



## **PROJECT KESHER**

### ***KOLOT: Women's Voices***

**September 2000 - January 31, 2003**

A project implemented by:

***Jewish Women International***, in partnership with:  
***NCSJ: Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States and Eurasia***  
***Project Keshet*** and the ***Russian Jewish Congress***

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## PROJECT OVERVIEW:

Project *KOLOT* (Women's Voices) was organized by Jewish Women International (JWI) in partnership with NCSJ: Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic States and Eurasia, Russia-based organizations Project Keshet (PK) and the Russian Jewish Congress (REK)/KEROOR. The 2-1/2 year project began in September 2000 and ended January 2003. The project was initiated with a \$129,000 grant from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State, and was also supported with cost-sharing by partner organizations. Originally scheduled to end after 18 months, extensions provided an extra year of work at no cost to the U.S. Government. Additional in-kind and cash contributions of partner organizations enabled the project to continue, demonstrating a significant commitment from these organizations to the project.



At the *KOLOT* conference in Tula. (l.-r.): Lyudmila Danilov, Director of the Tula *KOLOT* project; Tatiana Lisenko, Director of the Tula Regional Committee on Women, Family and Demography; Faina Sanevich, Director of the Tula Hesed "Neshama"; Lena Makhrina of KEROOR

The goal of Project *KOLOT* was to create a model to engage ethnic and religious communities in addressing the issue of domestic violence in Russia and other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. The pilot project targeted the communities of Tula and Voronezh.

### Highlights included:

- Intensive training on domestic violence for selected community organizers
- The development and implementation of strategies by Russia-based partners to engage media, police, health professionals, religious and ethnic groups, governmental agencies and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including local crisis centers, to address domestic violence
- One-day community-wide seminars on domestic violence
- The publication of manuals to guide the work of rabbis and community workers in addressing domestic violence

### Objectives outlined in the original project document are as follows:

- To increase awareness of domestic violence among ethnic and religious women's groups and religious leaders, initially targeting the Jewish community
- To explain and develop techniques to address domestic violence within the Jewish context and in the context of other ethnic groups and religious communities in Russia
- To identify and train community and religious leaders to provide appropriate local responses and training to their communities in addressing the needs of abused women
- To introduce materials used in U.S. religious communities that can be adapted both culturally and linguistically for Russian use
- To engage religious leaders as significant community-change agents

The work to address these objectives in Tula and Voronezh became the springboard for positioning the Jewish communities as facilitators and leaders in combating the very high rates of domestic violence in Russia. Successes of Project *KOLOT* include achievements in providing a model of engagement for other ethnic, religious and secular groups in addressing the issue of domestic violence, and in creating positive relationships and tolerance between and among religious groups, government, and NGOs.

## INITIATING THE PROJECT :

In October 2000, Diane Gardsbane, JWI Director of Programs, and Lesley Weiss, NCSJ Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs, spent 10 days in Russia for meetings with Russia-based partners and NGOs focused on human rights and domestic violence services in Moscow, Tula and Voronezh. Several groups were in the process of implementing major projects to address domestic violence, including the Moscow crisis center, ANNA, which was implementing a major national public awareness campaign – distributing brochures and posters and sponsoring public service announcements. Additionally, the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), with a grant from US Agency for International Development, was providing up to \$3,000 to help create crisis centers throughout Russia. Groups in both Voronezh and Tula had received funding from IREX.



Preliminary meeting with women at the Voronezh Jewish Community Center, October 2000



At crisis center in Tula, October 2000 (L-r.): Tula KOLOT representative Evelina Shubinskaya, Faina Sanevich; crisis center director Nina Panina

The Tula crisis center had been in operation for one year. Nina Panina, the center's director, was happy about the potential collaboration but clearly perplexed, commenting: "But Jewish men do not beat their wives".

A representative of the Tula Mayor's office, while expressing support for the impending project stated: "I have never come across the problem [of domestic violence] and never met such families".

A meeting with the Tula police could not be arranged.

A representative of the Voronezh police department was doubtful about what could be accomplished by the project: "There is nothing we can do if we respond to a call from a woman who is being beaten. At most he will spend a few days in jail. We don't do anything about most calls. We have no money for this issue and no laws." We were to learn later that the Voronezh police department and the Charlotte, N.C. police department had been engaged in cross-training on the issue.

The director of the Voronezh crisis center, Aida Gorbunov, was not in Russia at the time of the U.S. partners' visit. She had spent several years working to engage community structures and leaders in addressing domestic violence and had achieved some success. However, she had encountered funding struggles and had no means of sustaining services when grant funds were depleted.

### Pre-Project Survey, Tula:

Approximately 200 individuals in Tula, from age 14 to over age 50, with the majority ages 14-20, were surveyed about attitudes relating to domestic violence and the status of women. Approximately 2/3 of the sample was female.

When questioned about their attitudes towards equality and violence in a relationship, almost all men and women stated that there should be equality between men and women (95.5%) and most agreed that a man does not have the right to hit his partner (86%) or force her to have sex (73%). However, 42% felt it was okay for a man to tell a woman what to wear or whom to talk with, 35% stated these behaviors were unacceptable, and 22% responded that this question was "difficult to answer". In addition, the majority of respondents felt that relationships should be private. In a question about whether society should work on family problems there was a range of responses, although the majority felt society had this responsibility.



Meeting with a representative of the Tula mayor, October 2000: (L-r.) Faina Sanevich, Director of the Tula Hesed "Neshama"; Lesley Weiss; Diane Gardsbane; representative of the mayor's office; Tula project leaders Evelina Shubinskaya, Natalia Prosvirina and Svetlana Yakimenko

### **Pre-Project Survey, Voronezh:**

The Voronezh sample, a total of 75 persons (59 women and 16 men), had similar responses to those in Tula.

### **Informal focus groups:**

Meetings of Project Keshet women's groups in Tula and Voronezh provided informal focus groups to assess attitudes and knowledge about domestic violence.

In Tula, the group was made up of approximately 30 women, the majority middle-aged, many of whom were volunteers or staff at the Jewish community's Hesed Center, the hub of the city's Jewish life. In general, women were very reserved in expressing their opinions about domestic violence.



Meeting between NCSJ, JWI, and Project Keshet representatives with Jewish community leadership in Voronezh, September 2000. Center back: Rabbi Nosson Vershubsky, Rabbi of Voronezh

In Voronezh, like Tula, the group was comprised of approximately 30 women. However, this group had more women working in the community as professionals in fields including medicine, law, music, education and engineering. The participants were far more outspoken than in Tula and relayed popular sentiments about domestic violence, as well as their own frustration with the status of women. "If he loves you, he beats you" was relayed as a still-powerful Russian maxim, even though the Voronezh survey indicated that most do not believe it. Other comments included: "It is easy to get married, but afterwards can be painful"; "You can't work as a woman; you have to work as a horse"; and "The Russian woman must be the one to adapt."

### **Police statistics:**

In the first months of the project, community organizers in Tula began developing relationships with police. Access to confidential statistics for Tula's Central Area for the first 9 months of the year 2000, a district described as "calm", was made possible through collaboration with a police officer who was convinced of the importance of the project. These statistics indicated that one out of every five crimes was committed against a woman (1,325 of 7,405 total crimes), with one out of every three of these crimes considered a "family conflict". Of the 1,325 reports made by women to the police 1,255 did not even proceed to court.



In Tula, *KOLOT* activists established a cooperative relationship with the local police department to aid in community efforts against domestic violence. Pictured: Tula project leaders and police representatives at the May 2002 conference "Ways of Preventing Domestic Violence: Domestic Violence Cannot Be Justified"

new spaper for the year 2000 before coming to the United States in January 2001. While supposedly only the most noteworthy cases would be reported, she found 96 reported cases for an area with a population of 600,000. This figure gave credibility to the 14,000 annual deaths attributed to domestic violence in Russia each year.

Pre-project surveys, informal focus groups with women, meetings and interviews with project partners, community leaders and NGOs, as well as survey work with the police, provided valuable guidance for project implementation.

**U.S.-BASED WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP TRAINING (JANUARY 2001):**

Eight women from Russia participated in 2-1/2 weeks of intensive leadership development and training on domestic violence and community organizing. Participants included Project Keshet's New Independent States (NIS) Director (based in Moscow) and Program Director (based in Ukraine), the head of Tula's Jewish community, the executive director of the Voronezh Jewish Community Center, and 2 women from each community.



Project leaders meet with police in Richmond, Virginia, January 2001



Tula and Voronezh project leaders at training seminars in Baltimore, January 2001

Training was provided by a host of community-based organizations working to end violence against women in Baltimore, MD; Washington, DC; Richmond, VA and Columbus, OH. Topics included the dynamics of domestic violence, safety planning, the history of the U.S. battered women's movement, models for developing public awareness, education and intervention programs, economic issues and domestic violence, legal remedies, domestic violence and Judaism, justice in the Jewish context, public policy advocacy, community organizing strategies,

In addition, during the same 9 months, 35 requests to police came from the Semashenko Institute (hospital) citing serious injuries to women, including brain damage, broken bones, injured faces, injured breasts, knife traumas, wounds made by sharp instruments and bruises from attempted strangulation. In the 35 incidents, 27 of the perpetrators were husbands, 2 were fathers, 2 were boyfriends, and 3 were sons. Only 10 of the 35 cases were taken to court, with 25 of the women's requests rejected for "lack of proof".

Interviews with police revealed that they did not know where to send victims for legal aid, housing support, psychological help or financial assistance.

**Other Research:**

One of Tula's selected project participants researched all incidents of domestic violence reported in the regional

U.S. and international community-based programs, parenting without corporal punishment, shelters as an intervention strategy, what to do when there is no shelter or police support, children who witness violence, and strategies to attract “hard-to-engage” professionals – such as police and religious leaders.

Collaborating organizations included:

- House of Ruth, Maryland’s largest domestic violence provider and shelter in Baltimore
- CHANA: Counseling, Help Line & Aid Network for Abused Women, a program serving Jewish victims of domestic violence in Baltimore, and a project of The Associated: Jewish Federation of Baltimore, in cooperation with Jewish Family Services and the House of Ruth
- Jewish Program of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, an interfaith organization focused on the intersection of religion and abuse, Seattle, WA
- Washington Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Seattle
- Safe Harbor, a domestic violence program and shelter in Richmond, VA
- Family and Community Strengthening Program of the Resettlement Department and the Shalom Bayit [ “Peace in the Family”] Program of Jewish Family Services, Columbus, OH
- My Sister’s Place, Washington, DC’s domestic violence program and shelter
- National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Public Policy Office, Washington, DC
- National Council of Jewish Women, Public Policy office, Washington, DC
- WEAVE: Women Empowered Against Violence, Washington, DC
- DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, Immigrant Women Program, Washington, DC

Briefings were held at Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, The Helsinki Commission, and with the legislative assistant to Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA).

**PROJECT ACTIVITIES:**

The U.S.-based partners provided technical assistance and mentoring to the Russia-based organizations. This included helping organizations network, providing materials, and giving advice. Site visits by Diane Gardsbane in August 2001 and by Lesley Weiss in June 2002 provided in-person assistance and further networking opportunities. A final visit by Gardsbane in October 2002 provided an opportunity for all project participants in Russia to spend 2 days evaluating the project.



At January 2001 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) policy briefing on domestic violence in Russia (l.-r.): Natalia Slobodiank, Project Keshet Program Director, translator, Lesley Weiss; Rita Drozdinskaya, head of the Voronezh Jewish Community Center; Diane Gardsbane; Martins Zvaners, Communications Director of RFE/RL; Anna Stepanova, Tula project representative

The Russia-based partners worked in the two communities of Tula and Voronezh to engage media, police, health professionals, religious and ethnic groups, governmental agencies and NGOs – including local crisis centers – in addressing domestic violence. Project Keshet provided ongoing leadership training to community organizers and assistance in project implementation. Project Keshet’s Program Director provided assistance in creating workshops and materials for use, often tailoring what was provided in the United States to the needs of the local population. The NIS Director provided oversight to the project in Russia, and acted as the liaison with JWI and NCSJ.



Rita Drozdinskaya addresses the Voronezh conference. To her right and left are Voronezh municipal officials

One of the final major activities for the project was the sponsoring of a one-day conference on domestic violence in Tula and Voronezh, involving the participation of high-level government officials.

The culminating activity was a collaboration of JWI and Project Keshet to publish CIS editions in Russian and English of two manuals published by JWI in the United States: *Healing & Wholeness: A Resource Guide on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community*, for community professionals and volunteers, and *Embracing Justice: A Resource Guide for Rabbis on Domestic Abuse* (edited by Diane Gardsbane).

## **MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

### **Coalitions:**

#### Tula:

A coalition roundtable to address domestic abuse was created with representatives from 12 governmental and non-governmental organizations, including the police, as well as organizations focusing on issues of human rights, women, employment and business, legal aid, medical and psychological needs, and youth interests. Meetings were held on a regular basis throughout the project period and continue as a sustaining aspect of the project. Meetings featured discussion on topics of specific interest, as well as action planning. See the attached list of member organizations and accompanying structure "About the Coordinating Board of the Coalition . . ."

The Tula *KOLOT* project was invited to join the International Coalition of Active Measures against Violence (MKAD), along with 15 other NGOs from countries including Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Estonia, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Russia.

#### Voronezh:

Prior to *KOLOT*, a government-sponsored coalition to address domestic abuse in Voronezh existed but met infrequently. Project *KOLOT*, in collaboration with the crisis center, assumed a leadership role in getting the group to meet in August 2001. At the meeting it was announced that the Jewish community was now leading the work on the issue of domestic violence in Voronezh. While the process met with some anti-Semitism, the work generated respect for the Jewish community and, in turn, greater participation by the Russian Orthodox community. There is ongoing participation by the Jewish community in the state-sponsored coalition to address domestic violence, and other government structures.

### **Additional Partnerships:**

A formal partnership was formed between the Voronezh Jewish Community Center and the Crisis Center, headed by Aida Gorbunova (partnership agreement attached). Over the two years, as the crisis center's funding had been depleted, the partnership enabled the crisis center to continue offering services as a part of Project *KOLOT* and the Jewish Community Center. As a part of the project evaluation, Ms. Gorbunova reported that she initially endured many anti-Semitic statements and even withdrawal of support from non-Jewish community sources when the partnership began. However, as the Jewish community gained respect for the success of its efforts, the comments stopped, although "the anti-Semitism may still be there", according to Gorbunova.

Voronezh *KOLOT* developed partnerships with numerous NGOs, most significantly with Youth Human Rights Group, Women of Chernozem Zone and DEMOS, a women's group that focuses on sexual harassment and the trafficking of women.



At a meeting of NGO representatives in Voronezh: (clockwise) Irina Karpova Director of the Voronezh Heseid; Boris Usherenko, Russian Jewish Congress representative; Anna Garmonova, Director of Demos; a representative from the *Voronezh Gazette*. (Right, clockwise): Lesley Weiss; Lena Makhrina; Rita Drozdinskaya



Russian Orthodox Priest in Tula addresses *KOLOT* leadership

### **Multi-Ethnic and Religious Groups:**

Collaborations and programming with national minorities and representatives of different faiths was a major aspect of the community organizing, particularly in Voronezh.

- Multinational women's groups were formed, first in Voronezh and later in Tula as well as in many other communities where Project Keshet is active. The group in Voronezh focused initially on the problems shared by victims of domestic violence.
- Meetings were held with leaders and members of other faiths, particularly the Moslem and Russian Orthodox communities, to engage them in addressing domestic violence.

### **Work with Government (Voronezh):**

Work with the local and regional governments is considered one of the crowning achievements of the project in Voronezh, including:

- The work of Project *KOLOT*, represented by the Jewish Community Center, was included in the Voronezh Municipal Plan for Improvement of the State of Women in Voronezh in 2002-2004. This was considered a tremendous accomplishment for the project and also for the Jewish community, as this was the first time the Jewish community had been included in any government plan of action.
- Representatives of the Jewish Community Center were invited to be part of a key municipal committee, which the Jewish community described as "very organized and knowledgeable about how to solve problems outside its own community".
- Collaboration was established with the Regional Office of the Public Prosecutor.

- The local Voronezh State Department provided assistance to the May 2002 seminar by providing use of the parliamentary hall and guards at no cost.
- Following the May 2002 seminar, *KOLOT* was invited to work with the Voronezh regional and town parliaments on preparing a law that would address domestic violence.

### **Work with Police (Tula):**

Work with police in Tula, which began in secret, became one of the greatest achievements of the project there. This cooperation resulted in a number of positive developments, including:

- The process of compiling statistics and other information on how calls are handled is now open to public scrutiny.
- Tula police and *KOLOT* jointly developed two-sided leaflets with information about services for victims and police reporting information. These provide officers a checklist of tasks to perform when responding to domestic violence calls.
- Police have designated times that community members can come to register complaints about crimes committed against them. One of the Tula district offices invited *KOLOT* staff to be present to help when the cases involved domestic violence. After seeing how effective this was, police suggested advertising the days *KOLOT* staff will be present.
- Police have invited *KOLOT* to provide training to police officers on domestic violence.



Tula police representatives and project leadership discuss police response to family violence

### **Public Awareness Campaigns:**

Successful public awareness activities were carried out in both communities, utilizing radio, television, newspaper and the distribution of informational materials. Events included:

- An hour-long television interview of Tula-based community organizers on "Preventing Domestic Violence"
- A televised clip on the Voronezh project
- Coverage by Jewish and community newspapers
- Participation in a human rights film festival,

which included daily distribution of brochures and leaflets on domestic violence, as well as coverage by the local newspaper

- Assistance provided by the two communities to Project Keshet groups throughout Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, and also to other women's organizations in Georgia and Kazakhstan in developing awareness campaigns
- Distribution of materials throughout Tula and Voronezh, in public places, including stores and offices, with materials provided by national groups (such as ANNA in Moscow) and those developed locally by *KOLOT*
- Development of a campaign within Project Keshet's international "16 Days of Saying No to Violence" annual awareness event (November 25-December 10). Project Keshet initiated its involvement in Tula, Voronezh, and Kineshma in 2001. Participation grew to over 60 communities in 2002.
- Distribution of the crisis line phone number through the Jewish and community newspapers, women's organizations and clubs, radio, and police departments

## Educational Programs:

The project developed training curricula by age and operates ongoing educational programs for children, youth, men and women in schools, camps, youth groups, women's and family clubs, and community organizations:

- Ages 6-10 years: Role-play on the subjects "I Know Who Will Help Me If .." and "When We're a Mother and Father"
- Ages 13-15: "I and the World Around Me" with the goal of understanding your own and other's actions
- Ages 16-18: "A Girl and Domestic Violence"
- Ages 18-19: "Trust and Respect are the Basis of the Family" and "Violence in a Family: What to Do?"
- Teens: "Violence in the Dating Stage" (see attached)
- Teachers and parents: "Domestic Violence and Children", "Myths and Facts Concerning Domestic Violence"
- Parents: "My Home is My Fortress: Is It Always that Way?"
- University: A syllabus for a 36- hour course for Tula State University's psychology and sociology students "Preventing Domestic Violence", taught by one of *KOLOT's* community organizers (see attached).



Local media covering the project in Tula, October 2000

## Enhanced Services for Women:

Project leaders felt that a project priority was to enhance services for victims and survivors of domestic violence. These focused on providing crisis lines where women could find support and referrals to services in the community, and help with skills that would make women more employable, enabling them to leave abusive relationships.

- The Tula Hesed Center installed a phone line to act as a crisis line 3 days a week for Jewish and non-Jewish victims of domestic violence. The line is staffed by psychologists who receive training on domestic violence.
- The Voronezh Jewish Community Center utilizes one of its phone lines as a crisis line 3 days a week, operated in collaboration with the Voronezh Crisis Center. The line is paid for by the Jewish community and staffed by volunteers trained by the crisis center director.
- The Voronezh and Tula crisis lines are advertised through brochures and in newspapers that clearly communicate that the lines are operated by the Jewish community and open to the entire community.
- Both communities developed extensive resource listings that are used to refer callers to legal, social, medical and employment services.
- Inspired both by Project Keshet's KeshetNet centers that provide computer training and employment assistance to women, and by JWJ's Esther's Place in Baltimore that provides economic security to battered women, both Tula and Voronezh addressed the need for women to be economically self-sufficient:
  - In Tula, *KOLOT* developed a partnership with an NGO focused on employment assistance for women.
  - Computer training was provided in Tula using the project computer.

- In Voronezh, Club Esther was founded to engage women in microenterprise development and marketable skill building.
- Voronezh successfully applied to Project Keshet to become a KeshetNet center and opened the center just as Project *KOLOT* was ending.

### City-Wide Seminars on Domestic Violence:

Day-long seminars on domestic violence were sponsored by Project *KOLOT* in both Tula and Voronezh in May 2002 as one of the final major activities of the project. The seminars engendered the participation of local and regional government officials, police, NGOs, religious groups and the community at large.



Regional police representatives and project leadership at Tula project conference, May 2002

#### Tula:

A conference held May 15<sup>th</sup> at the Jewish community Hesed Center was titled: "Ways of Preventing Domestic Violence: Domestic Violence Cannot Be Justified". 54 people, including representatives from law enforcement, religious groups, the city administration, legal services, human rights groups, women's organizations and municipal social services, attended this event.

Tatiana Lisenko, the Tula Administration Director of the Committee on Women, Family and Demography, opened the conference. The plenary session was followed by presentations in

which local police reported on their collaboration with the *KOLOT* project. A member of the Lawyer's Association of the Tula region spoke about legal assistance to victims of domestic violence, other sessions focused on elderly abuse and conflict resolution within the family. Local clergy, including the Tula Rabbi, a Russian Orthodox priest, and representatives from the Church of Seventh Day Adventists spoke about the role of religion in providing help to victims of violence. Psychologists addressed methods and forms of psychological assistance to victims.

#### Voronezh

Titled "Preventing Home Violence," a one-day conference was held May 20 at the Voronezh Parliamentary Center with 100 persons in attendance, sponsored by *KOLOT* and the crisis center "Defending Women". Participants included representatives of law enforcement agencies, the courts, religious and ethnic groups, human rights groups, NGOs and others.

Organizers noted that this conference was the first public discussion of a social issue between the local government, the police and the Jewish community. It was the first-ever formal public discussion of domestic violence. The conference included speakers such as the director of the Jewish Community Center (who opened the conference), the director of the partner crisis center (also representing the Russian Association of Crisis Centers), the Oblast Duma Deputy Chairman in charge of social issues, the City Duma Deputy and representatives from the Department of the Interior, the Association of Justices, the Federal Court, and a representative from the Tula Domestic Violence Project.



At the Voronezh conference: Tula *KOLOT* representative Evelina Shubinskaya, also a member of Project Keshet, addresses participants.

The media attended both conferences. In Tula and Voronezh, articles appeared in both city and Jewish newspapers. The director of the Tula project appeared on a local radio show to discuss the project and the conference. In Voronezh, following the conference, the Director of the Jewish Community Center was invited to serve on a state Duma Committee on International Relations.

### **Materials Developed and Distributed:**

Many materials were developed as part of public awareness and educational campaigns, as noted above. Additional significant material development includes the following:

- Booklets detailing project *KOLOT* activities and accomplishments in Tula, published in October 2001 and May 2002, to help the project serve as a model for other groups.
- Booklets of composite victim stories by the project in Voronezh.
- As noted above, CIS Editions of JWI's 2002 publications: *Healing and Wholeness: A Resource Guide on Domestic Abuse in the Jewish Community*, for community professionals and volunteers, and *Embracing Justice: A Resource Guide for Rabbis on Domestic Abuse*, were published in Russian and English as the final activity of Project *KOLOT*. These provide information specific to the Jewish community as well as methods of community organizing and education that can be utilized by any group. Model strategies developed from Project *KOLOT* are highlighted, including how to establish a community-wide coalition, methods of engaging multi-ethnic women's groups and strategies for working with youth.
- Manuals will be presented to communities throughout Russia, Ukraine and Belarus in conjunction with a seminar about domestic violence. The preliminary reaction to the manuals has been extremely positive. Requests from communities for seminars on domestic violence are outpacing Project Keshet's current capacity.



Resource guides being used by participants of a Project Keshet-sponsored training seminar in Simferopol, Ukraine

### **Tolerance Building:**

When asked to comment on what participants considered the most successful element of Project *KOLOT*, most highlighted the increased acceptance and tolerance the project provided the Jewish community. In addition, participants noted with great pride that the Jewish community is seen as a leader in working to address domestic abuse in both Tula and Voronezh, and to some extent by groups outside these communities. The success they have achieved in this arena has provided entry for the Jewish community into other areas of public policy and community life.

Markers of the increased tolerance and understanding include the attendance of police and other officials at concerts of Tula's well-known klezmer band and attendance by Russian State Department officials at Jewish Community Center holiday celebrations. Particularly in Voronezh, where anti-Semitism has been an ingrained part of community life, these are unprecedented events that are directly related to the successful implementation of Project *KOLOT*.



Project leaders in training seminar in Baltimore, January 2001

## **CHALLENGES:**

The project's major challenge, and perhaps failure, was in engaging rabbis and other religious leaders as partners in the project. While rabbis were willing to learn more about domestic violence, to acknowledge the existence of domestic violence in Jewish relationships, and even to provide public comments supporting the project and the issue, the project was not successful in gaining their active participation. As a result, the Russian Jewish Congress, a willing and supportive project partner, was not utilized to the fullest extent.

The renewal of Jewish life in Russia over the past decade has taken place with astounding success. Synagogues, Jewish community centers, Jewish schools and other institutions of Jewish life are being built and integrated into community life with remarkable speed. Concurrently, entire generations of Jews are just learning what it means to be Jewish. Yet most rabbis in Russia are Orthodox, while religious observance itself is still foreign to many Jews in Russia. These rabbis are often seen strictly as religious leaders, not as Jewish community leaders or as confidants for family problems. In addition, progressive women, particularly those who have experienced American Jewish life, see Orthodox Judaism in the Russian context as threatening to their ideology of equality among women and men. For these and other reasons, the concept of having women and rabbis working together to address domestic violence was probably premature in the development of Jewish life in Russia.

Yet, the Jewish landscape is changing rapidly in Russia and other CIS countries. Over the past year alone, Project Keshet has made new inroads in its relationships with individual rabbis and rabbinical groups. By building on these relationships, difficult issues such as domestic violence will be more easily addressed.

## **SUSTAINING THE PROJECT :**

Sustainable structures, including community coalitions, ongoing partnerships, educational programs, and manuals to guide the work, are in place to continue the work started by the project in Tula and Voronezh. A small amount of funding to provide part-time staffing could be utilized to coordinate this effort.

Project Keshet, through its growing network of women's groups throughout Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and other CIS countries, continues to expand the number of communities that are working on the issue of domestic violence.

The following are indicators of the project's sustainability:

- PK created a domestic violence coordinator staff position to assist women's groups throughout the CIS develop and implement programming on domestic violence.
- Programs on domestic violence have been sponsored by over 65 PK women's groups throughout the CIS and this number continues to grow .
- Ongoing, major programming addressing domestic violence continues to be operated by 40 PK women's groups throughout the CIS. This number continues to grow .
- Over 60 PK women's groups participated in the global 2002 "16 Days of Ending Violence Against Women" campaign.
- Book presentations accompanied by seminars on domestic violence have been held successfully in communities throughout the CIS.
- PK's development of relationships with rabbinical organizations focused on reviving Jewish spiritual and religious life will provide a mechanism for engaging rabbis in addressing domestic violence.

## **CONCLUSION:**

In the development stage of this project, there were fears that we had “promised too much” and that we had been overly optimistic about what could be accomplished. Domestic violence is widely accepted in Russia, as noted in the pre-project surveys, and considered to be a “private” problem. Given Russia’s historic anti-Semitism, we wondered if it would be too much to expect the Jewish community to take on such a controversial subject.

However, the project attained a success that was totally unanticipated. While we cannot know the extent of the project’s impact in terms of preventing or addressing domestic violence, we do know that the project engendered collaboration and commitment to the issue from those groups that can have long-term impact. The success of the Jewish community in the role of a prominent leader in addressing domestic violence can be used not only as a model for other religious and ethnic groups, but as a model for Jewish communities around the world.