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Mother's Day not always a celebration

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By JESSICA PERSONETTE

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WOODSTOCK - Karen Federighi of West Dundee said she had not seen or talked to her daughter in three years.

Trisha Robertson Wilbrandt of Alden sees her oldest son, but cannot see her other son and daughter.

"They take your kids away from you, and you're lucky if you get to see your kids," Robertson Wilbrandt said.

These women share a similar story with more than 50 other women who gathered at Grace Fellowship Church in Woodstock on Saturday for a Mother's Day Awareness Gathering. The picnic and concert was for women from all over the Chicago area who lost custody of their children in divorce cases.

It was organized by Annette Zender, a Woodstock resident, who has networked with more than 120 women and five men fighting custody battles through a group called Legally Kidnapped.

"It's called Legally Kidnapped because the judicial system took our children from us," Zender said. "Judges are ignorant about what's happening to these children."

St. Charles resident Debby Peterson and her daughter, Veronica, were at the picnic Saturday.

Debby Peterson said Veronica asked for a lawyer for her 12th birthday so she could live with her mother.

"My dad thinks I'm confused because I want to live with my mom," Veronica Peterson said.

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Debby Peterson said her ex-husband made Veronica go to the same psychologist who Debby said incorrectly concluded that she was unfit for custody.

"It's not that we hate men," Debby Peterson said. "It's what it does to our children."

Many of the women said they believed their ex-husbands won custody of their children, sometimes despite the men's histories of abuse or criminal activity, because of ignorant or corrupt lawyers, judges, and court-appointed psychologists.

Three Lake County women, Catherine Campbell, Erin McRaith, and Karol Magistrelli have filed suit in Lake County court against county court officials for discrimination against women and Pro Se litigants, or those who are representing themselves without an attorney.

They are seeking \$15 million in punitive damages for a combined 15 years of litigation. All three have taken child support and custody battles to the Illinois Supreme Court or in the Second Appellate Court.

"It helped when we networked and found out other women were going through the same thing," Campbell said. "There must be a problem with the system."

