

TODAY'S CHICAGO WOMAN

NORTH SHORE MINI-PROFILE

Elaine Levy-Kopf guides women through divorce

Elaine Levy-Kopf has a beautiful family and a business for which she sets her own hours. Her specialty? Divorce.

She knows all about it, unfortunately from experience. Married at 21, Elaine was divorced from her husband a few years later and left to raise a three-year-old son by herself.

Elaine managed for two years by taking part-time work so she could care for her son. When Aaron was five years old, Elaine placed him in kindergarten and began working full-time at the Albany Women's Center as a counselor.

Elaine was eventually promoted to administrator of the entire facility. Her ten years at the AWC, where she encountered daily examples of women's crises, motivated her to rally for women's causes.

"Women's issues are my pas-

sion and my dedication," declares Elaine. "Recently, women are taking stands and are being heard."

Many of the women Elaine counseled at the AWC were frightened because they didn't know where to turn; she offered them information to fight their fears. Two years ago she discovered how to apply education as a means of empowerment after divorce. She created **Women in Focus**, a support service for women going through or contemplating divorce. While many women see divorce as an admission of failure and a loss of identity, Elaine's program helps them cope: in the words of a participant, to "come through it with strength and optimism instead of devastation."

Participants meet once a week for 45-minute talks addressing various aspects of divorce, followed by

support group meetings. A psychotherapist lectures on single parenting. A financial planner offers suggestions on how to handle monetary issues. An attorney addresses the legal particulars of divorce.

Other topics Elaine covers include making the transition from married to single life, breaking old relationship patterns and exploring female sexuality.

The post-lecture support group is essential to a positive transition, asserts Elaine. "It's a safe haven for women to be vulnerable together." Her last group bonded together so strongly that they still meet at each others' homes.

Elaine notes that the kaffeeklatsches of her grandmother's day are over; however, "women together have a special connection."

Women in Focus does not



Elaine Levy-Kopf

endorse "male-bashing." Instead, Elaine focuses on helping each woman become comfortable with herself, enabling her to be a better partner in the future should she choose to remarry. Her philosophy embraces the self-actualization which can result from divorce: "If a woman handles her divorce with integrity, she will emerge better than she was before."

Jennifer Karetzky

For more information about Women In Focus, call 708-441-1879.