered. We can only act upon her rights as they exist."

Muller v. Oregon, 1908 (U.S. Supreme Court): Oregon had limited women's working days to 10 hours. The Court upheld the Constitutionality of the Law: "That the woman's physical structure and the performance of maternal functions place her at a disadvantage in the struggle for subsistence is obvious.

"Differentiated by these matters from the other sex, she is properly placed in a class by herself, and legislation designed for her protection may be sustained, even when like legislation is

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