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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Open Arms Hurt by Possible Battered Women's Scam in Ohio

April 27, 2007 FINDLAY, Ohio – A questionable group is operating throughout Ohio and has been soliciting funds claiming they are assisting ‘local battered women’ by asking for donations at the entrances to various stores. They have appeared in more than 15 counties in the last several months, **including here in Hancock County.** “People have told us they donated to this group, thinking they were helping Open Arms.” says Beth Meeks, Executive Director of Open Arms, Hancock County’s Domestic Violence and Rape Crisis Service. This group frequently targets Wal-Mart stores but has been seen at Sam’s Club, Kroger’s and Community Markets. They may be currently targeting stores along the I-75 corridor. The money raised is not being given to local domestic violence shelters and none of the family violence organizations throughout the state have any connection to the group or can verify who this group is. They sometimes use the name Women’s Christian Academy and have used other names such as United Restoration Ministries or Columbus Restoration Ministries. They are vague about their purpose and do not provide a contact or organization name unless pressed. They usually claim to be raising funds for ‘local battered women’. Attempts to reach the group by phone often go unanswered. The Columbus Restoration Ministries, who answer their phone as United Restoration Ministries, claim no connection to the people soliciting at stores. When questioned, the soliciting group typically leaves the area. Multiple complaints have been filed with the Ohio Attorney General’s Office.

“This is devastating to us because it is already so hard to raise funds. There is so little funding for domestic violence programs that we rely directly on community donations to pay our everyday bills. It is heart breaking and unbelievable that someone would try to profit by claiming to help local victims of family violence.” Meeks said. “We do not generally do these type of ‘canister’ solicitations and if we are out in public we have a sign with us advertising who we are.”

Several local stores have been contacted about the situation and all were supportive in making attempts to keep the questionable fund raisers out of their businesses.

“It’s a reminder that we should always carefully scrutinize where we put our charity dollars.” “When possible it is best to give directly to the organization you want to support. You can always contact your local United Way and inquire about organizations. They are usually aware of who the legitimate local charities are and can direct you to them.” she explains.

Anyone wishing to make a donation to Open Arms can do so by visiting them at their Outreach and Administrative Office at 401 West Sandusky Street in Findlay or by mail at P.O. Box 496, Findlay, Ohio 45839.

Open Arms Domestic Violence & Rape Crisis services is a nonprofit agency supported in part by the Hancock County United Way. Open Arms provides six program services to those living and working in the greater Hancock County community. The six programs include Rape Crisis Services, Child Advocacy, Violence Recovery Project, Outreach Services, the Harmony House Visitation & Exchange program, and Emergency Shelter Services. The 24-hour Crisis Hotline is 419-422-4766.

Council on Domestic Violence, Inc.
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(419) 420-9261 Business Line
(419) 422-4766 24-Hour Crisis Hotline
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