



## Thank you for empowering survivors



Women's Center & Shelter  
of Greater Pittsburgh

### Survivor Story: Sticks & Stones

*No matter how far removed you are from a traumatic event in your life or how much you think you're over it, for some of us, the smallest thing can take you back there in a split second.*

It can be a scent, a song, a name—for Mei, a late twenty-something whose soft-spoken demeanor initially conceals her witty and tenacious personality, it was a book.

“A short walk from my apartment, there's the most peaceful little bookstore/café/my place to ignore the world for a while. If I ever have a bad day, which thankfully is happening less often, this is my go-to place. This is not the place where I'm triggered into feelings I have about the four, dark years with Feng, my ex-husband. But then I saw the book,” began Mei.

“I was digging through a cardboard box of 99 cent books and there it was. It wasn't a Stephen King horror or John Grisham suspense novel. Are you ready for this? It was *All I Really Need to*

*Know I Learned in Kindergarten.*

Within mere seconds, my brain jumped from kindergarten to things kids say to the children's rhyme ‘Sticks & Stones.’ And then I said it to myself in a whimpering whisper, ‘Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will

*“Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me... That is such a lie! Words do hurt.”*

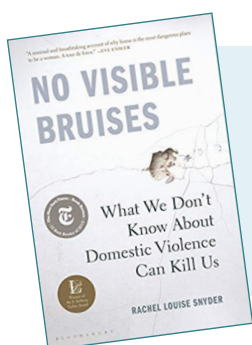
never hurt me.’ Then, loud enough for a random little boy and his mother across the room to hear me, I said, ‘That is such a lie! Words *do* hurt.’

For four years, Feng never laid a hand on Mei. Instead, he hurt her with the power and control of his words. “I heard the worst, self-confidence crushing, threatening, and manipulative words

come out of his mouth. On an almost daily basis, Feng patronized me, blamed me, and criticized everything I did. Nothing I did was good enough; I felt stupid and he confirmed it by telling me I was. Feng didn't hit me, but I never knew if the next time would be the time it *would* get physical. He'd raise his hand, but I think it was mostly to scare me. Petrified that that first shove, slap, or punch could take the place of his words at any time—he relished in my fear,” sighed Mei. She knew his words were violent, but for the longest time, she didn't know this was abuse. The few people she told about Feng's behavior were of the same mindset. “‘Words don't hurt you, Mei. It's the bruises and broken bones that do. If he hasn't hit you, it's not the same thing,’ they'd tell me,” said Mei. “So I stayed. Every awful insult was a figurative blow to my face, but I stayed.”

Mei stayed until shortly after a random trip to her doctor's office. She explained, “I was there for a checkup and stopped to use the bathroom on my way out. Inside the stall, there was a flyer with little pull tabs on it. The sign was from Women's Center & Shelter and it was also my sign to make the call. The Advocate I spoke to was wonderful. She confirmed it; I wasn't crazy, I *was* experiencing domestic violence.” Mei continued, “I found out there were a lot of resources available for me, counseling, and support groups. I learned that I was worthy and I was good enough. And I was finally able hear my own positive, loving words inside and listen to *them*.” ●

*Names and images have been changed for safety purposes.  
Thank you for understanding.*



#### Are you interested in understanding more about emotional/psychological abuse?

The award-winning book, “No Visible Bruises” by Rachel Louise Snyder, dispels common myths about domestic violence and highlights the full scope of the issue. Bringing domestic violence out of the shadows and into the light, this book helps readers to understand the common question around, “Why doesn't she just leave?” Understanding the depth of domestic violence is hugely important to ending it so we hope you'll consider reading this powerful book. ●



## Letter from the President/CEO | Strategic Planning Update

*Whether you've been a long-time supporter of Women's Center & Shelter or are a new friend just beginning to learn more about us, you may be aware of how excited we are about the recent growth of our programs and services.*

To continue along our successful path and support this expansion, we knew we'd need guidance to keep steering us in the right direction for years to come—specifically, a strategic direction and operations plan.

Our Strategic Planning Committee, which is comprised of strategic thinkers and visionaries from our Board of Directors, guided the overall development of the plan. To drill down into detail, a staff-driven Strategic Planning Committee helped us determine the best ways to achieve our goals. Along with creating our goals, these committees created action steps to reach those goals. Our entire Board reviewed the Strategic Plan, made edits where needed, and ultimately approved it in January 2019, giving us the green light to move full steam ahead.

### The strategic direction, which we'll be carrying out from 2019 through 2021, is comprised of these five goals:

- **Strategic Goal 1:** Develop a state-of-the-art organizational infrastructure in order to build capacity and strengthen WC&S.
- **Strategic Goal 2:** Strengthen and enhance external communications strategies in order to be a prominent, vocal advocate in the community.
- **Strategic Goal 3:** Increase capacity and reach of programs and prevention efforts through filling current gaps and expansion needs, developing enhanced outcomes, and using predictive analytics to identify and respond to patterns, trends, and mindsets.
- **Strategic Goal 4:** Engage the Board of Directors in interesting and productive ways and strategically recruit the talent and skills needed now and for the future.
- **Strategic Goal 5:** Develop and implement an organization-wide talent management strategy to encourage strategic career pathways for staff and succession planning throughout WC&S.



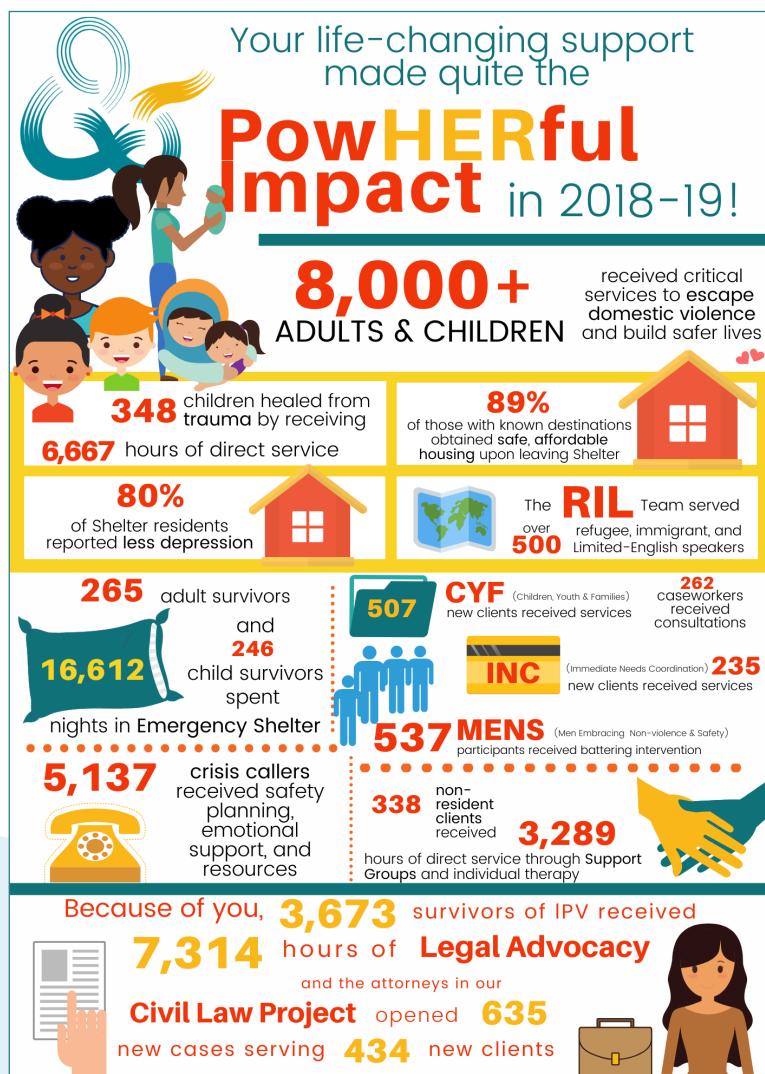
**Our mission is to advance the safety and wellbeing of victims of intimate partner violence and prevent and respond to intimate partner violence through social change.**

These goals, their numerous objectives and action steps, are not simply listed on a white board and reviewed when we think we need to check ourselves. Board committees drive progress on a regular basis, and the Board-level Strategic Planning committee oversees progress and timelines. Staff from across the organization continue to work diligently to carry out the specifics of the plan. And so far, we're right where we need to be. Don't miss the fall issue of Rosewood—we're planning to highlight a few of the most exciting strategic accomplishments thus far!

Sincerely,

*Nicole*

Nicole Molinaro, President/CEO







## Corporate Spotlight

## "You Aspire. Together We Achieve."

The management consulting and technology firm Aspirant uses their time and talent to make real change in the lives of domestic violence survivors and their children as a company and through the efforts of individual employees.

Women's Center & Shelter's partnership with Pittsburgh-based Aspirant began back in 2014 with the development of the life-saving RUSafe app, now in its second version and available in three languages in all 50 states. Since that time, Aspirant has fully embraced WC&S through their Connection of Hope campaign (started to help raise awareness of and prevent domestic violence) by serving meals to residents and children, participating in the annual Adopt-A-Family holiday giving program, hosting events on WC&S' behalf, sponsoring WC&S events, and providing countless amounts of expertise in a wide variety of areas. Most recently, Aspirant created the "Aspire to Your Full Potential"

initiative, which will provide WC&S with funds to assist adults and children with gaining freedom from abuse through transition-related expenses, including: relocation fees, transportation costs, moving expenses, education, legal fees, utilities, furniture, and even security systems for added safety.

*"Aspirant is a company built on values, and two of them come to mind when we think about the difficult situations that WC&S' clients are facing: empowerment and perseverance," said Aspirant President Mike McClaine. "We want these adults and their children to thrive in a life free of violence, and our hope is that in some small way, this initiative will help do that."*

For many survivors, starting over again can be incredibly daunting. But Aspirant is helping to make the journey a little easier. ●

## Counseling the Littlest Survivors



When it comes to domestic violence, children are often the forgotten survivors. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, more than 15 million children in the United States live in homes in which domestic violence has happened at least one time. Whether or not children experience violence directly, simply witnessing it or knowing that it is happening can have deep, negative lasting effects. As adults, these children are at a much higher risk of repeating the cycle of violence by entering into abusive relationships or becoming abusers themselves. In our daily work with children survivors, we see firsthand how vital it is to help children heal from the trauma they've experienced so that they are able to thrive as adults.

WC&S received wonderful news this summer from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) that both of our proposals were approved. These grants provided for the hiring of several new full-time positions and the implementation of additional programming, including individual and group counseling for children and young adults. This is an extension of the Children's Program focused specifically on nurturing the mental health and well-being of child survivors.

The children's support team is comprised of a Children's Counselor and a Children's Support Advocate. Though the roles are different, they collaborate on case management, treatment strategies, best



practices and hosting groups. Our Children's Counselor has a Master's Degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and her primary role is to provide individual and group counseling for children ages 5-17 years old, as well as to host support groups for mothers who are residents or non-residents (those who utilize services but are not staying in the Emergency Shelter). The "kiddos," as she lovingly calls them, are referred for counseling services by our Shelter staff, Child Advocates, or any other direct service staff. Along with holding groups, she also supports our monthly Trauma Information Series, which is designed to increase awareness and empower survivors of trauma.

Our Children's Support Advocate has a Master's Degree in Social Work and focuses not only on the children we serve, but their mothers, too. She works side by side with the Advocates in the Children's Program, providing childcare and support for all of the kids' needs. As the Children's Support Advocate, she provides parental and behavioral support, assessments to identify issues and needs, and meets with the mothers individually to address behavioral concerns and parenting tools/strategies. She also holds Teen Nights, a time for teens to unwind and enjoy themselves by watching movies, partaking in different activities, and having great conversations. ●

**We are thrilled to have this new program and these incredibly important staff positions to focus on the littlest survivors!**

United Way Contributor Choice #110





Women's Center & Shelter  
of Greater Pittsburgh

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## Join us for a night to remember at our new venue!

This year's Celebrating Survivors event, presented by UPMC Health Plan, will take place on **Friday, April 24th at the PNC Champions Club at Heinz Field from 6:30 – 9:30 p.m. with a VIP reception beginning at 5:30 p.m.** We are excited to welcome **Dr. Brian and Jill Hamlin** as this year's honorary chairs. Their entire family has gotten involved in the WC&S mission through hosting events, preparing meals for the residents and children, and serving as long-time supporters.

We are thrilled to announce this year's Ted Craig Honoree, the **Ladies of Steel, partners of the Pittsburgh Steelers' players and coaches.** These amazing women have been serving at WC&S since 2010. Their engagement with WC&S' clients has evolved into a number of beloved annual traditions including parties to celebrate Halloween, Thanksgiving, and the winter holidays. The Ladies of

*Celebrate. Honor. Remember.*



Steel serve meals, purchase hats, coats and gloves for resident children, plan fun and exciting activities for adult and child survivors to enjoy, participate in the annual Children's Festival, and deliver cheer in the form of holiday gifts. Most importantly, the Ladies of Steel connect with the residents on a deeper level, woman to woman and mother to mother. With the game of football, change is inevitable. But, the Ladies of Steel's commitment to WC&S has been unwavering for a decade. And, though the players change, the dedication to service remains the same.

Please consider joining us to honor them, as well as to enjoy delicious food, smooth sounds from Calvin Stemley and the Stemtecs, great friends, a wine grab and silent auction, and the fabulous atmosphere of the PNC Champions Club at Heinz Field. To learn more, visit [bit.ly/CelebratingSurvivors2020](http://bit.ly/CelebratingSurvivors2020). ●