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## Bayside Woman Struggles to Obtain Child Support

By Zach Patberg

In a back room inside the Fresh Meadows library, six middle-aged women sat around a table strewn with file folders and bags of pretzels. A mother of two from Flushing was trying to explain the difficulty of squeezing child support payments from her ex-husband, whom she left years ago to escape domestic violence.

“It’s been dragged out at court and the whole time they look at you like the moms are crazy, but really it’s the men who are crazy,” the 32-year-old woman said. Then as if apologizing for her criticism, she added, “I’m just bitter about what my kids are going through with their father.”

The woman, along with most of the others, requested that her name not be used out of fear that her husband would find out where she was – at an informational forum where single mothers meet once a month to learn how best to expedite the routinely sluggish process of collecting child support payments.

The program is part of a nationwide organization called ACES, or Association for Children for Enforcement of Support. Debbie Ecker, an ACES coordinator, started the Queens chapter five years ago.

“We teach them how the courts work so when they go there they can get what they want,” Ecker explained at the meeting one recent Thursday. That includes showing mothers how to subpoena financial records from former spouses, file petitions for arrears and know when to stand up to a judge or court clerk.

Most of the mothers said they were still waiting for some \$15,000 to \$30,000 in back payments from their former spouses.

Danette Mazzarello, of Bayside, is seeking around \$65,000. Raising four children alone after divorcing her husband of 17 years, Mazzarello had this to say about her experience collecting money: “The city doesn’t play nicely.”

ACES has proven helpful, however, according to the mothers. Some have succeeded in collecting a portion of the payments. When one found out that her file had been lost in the court’s records room, Ecker made a phone call and half the file turned up the next day. And just

a few weeks ago ACES declared victory when the courts decided it would no longer require custodial parents not on welfare to pay a fee to register judgments against their spouses. Ecker said she had been fighting for that change for five years.

But with every breakthrough there seems to come more roadblocks. Many of the women at the ACES meeting said, for instance, that some husbands try and hide their assets under different names and employment. Diane Bell, Ecker's ACES partner who also is seeking back payments, told of a friend whose ex-husband was an accountant in Jamaica Estates but worked as a pizza deliveryman on paper.

Despite what some may say, however, the group of women insist that the purpose of the ACES meetings was not to badmouth ex-husbands, but to get help in collecting money needed to raise their children.

"The whole idea is not to be vindictive but to get ahead," said Helen Jimenez, a physical therapist from Forest Hills and single mother of two. "We'd welcome men here if they had an open mind. Do you see us painting our nails or gossiping?" She shook her head and pointed a thumb at her two daughters playing behind her. "It's all for them."

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