

CHICAGOLAND

Domestic violence shelter gets reprieve

Emergency funding reopens Aurora facility closed by state cuts

By **Margaret Ramirez**
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Less than two weeks after state budget cuts forced it to shut its doors, Mutual Ground domestic violence shelter in Aurora reopened Monday with funding from a local philanthropy group and the United Way.

Mutual Ground, the only shelter for battered women in Kendall and southern Kane Counties, turned away 24 women and 32 children seeking emergency housing in the last two weeks, said Executive Director Linda Healy. Staff members propped hundreds of women and children's shoes along the shelter's wrought-iron fence to symbolize the 400 victims who stayed at the shelter last year and those who would be turned away if the shelter remained closed.

The John C. Dunham Fund and the Fox Valley United Way provided \$350,000 in emergency funding for several local non-profit agencies, including Mutual Ground. Michael Meyer, chief executive officer of the Fox Valley United Way, said there is no set grant amount for Mu-

tual Ground but that the agency would withdraw from the fund as needed.

"This incredible act is not letting the governor and legislators off the hook," Healy said at a news conference Monday. "Rather, it is the key to opening the doors for the community until they come up with a solid budget."

Mutual Ground receives 34 percent of its \$1.8 million budget from Illinois. Last month, Healy was notified that its funding for domestic violence and sexual assault services would be cut 75 percent in the fiscal year beginning July 1. That same day, Gov. Pat Quinn vetoed the portion of the budget that funds social services, leaving Mutual Ground and hundreds of other social services agencies in limbo.

Quinn remains in a standoff with Democratic legislative leaders, who have approved reduced budgets based on how much money is available, but the governor wants to increase the income tax to prevent human services cutbacks.

Without Mutual Ground's shelter, abused women and rape victims in the area have few options. Aurora has a homeless shelter, but because anyone can enter the premises, it does not qualify as a safe house for abused women and children.

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Kristen Good puts up a sign announcing Monday's reopening of a domestic violence shelter in Aurora. **CHUCK BERMAN/TRIBUNE PHOTO**