

Interview with Diane Betts

Date: March, 2014

Location: Marquette, Michigan

Women's Center in Marquette

START OF INTERVIEW

Jane Ryan (JR): Good morning, Diane. I'm happy to be with Diane Betts, who will be sharing her story of her involvement with Women's Center which is currently housed on South Front street, it is March of 2014 and we are really happy to be with Diane because she can share very personal story of her involvement with the Women's Center and how it's evolved down to her being part of staff. Diane, would you like to share little about where things are now and then go back with your story?

Diane Betts (DB): Ok. I'm Diane Betts and I have my master's in social work, and as of January 2014, I became the Associate Director of the Women's Center Harbor House.

JR: Ok. Tell us how this all began, why you knew about the Women's Center, how you got involved, and approximately when?

DB: I was living in Crystal Falls, this was in 2002. I was 42 and I had a two-year-old and a three-year-old. The domestic violence situation I was in... I would never say that back then because when I thought of domestic violence I thought of it being the bruising and bleeding on the outside, I found out though that it's not. How I found out... actually there was phenomenal people in many communities, and one was WIC nurse, do I mention names?

JR: Probably, it's ok to if you feel... and when you use an acronym like WIC, what was that?

DB: WIC is Women's...I don't even.

JR: What was its purpose?

DB: Ok. The WIC program is through the health department and they help women who have children... just any health issues with the newborn and you are also provided with...it's for low

income families, so you are provided with coupons to get milk, eggs, cheese, all these basic health food, even like grains like oats or cereal. She would come to visit the home and we got to know each other, and she finally just one day said, she just realized that things weren't right and she encouraged me to talk to the Women's Center of Marquette. So I made a phone call to the Harbor House which is connected with the Women's Center, the Harbor House's has advocates there. It is the emergency shelter. I talked to an advocate, her name was Paloma, who was the outreach advocate, and I just talked to her and she just mentioned... she just told me what the Women's Center did and everything, I just kind of forgot about it, because I thought, well that's me. But I knew through the... I knew I had to get out of this unhealthy relationship. I got a phone call from our pastor. Pastor Dennis Schmidt, his church was in Wisconsin, Athelstane, Wisconsin. He called me one day and he said that I need to get out of this relationship. He couldn't mention divorce which I understand, but he said "it's unhealthy, he's a criminal, and he belongs behind bars. You need to get a PPO and get out of there." That was my confirmation that something wasn't right. So that's what I did. I did this on my own with the help of corresponding through phone calls with the Harbor House. I went to the judge in Crystal Falls and I asked for a PPO and I wasn't sure that I get it because again, there wasn't any physical abuse, but there was emotional abuse, financial, even spiritual...

JR: And the PPO is a protection order?

DB: Personal Protection Order. You just have to drive a narrative about why you feel this is necessary, why do you feel safe, why do you feel scared? Cause bottom line is you feel scared somebody whether they have physically touched you or not there's something wrong. So I was granted that. Now I, born raised in Dayton, Ohio, I wanted to move back to Ohio where my family was. But the laws in Michigan, the marriage laws, state that whoever... and I had to find this out because I made a phone call out of blue, I decided wait a minute, I wanted to pack up the kids and go to Ohio. And something told me in my gut saying, "find out if you can." So I just called attorney and the Yellow Pages and I asked him and he said if I would have done that, I would got kidnapping and abandonment charges. Even though the father, the children, my husband at the time, left us and moved to a different state, because I had children, I was the one responsible, therefore I could not leave state.

JR: That was Michigan law?

DB: Michigan law, yes.

JR: And that still on the books or has that been erased?

DB: I believe so, I'm not really for sure. I believe so. I don't think that has changed. Maybe one day soon. But all things were for the good, that's what I believe in, because I was raised and I wanted go back and say because I was raised in a very strong family core of a mother and a father, siblings, strong work ethics, values, morals, believes, we went to church, and so I was educated. I was strong, I was smart, I was intelligent, but so are people that heard other people. They are manipulative and that's hard for me to wrap my mind around, but there are... that does happen. Ok. So, I did some research, talked to many people in the community Crystal Falls and they told me about, you know, I was thinking about I needed to go back to school. So... because all my life raising myself, I was in retail business... worked fine, but with two very young kids I needed to find another avenue to support ourselves. So I put myself on the waiting list... oh we were safe, sorry... When I served him the PPO we were safe in the home we were at temporarily, so it gave me time to not have to run into an emergency shelter, I had time to seek other avenues and that was through looking into housings, affordable housings, which I knew nothing about. That goes by your income; Section 8, HUD, MSHDA's, those kinds of things helped families and individuals with low income. I don't know what I would have done without that. So I got on the waiting list for Lake Superior Village Apartments. I applied for Northern, bottom line is June of 2003 I was packing up the house and my kids and we were moving to a foreign land called Marquette, Michigan. I knew nobody here.

JR: Was the move prompted by the need for education at Northern?

DB: Education, housing, safe affordable housing, because I was working at a grocery store in Crystal Falls, minimum wage 40 hours a week. You can't make it what two kids on that and I knew there had to be something better; that's the way I was brought up. I did have to humble myself and go to DHS to get on the welfare system which was so against what I believed in, but I have two children to take care of and I needed help. And that was a wonderful, wonderful support. I had food stamps, Medicaid, it was just phenomenal. So we moved, I got into Northern, and things are going okay. We were making it. You can make it all 6-8 thousand year with all these other helps in the government system. And I was working part time at Kohl's, they were wonderful to work for, and I started in the early child development classes. Along the way there

is a woman that I need to speak of and that's Dr. Karen Suksi. She was the one woman that I could trust and I just told her why I left and what I was going through, because psychologically I was still scarred. See, when one person is unhealthy and you're intimate in that relationship, you become unhealthy, which I didn't see or know. So I started sharing with Dr. Suksi about what I left and what was still traumatizing me, so to speak, not knowing this. She encouraged me to go talk to someone at the Women's Center. The Women's Center Harbor House and I was like, "really?" So I did, and that's where my life change forever for the good; not just my life, but my two children. So when did I make that call, it had to be sometime starting schools so it had to be sometime in the fall semester of 2003.

JR: And this was your second connection but now it made sense.

DB: ...Connection, but not it was physical, but now it was physical connection because the other times was just phone calls. I had never met them yet. They were helping me from a distance to stay safe, to safety plan with me, to empower me, and to let me know there's ways... there's options I could take to be safe. But then I made a physical connection. I had an appointment and I met Mary Smith. She was the...I don't know what her title was, but she worked with the families. So she came to my home, my apartment and she connected me with the community. What I can do, even though I was poor, the healthy things that I could do for my kids and I, she told me about the strong kids scholarship at the YMCA. That was just phenomenal. And the children's museum, all these places that my kids and I could connect with other people, and of course I found a church. I didn't find it actually it was the pastor from Wisconsin that came all the way here and met pastor Kevin Taylor, Silver Creek Church, to make sure that kids and I had some kind of community connection and the stay strong, it just, cause once you just, you know, bottom line is no one can go through life crisis situations, issues, alone, period. We all need a hand hold on to. So when I moved here, my mom and my dad and my brother came up to visit just make sure that we were safe, because when you hear about low income housing you typically think of the negative things and when they came up to visit, they knew we were okay. Matter of fact, we were poorer in a lot of ways, but we were richer in many, many other ways. We were richer because we were safe, there was freedom, there was peace and joy in our lives. Even my children felt that. Even my son who was only three-and-a-half, four, they could feel that. The Women's Center with Mary Smith came to our house... and actually my parents where

there at that time, so they were listening in the other room. Again they wanted to make sure that their daughter, their grandchildren were safe. Mary went over many things of me besides the community piece, also we were talking about ways to keep a safe, a personal protection order, PPO, and child custody issues because you want to act on that fast because again, if whoever starts the process first, that's where it'll be held. So, another phenomenal connection, Mary introduce me to Laura Grover. This was April, 2004. She did a pro-bono, I got the down payment help through a grant I believe through Women's Center. Mary helped me that day in my kitchen before April, this had to be February, 2004. She wrote for me, she said "look, this might be traumatizing to rehash all the things you and your children endured through his power, and control, and threats, and intimidation. So she wrote down everything I started sharing with her. And that was the first time I shared details of what he did.

JR: And she is a lawyer? You said pro-bono...

DB: No.

JR: No?

DB: Oh, I'm sorry. Mary Smith is an advocate of the Women's Center.

JR: She is the one who you were speaking with...

DB: She is the one who wrote this stuff down, she was an advocate, is kind of like she almost was like a lawyer. Because she knew all the court legal stuff, because she also worked with, she had a connection with the lawyers. Because the Women's Center Harbor House helps with the court stuff such as any legal stuff, PPO's, personal protection orders, they help with child custody cases, they help with divorce cases, and it's not that their lawyers, but they just know the connections and they're there to hold your hand throughout the whole process as long as you ask.

JR: And it's probably... know at the point at which you might need a lawyer or need whatever.

DB: Yes, and they'll connect you, and then if you can't afford one there's also other ways like the... what is it the... legal aid of Michigan, phenomenal people phenomenal organization. Ok. So, in my house, that day we did all this work. I don't know how many hours, I mean it had to be two hours that she spent with me and my kids, and we wrote all of this out to get the process going for divorce so we could be free and safe.

JR: Did you find it traumatizing or was there some relief connected with doing verbalizing or...?

DB: It was. And for me to say it and write it, I don't think I could have done that. Not knowing, cause like when you keep it buried inside and then you start sharing, it is hard but it was empowering. Because it was release of guilt, or shame, or fear, or any of that you just automatically feel even though it's not my shame and guilt. Shame on somebody...

[AUDIO SKIPS]

JR: We will resume our interview with Diane Betts, we may have to overlap train of thought here to recall, but you recall where we were.

DB: Yes, because we were back in Lake Superior Apartments when I just started fall semester at Northern Michigan University, fall semester of 2003, in the early child development which is a psychology department and where finally it was in the beginning of January, February of 2004, that after talking with Dr. Karen Suksi that I needed help. I needed somebody to talk to. So that's when I made a phone call and Mary Smith who was an advocate, who still is an advocate...

JR: Through the Women's Center.

DB: Women's Center Harbor House, yes. She came to my home. That I can't stress the personal, homey feeling, and plus I had my kids there, and talking about the domestic violence that is horrific and traumatizing and for the first time sharing this with another human being and a woman; a strong empowered woman that I thought I was, but that was taken away from me for a period of my life. So, she was helping me with paperwork regarding getting prepared for going to the court system through Judge Sulka to get child custody established and divorce; and then this is where we were introduced to Laura Grover. Here's how everything works with the Women's Center Harbor House. After Mary was done writing all the information that she needed, as she left my home, my parents were astounded by what phenomenal support I have here. They felt that there was so much support and love in this community that they knew that it was ok that they go home and know that I was in good hands. So then eventually came time to go to court. Again, I don't have to go alone. Mary's not a lawyer, and even Paloma, they're not lawyers, they're advocates who will stand by your side through the whole process of whatever you need.

JR: Can I take an aside here? Do they get training through the Women's Center? How do they learn these powerful roles to assist and advocate?

DB: We do have ongoing through our grants. Ok, so everyone's programs, and services, and their title, they're throughout... when we get a state and federal grant, monies are distributed through... besides salary and everything else... that there is monies that have to go to training and conferences. So we're always training to...

JR: To do the... to carry out these roles.

DB: Yes. Yes.

JR: Enough of that.

DB: So even... before the court date, the appointments that I had with Laura Grover, through any of... through attorneys that all I have to do is call and say "Hey, Mary." She will say, "When do you have your appointment with Laura Grover?" "I have it on such date and time." "I'll be there. Do you need me to pick you up?" "No, I'll meet you there."

JR: And Laura Grover was...?

DB: An attorney at the time, and we met in her office, and Mary met there with me. It was nice, because when you're going through traumatic events you're not going to remember things. Your brain is already full, you're worried about so many things, and the advocate who's there—she can document stuff for you then, because then you can meet later on, and go over everything.

JR: Process-y.

DB: That's just what happened. You just... it was just wonderful through every step of the way. So then the court date, Mary brought Paloma along because many advocates that can make it, they're there just for support. And Judge Sulka was phenomenal. He was gentle, and kind, and I got to tell a little bit of my story, and I got everything I asked for granted.

JR: Did your spouse show up for those? Did he have to appear?

DB: I was worried about that. That's why the advocates are there, because a spouse can and will show up. You don't realize "Ok, let me share this." It was not that time when I was saw him. When I did finally see him face to face, I had a talk with him. It took me right back. Two years

went by that I saw him. That instant, that moment when I finally confronted him and spoke him it took me right back to that last moment. And that fear was when he would come at me and corner me, not to hit me, but try to make up, kiss and make up. That was traumatizing to me. But you know, I'm kind of jumping ahead. But two years, during the two years of being away from him, I was being educated, empowered... I can't think anything else... through the Women's Center Harbor House. So that's how was able to make that stand. We'll get to the point, I'm sorry.

JR: No. Can I clarify one thing? You mentioned Harbor House, which most folks view as a shelter where women go, but they continue outreach even if you're not living in Harbor House. They are the conduit for support at that point.

DB: Correct. They're... because we don't have enough offices here... it's a 24/7 shelter so there has to be some advocates there. So, there's offices at the Harbor House and there's offices at the Women's Center; and to this day there still is. Ok. So, he didn't show up, so that was an advantage for me. But either way I knew it was in good hands and it would just get done. I could move on. So, I was granted full custody of my children, so you think that, "ok, I'm fine, I'm good, everything's great and I can move on" ... and I have to use the Women's Center Harbor House advocacy supportive services. They have many. There's a sexual assault, advocate team here, there is the... through the domestic violence there is the one-on-one counseling, group counseling, housing program, court support... this is all advocacy supportive services. Court legal, financial...

JR: How do you connect with those? How do you determine which program you need or you would benefit by?

DB: Oh, it's phenomenal how the Women's Center Harbor House works. Not one advocate is assigned to you. They all work, it's kind of like having a...

JR: Family?

DB: Football team, or a conglomerate of lawyers, or whatever. Just empower educated people that can... everyone has their... not just a program, but their strength and their knowledge.

JR: So it's a team effort really.

DB: It's a team effort, yes. So if you're talking to Paloma or Mary and you're talking about other issues like... just talking about the traumatization you've been through then they'll say "hey, why don't you... we thought about coming and... we do one-on-one counseling, but what about this group that we do on Tuesday nights? I think that would really benefit you and the children, because the mom gets to come to the Tuesday night group at the Women's Center, and your children get to go to the Harbor House at the same time." So guess what, you don't have to worry about the daycare provider, babysitter, money, and also they're getting empowered. Because whether the children know it or not, the youth advocate and youth parent advocate that run that group on Tuesday night, they think they're just playing, but what they're learning is that the hands are made to not hurt, but to help, to love, to nurture. They were learning all the stuff because they were share with me, but they thought it was fun. That was the next step. So after the divorce and everything was going good, I was still just "what about me? I'm still a wreck." My fear was "what was it about me?" Statistics show us that we either go back to him seven times or get in another unhealthy or abusive relationship, which I was so fearful that I was... I was fearful of my own choices because of what happened.

JR: It's hard to trust your own instincts again.

DB: Trust, yes.

JR: Plus, you want a life. Life doesn't just end with a divorce, right?

DB: Right.

JR: You want to move on, but...

DB: Right, and get healthy and whole myself. So by this time, it was around the summer. It wasn't too far into being in a client of Women's Center Harbor House that I started... my children and I started attending the Tuesday night groups. That's where my life changed forever as far as within my being. My strength, the education, the empowerment that you see in here now was not until I started going to that Tuesday night group.

JR: How many women participated? Few or twenty...?

DB: It can be anywhere, actually there was like anywhere between five and ten of us. It's anyone that wanted. All these programs and services are free and they are for us to choose. That's one

that the philosophies I love about the Women's Center Harbor House, they never told me what to do. Because see, the perpetrator, the batterer, the unhealthy person always told you what you could or could not do.

JR: And you needed to pick up for yourself.

DB: Right, because how else will I be able to? Tuesday night groups were just all about sharing your story, and when you start trusting this group and you start sharing things.... I'll never forget the day, I don't remember what month that was, I'll just say, I know somewhere towards the summer or early fall of 2004, going to group consistently with my children. We actually went to group for two years, from 2003 to 2005. So maybe it was towards the end of 2003, I don't remember and I'm sorry, but I do remember being a client. I do remember being a client from 2003 to 2005, so maybe then my memory is correct. Somewhere around after the divorce, the court procedures... proceedings, sorry... it was after that we started going to groups. So it was summer/fall of 2004 that we started going to the group that was offered through the Women's Center Harbor House programs. Sorry, I'm stumbling here. My children and I liked it so much that my children would tell their fellow student mates in class that "it's Tuesday night! We get to go to the Harbor House!" and I'm thinking "oh my gosh..." (Gasp) But I was thrilled about that because I didn't want them to think that it was their shame and guilt, because children will automatically. My son shared intimate things with me that he thought he was to blame for daddy leaving, and he needed to find daddy. There was many things coming out as they were receiving the Tuesday night... I call it services... counseling... that they didn't even know that it was. One thing that we can't... the advocates in Women's Center Harbor House can really do... they can counsel me and I can counsel through my kids. As I'm getting healthy and whole so will they because I'm going to learn and role model what I'm learning, and they're going to feed off of that. And then they get to do those fun things. They get to share their fears... because my son finally the age of 6 or 7, shared with me that he couldn't tell me some things because he was afraid it was going to make me sad. So we found somebody he could. This is so important. Ok, one night in group... I'm going to share something very intimate that was private to me, but is important to share. We were in group, we were talking about the marriage, and about sex, and about when I said "no," was it rape? Somebody started sharing that and then I spewed it out. I said I allowed him to do that. I allowed him to have sex with me when I didn't want to, but what

I learned from the advocates and the women in that group is no; I didn't. I had to do it to survive. Because if I didn't give in then he was stick around and haunt me until I did, because after all, there had to be another man. That was the first time I had a taste of freedom from that guilt and shame. I remember standing up in that group and saying "shame on him, not me." I'm sorry if I'm getting emotional, but that was the most powerful thing in my life. Because after all, if you're a wife and if husband is touching you, you shouldn't feel grotesque about it. You shouldn't feel these horrible negative feelings. You should feel... it should be wonderful, it should be pleasurable, because that's what it was made for. So I thought there was something wrong with me. What is wrong with me? Why does it not feel good for me? But he also laid that on me too. And that group that night set me free that... no, I didn't allow him. It was just something that I'd do to survive. So that was the beginning of many things through the group, and individual counseling...through the advocates. I don't remember their names.

JR: Now were you still doing schoolwork?

DB: Yup, and working. Yes, but I made sure that... because of living in low income housing, I didn't have to work 40 hours a week to make ends meet. The rent goes off what income you're bringing in.

JR: Proportionally.

DB: So, I was able to... and then with Kohl's, they worked around my schedule. So I chose to work Friday and Saturday nights so I could be a mom during the day, because the kids went to bed early. So I could still learn to become a very healthy mom. I have to share this because society will tell us that children need both mom and dad. That's beautiful, but in domestic violence and unhealthy relationships, children are better off with one healthy parent or adult than two unhealthy parents. That set me free from the guilt and shame of being a single parent. This all came through just reaching out to the Women's Center Harbor House. You know, church played a part, just with the faith, and keeping strong, and connecting me with other women in the community to feel a part of, because every human being wants to feel loved, but not to be hurt. So, oh my gosh, where do I go from here. So carrying on through the years, I always stayed connected to the Women's Center when they would have an outreach, like when they have awareness month for sexual assault or domestic violence. To be a part of that now just to participate.

JR: And you could at this point be a positive model for a survivor who is moving on and getting control over your life.

DB: Right, because I didn't mind share my story once I was set free from the shame and guilt. Then I could share my story because it wasn't about anything I did wrong. Why did you choose to marry him? Why did you stay? Why did he hurt me? That should be the question. Why did he hurt me? Not why did I move with him, why did I live with them, why did I marry him? Why did I stay? Why did he hurt us? That keeps me strong. I learned again... all this from Women's Center Harbor House, and then you know what? The piece of the Northern Michigan University through psychology department, through the early childhood development, it helped me be more aware of what my kids endured and try to help them. So the 4 years at Northern, I stayed connected with Dr. Karen Suksi. I changed though, in the middle of that to... I wanted to... this kind of funny... The early childhood development was wonderful, but I didn't want to also work with kids all day, because I two of my own and that can be exhausting. But I wanted to work with kids in different way. I wanted to empower them, and to see the behaviors, and help other moms or parents to help children who go through any kind of traumatic event whether it's divorce, or whether it's deaths, or domestic violence, or sexual violence. So Dr. Suksi said, "Diane, what you could do... you could go to into social work, a sociology minor and continue your degree in the early childhood development program" which is a psychology department, which is strong, they are both strong departments. Then she was saying, "cause then you can go on for your master's" and I'm going, "whoah!" Because I have to tell you, when I moved here at 43, I did not go to college, I went into a working field program that educated myself without any college degree and I was doing fine on my own in my 20s and 30s. I made a living very well. Where was I going with this? As time changes though, it was difficult to do the retail business, because you do have to work holidays and weekends and it was just me here with my kids. And I needed something more sustainable. Actually it also... to me on my fear. What I mean by that is looking back on that five years of marriage at Crystal Falls, I did not want that fear to imprison me anymore. Now, just because I get out of that situation doesn't mean there's not fear. Because anything that is unknown to us, we all have fear. Again, now I didn't want that fear to imprison me. So going to school was very fearful of me because I didn't know how to turn on laptop, I didn't know how to use computer. Again, there was help there. Through the help, it was at the helpdesk located in the library that... I was there all the time and I know it's like they didn't

care, they helped me through everything. So going just two years was good enough for me and then doing four was beyond anything I ever dreamed of. Then when Dr. Karen Suksi was talking about a master's I was like, "Ok, you've gone way too far. This is just little old me here." But she kept empowering me. You know what it takes, you know why I feel I am a success story, is because somebody believed in me when I did not believe in myself. That is most powerful thing in the whole world. The Women's Center advocates believed in me, Dr. Karen Suksi believed in me. They saw things in me that I didn't see. Because when you were in that healthy situation, when you're with a partner who consistently puts you down, makes you feel incompetent, you start believing that. You start believing that you're not worthy, that you are not strong enough, smart enough, beautiful enough to do anything. My identity was sucked out of me. I had to find that again.

JR: And you got that.

DB: The people who believe in you, you get it back even stronger than ever I think. I became more healthy than ever before. So I kept hearing this master's and somebody believing in me, and I'm like, "wow, I am those. I'm getting A's and B's. I am doing well." And then I was like the financial part, but then everyone said "but there's help out there, there's hope out there." So I put it out. What I mean by put it out, I put my needs out there to look for master's programs. Master's programs at certain colleges and universities. And at first I thought, "ok, I have to find something in Marquette." There was a cohort program going on through Marquette at that time, this is 2003 to 2007. However, being my age, I was looking at graduating undergrad at 47 and the cohort... I would have had to wait a year and I'm like, "I don't have time to wait." So I looked at other places like Michigan State University, U of M, and so forth. Bottom line is, is that also took bigger step of faith and went and looked at University of Indiana... I think it's Indiana University, University of Kentucky, and Ohio University. Now the biggest thing was how to I get out of state? Cause again,

JR: Financial...

DB: Even though...no. There's Michigan law, a marriage, even though we were divorced and he wasn't even very well connected with his children... didn't see them, no, didn't see them very often all or call very often in those four years. I think he only made couple trips to Marquette. I still had to abide by the laws in Michigan and bottom line is that I went, I had to... I felt I had to

ask permission from the children's father, my ex-husband, but the one thing I had to do is write a letter to Judge Sulka. Before I did all that though... I'm kind of going ahead... Dr. Karen Suksi, who was my cheerleader, who was my rock... and because of single parent in low income, there is scholarships out there to help. One other phenomenal organization is The Sunshine Lady Foundation under Warren Buffett and Doris Buffett. There's a scholarship that helps survivors of intimate domestic violence that who wants to go back to school to provide for themselves and their family, they would support and help. It's a huge application and you had to have someone in the Women's Center, shelter, organization to be your sponsor. At that time, it was Cindy Branken, who was the advocate here, who told me about The Sunshine Lady Foundation, and I applied. It's a huge because it's a lot of money that whatever their bottom line is what stopping you to get the education that you need, what's the financial burden that stopping you to going on for your goals and dreams of your educational process to further...

JR: So you applied for this?

DB: Yes.

JR: And you got it.

DB: And I got it. So that was a big help. So when I was putting my applications out my senior year of the undergrad program of NMU, this was April... no, it had to be...their spring break is early. So I would say, March 2007, my spring break, I saved some money. I had this wonderful young lady, Cassy Bolton, that was part of my children and I's life, who helped me raise my kids so to speak, she was my daycare provider. She said, "Yes, Dianne, I will stay with your children while you go down to Ohio." My plan was to meet my mom in Ohio and go to see these... I had to walk on the land of where these universities sat, because it wasn't just me going to school, I had some great baggage, and they were my children, and it had to accommodate their needs. And so went down and I went to these three colleges, Indiana University, University of Kentucky, and Ohio University. I met every one of them and bottom line is, after it was setting done, that I received letter from Ohio University, not just offering me a stipend, but full tuition waiver. I said, "That's it, we're going, kids." That's where I had to give the letter to Judge Sulka to get approved to live the state of Michigan to go to...

JR: And they were able to do that by the law?

DB: Yes, he approved it. So we moved... while we were down there though, we were still connected with a Women's Center down there, because I was receiving the Sunshine Lady Foundation scholarship. So I did the two-year program there through the social work department of Ohio University, and just to add, they were well aware of Northern Michigan University's programs and university itself which was so exciting. So NMU needs to be so proud of what they are doing in their programs and services themselves, because they have a great reputation.

JR: And it combines with what we've learned... the Women's Center being cutting edge, early, long-standing, perhaps the oldest...

DB: Yes, the Women's Center is the second oldest in the nation and the largest in the state of Michigan, I believe.

JR: I believe and continuously operating.

DB: Yes, continuously operating... 40 years.

JR: Terrific. So that brought you back partly?

DB: Partly? Well, yes. Because even though my family was in Ohio, and it was wonderful, we got to experience a whole new world of diversity, population of people, our hearts were here. Marquette community, Northern, the Women's Center, church, the people in this community made this feel like home. We felt like we had family here and we really couldn't wait to come back. So it happened. After graduating, I decided to take another step of faith and come back and... so where was I going to go with this master's of social work? There's many places you can go. Yes.

JR: For employment.

DB: And you know, the doors don't open up right away, so I'm going "Oh my gosh." But I knew... connecting back to people I knew... one of them was all the advocates and the director, Phyllis Loonsfoot, of the Women's Center Harbor House... I would talk with them. They of course believed in me and loved me, but in order to become... to get employment here you have to wait for grants to open up, and also they like to hire with then. So you need a volunteer and they said, "Start volunteering". And I said, "Well that's easier said than done, I have two children. I have to have an income. I have to have somebody watch my kids so I can volunteer."

But you know, I know the connections that I learned through the Women's Center of how to connect with all the community resources whether be DHS with a daycare provider, child and family services if you need help. I mean just anything with monies, rent, security deposit, other programs. So I connect with all my resources again and bottom line is, I believe it was September 2009 I started volunteering. A grant job position opened up at the Women's Center Harbor House. I applied and got it, and as of October 2009, I became an advocate. And my whole dream goal... I never thought I'd really be working back here, but what I wanted to do is give back to what's been given to my children and I.

JR: And the opportunity has developed?

DB: Developed.

JR: So what is your current position and briefly what's involved?

DB: Ok. So, my current position now is the associate director.

JR: Of the Women's Center?

DB: Of the Women's Center. Well,

JR: Still one.

DB: Yes. Women's Center Harbor House. So basically, Phyllis Loonsfoot, the director, has always asked the board members that "I need a backup person. I need somebody help me and..." It's kind of weird because you know how well when somebody believe in you, they have your back. I always reciprocate it; give it back. I always had everyone else's back. Especially Phyllis Loonsfoot, who believed in me as well. So whenever I didn't know what to do, I would just go to her and say "hey, what do you help with? What do you help with?" And that's how that group... but anyone... when this position of associate director came about... anyone can apply. But it's more about responsibility of not just the advocate supportive services and programs, whether that be housing, which I did, financial referrals, again all the court, legal, and individual and group counseling, but also with the associate director you are also learning about the administrative piece of this phenomenal organization, which is learning about your state federal grants and even our political leaders, because they help keep non-profit's running.

JR: And they've been key throughout the history that's come out and then there have been ups and downs with financial things. But it just would seem from your story you are uniquely equipped. You've been there, you can model it, you know what people are going through, and yet you've professionally gained the skills.

DB: Professionally, yes. So have the life experience and the six years of education.

JR: Right.

DB: And what's really awesome is that there are times when I feel I need to share this with somebody who's going through the similar shoes I walked through, because I want them to see a face. I want them know, "I can do it." You can do it, because I believe in you. And I pass that on, what's been given to me, I pass that on to other clients and the people of this community to know how they impacted life. They do... because what if they don't ever meet me, but they gave monies to the Women's Center Harbor House, or they donated anything? Food, clothing, household items, furniture through PakRatz? Because all our clients get vouchers to shop for free there. They get two year. This is all...so everyone in this community has impacted my life and changed my life forever.

JR: It's awesome that you recognize that and return and give it.

DB: Thanks.

JR: Ok. Very briefly in closing, we do need to do this all this, this is a wonderful contribution to the archival history. What do you view... if you had to summarize the biggest impact that the Women's Center has had? Not on just personally, but what do you feel is the value of us sustaining this Women's Center?

DB: Well right, because it isn't just me. Domestic violence and sexual violence impacts the whole community. How it impacted me is that not only the healing process, and empowering me, and educating me, and strengthening me, but I got on my feet and I give back to the community as well. I worked and went to school and now I'm working full time. You're giving back. You're paying rent, you're paying your dues, you're paying your taxes, you're working and giving back to the community.

JR: Excellent. This has been a wonderful interview and I'm so glad that you shared your time with us. Thank you, Diane Betts.

END OF INTERVIEW