



Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh

FALL 2021



Free from Abuse, 42 Year Later

"I was born into a family with many problems — drugs, alcohol, and abuse," Lisa began. She spent her early life in a tumultuous home with an inconsistent father and abusive mother.

In her teens, Lisa's father kept a close eye on her and her sister, but one activity they were permitted to do alone was play tennis. It was there, on the court, where Lisa met her future ex-husband, Bill — when he was 20 and she was 14.

"We started to see each other and soon, he began to buy things for me. He saw I had nothing. He bought me shoes, a watch, and then an engagement ring," recalled Lisa. "I never had so much attention and so I thought it was love. I had NO idea what I got myself into."

When Lisa was 16, there was a family argument about Bill. Her parents made her end the relationship and sent her away to her grandmother's house. Lisa's adult male cousin was also staying with their grandmother. One night, he manipulated her into sharing some drugs and alcohol, and then her cousin sexually assaulted her.

"I told my grandmother that I was sick and needed to go home," Lisa remembered. "I left, promising to stay away from my fiancé, and I tried. I wanted to listen to my parents, and I was struggling with what happened to me that no one knew about."

Bill heard that Lisa was back in town and their relationship began again. After a particularly difficult time for Lisa's family because of her father's abuse, her parents consented for her to marry 22-year-old Bill at the age of 16.

"Our wedding night was very strange. He asked his best friend to go to the drive-in theater with us. They sat in the front seat together, and I sat — utterly alone — in the back seat," lamented Lisa. "The day after our wedding, he became a totally different person. I remember thinking, 'Oh my God, what have I done?'"

Bill began to coerce Lisa into sex. "One day, I asked my mother-in-law for some advice. She told me a good wife will submit to her husband, no matter what he wants," said Lisa. "She twisted scripture to try and make me believe this, but I couldn't let it go. I told my husband how I felt, and he said he was doing nothing wrong. I argued and this is when the beatings began."

After a few months of physical abuse, Lisa was determined to leave. Bill lied; he said he was now her legal guardian, and he would have her committed. She was terrified, so she submitted to survive.

"I tried to work, but I couldn't hold a job, because he would accuse me of cheating on him. I never did!" explained Lisa. "He became so controlling that I was suffocating. I couldn't make my own decisions. I was never allowed money, even if I worked for it." Bill even prevented Lisa from finishing her college degree.

Bill lost his job, and although money was tight, he began to beg Lisa for more children. "After our third child, I had a miscarriage. I didn't want to try anymore. I didn't think I could carry a child to term," she shared. "He insisted and I continued to tell him no. Then, he secretly stopped using protection and I ended up pregnant."

Lisa kept the peace to ensure a healthy pregnancy and a "happy family." For the next six years, there was a "honeymoon period" and she experienced no abuse. Lisa, Bill, and their five children moved and became involved with a church near their new home. Things were looking up. Then, several incidents happened involving the family and the church, and they had to leave the congregation. Lisa's support system had been ripped from under her and she was forced back into isolation.

The family attended therapy together until Bill decided that he no longer needed to be included because "he was not the problem." Their youngest child disclosed to a therapist that Bill was sexually abusing the child, who was removed from the home and from the safe arms of Lisa.

[Lisa's story of survival continued on next page...](#)



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Lisa's Story: Free from Abuse, 42 Year Later

This was the final straw. Lisa left and got custody of their youngest child. They lived with a friend and received services at a nearby domestic violence program. Through a referral, Lisa got connected with WC&S for her divorce case.

In 2016, WC&S Civil Law Project (CLP) attorneys helped Lisa obtain a Final PFA Order to protect her and her child. A WC&S CLP attorney represented Lisa in 2017 for her spousal and child support case. Then, things took a turn. Bill and their adult children pressured Lisa into dropping the divorce case. They prevented Lisa from accessing the home to pick up church ministry instruments, her clothing, and other sentimental items.

Lisa decided to move forward with her divorce case with her CLP attorney in 2020. After a hard-fought battle, the divorce was issued in April 2021. Lisa found the freedom for which she had yearned for 42 years.

"After almost 5 long years of court, I am divorced. I lost everything, including 4 of our children he turned against me," said Lisa. "But it is finally over, and I am so relieved."

Lisa and her youngest child are now happily living together in their own home. "I learned so many important lessons: there is help available, love does not hurt, and you are stronger than you know. I stayed quiet, and I never told anyone outside of my home what was happening. This was my mistake. Please learn from it. **You do matter. There are people who care and can help! You can make it without your abuser.**" ●

The moment of change is the only poem.

— Adrienne Rich



At WC&S, the premise of our business philosophy is that problems offer good opportunities to create change. The strife, suffering, and trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic is enormous. There is not a day that goes by that we all don't mourn the loss of loved ones and the lack of normalcy in our world. However, as an agency, one of our biggest strengths is **finding hope among the heartache.**

Our commitment to change is rooted in The Sanctuary Model, a set of principles we follow that promotes safety and recovery from adversity through the active creation of a trauma-informed community. There are seven components to Sanctuary, the last (but certainly not least) of which is the commitment to growth and change. This framework helps us to evaluate current programs, solve problems, and set achievable goals for the future — in a mindful way that acknowledges growth and change can be challenging and traumatic. And so, we have changed.

This hasn't been an easy task. Change is good, but change is hard. In March 2020, we scrambled to make many of our programs virtual, including individual therapy, legal advocacy, support groups, and the addition of text and chat messaging as a part of our hotline services. We have made many adjustments to help survivors continue to have access to our life-saving resources — and some of these "temporary" changes have revolutionized the way we do our work. Just one example — over the past 18 months, we have learned that many survivors prefer the option of virtual support groups because they are more convenient for transportation costs and childcare.

This beautiful change has also occurred in our team. In the last five years, our staff has nearly doubled, and we've significantly increased our capabilities and number of people served, but our leadership structure has stayed the same. It was time for an evolution! WC&S created several new roles that provide additional executive-level leadership and provide enhanced training and mentoring opportunities. This structure helps bring to life our newly-adopted mission: *we will strengthen our ability to meet the individual and evolving needs of those affected by domestic violence by investing in the growth of our people, deepening community engagement, and amplifying the voices of all survivors.* I am so incredibly proud of these leaders who are blazing new paths and taking WC&S on an amazing journey.

Our new vision statement affirms: *we exist to end domestic violence and create safe spaces for help, healing, and hope.* This is possible only through change, a commitment to continual improvement, and a lot of heart. (*And if there's one thing we have, it's a lot of heart!*) These changes will allow us to go even wider and deeper to expand and improve our programs, our community relationships, and most importantly, the lives of adult and child survivors of domestic violence.

We are here for ALL survivors of domestic violence. We will help them take their next steps. We will cheer with them as they achieve their goals. Together, we can accomplish anything.

With peace and respect,

Nicole Molinaro
President/CEO



Our mission is to strengthen our ability to meet the individual and evolving needs of those affected by domestic violence by investing in the growth of our people, deepening community engagement, and amplifying the voices of all survivors.

Welcome back to WC&S, Education Facilitator team!

When you want to make an improvement in society, you start with the youngest members so they can learn, grow, and make an impact on our world. So, where do we start? We start in schools, by teaching youth that love doesn't hurt.

For years, WC&S had an education team that was invited into schools to teach children and teens about domestic violence and dating violence, but in 2008, we lost the majority of this funding. Without WC&S' Education Facilitators, we were missing an integral part of our holistic services. Community partners were anxiously awaiting the team's return. Then, in 2020, we got some good news. The Education Facilitators would be coming back, thanks to a generous grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.



"I was overjoyed when I learned that the Education Facilitators would be making a comeback," said Rhonda, Chief of Prevention, Intervention, and Outreach, who supervises the team. "Several studies have shown that youth in unhealthy relationships continue to experience abuse as adults.

With education and intervention, we can help these amazing teens to have lives free from domestic violence and to demand relationships that are full of love and respect."

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In the fall of 2020, WC&S welcomed Kayla (she/her) and Paige (she/her), two Pittsburgh Urban Leadership Service Experience (PULSE) Fellows, into the Education & Outreach department as Education Facilitators. Kayla and Paige worked hard to foster



relationships with city schools and local non-profit organizations. Kayla introduced Hot Spot Mapping, a program that engages a core group of students to look critically at the safety of their school community. Paige focused on nurturing relationships with local groups and worked on several projects with Gwen's Girls, a non-profit that seeks to empower young women.

Kayla and Paige completed their fellowships in July and have moved on from WC&S to new and exciting life chapters. We miss them both!

In February 2021, Matt (he/him) and Leo (they/them) joined the Education Facilitation Team to help continue the important implementation of the Teen Dating Violence (TDV) prevention program to the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Their individual



backgrounds and accomplishments make them the perfect duo.

Matt has combined his extensive football coaching experience with his passion for DV advocacy as a spokesperson for the Coaching Boys into Men program. Matt has also established an important connection

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The annual Stand Up for STANDING FIRM awards luncheon brings together leaders of the business community and features corporate champions committed to addressing the impact of partner violence in the workplace. We are offering a hybrid event for in-person and virtual attendees.

We hope you will join us to recognize K&L Gates, STANDING FIRM 2021 Employer of the Year and Diane P. Holder, STANDING FIRM 2021 Champion Awardee.

Learn more and register at bit.ly/SU4SF21

STAND UP FOR STANDING FIRM 2021 AWARD LUNCHEON

Tuesday October 12
The Westin Pittsburgh



Keynote Speaker

Michelle Weldon is a journalist, keynote speaker and award-winning author of six nonfiction books with more than four decades of experience in newspaper, magazine and digital journalism. She is emerita faculty in journalism at Northwestern University's Medill School where she taught for 18 years and was co-director of TEDxNorthwesternU 2014. Her award-winning books include *I Closed My Eyes – Revelations of a Battered Woman*.

continued

Welcome back to WC&S, Education Facilitator team!

with UPMC Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic (WPIC) that has allowed him to bring the TDV curriculum to students with serious mental health conditions or previous experience with dating violence. Matt is also the chair of the Police Reform Committee for WC&S' Equity & Action Collaborative.

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“I feel completely honored to be an Education Facilitator for WC&S because of the overwhelming need for what we do,” said Matt. “The amount of thank yous we get from school administrators, teachers, and students gives me the comfort to know we are doing good work for the community. This is the motivation to continue to educate everyone about the severity of teen dating violence and domestic violence.”



Leo is the original founder of the Repairing Rainbows with Gold support group for LGBTQIA+ DV survivors and has co-facilitated the group for the past two years. Leo has been working closely with Pittsburgh Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA) to help implement the TDV curriculum and has been working to bring the programming to Pittsburgh Perry High School as well. They

are also a member of the WC&S Diversity & Inclusion Committee and sit on the Board of Directors at Proud Haven.

“I’ve been volunteering with queer youth for a few years now and every day I am so inspired by their resilience to abuse, addiction, transphobia, and well, life in general,” Leo said. “I’m so passionate about this work because knowing that the youth I work with (in and out of WC&S) have a safe adult/space to turn to in a time of crisis is one of the most important things in the world to me.”

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Matt and Leo are currently working together on updating the current TDV curriculum to include more inclusive language and to make adjustments that fit the ever-changing needs of the school systems.

“This team is new, but the impact they have had in such a short period of time is amazing,” said Rhonda. “Their work is so needed in Pittsburgh. By educating youth and teens about teen dating violence, we can help prevent these kids from becoming victims and abusers. Education supports a future free from domestic violence. I couldn’t be prouder of this team.” ●



The WC&S team and their families enjoyed a staff picnic at the O’Hara Township Community Park. We shared great food and lots of laughs! Together, we want to THANK YOU, our incredible supporters, for all you do to make our work possible!

Thank you!

WC&S supporters hold creative community fundraisers (and you can too!)

Women's Center & Shelter is lucky to have such an amazing community of supporters surrounding us. Friends like Alina's Light, Karissa's Army, and many others have hosted wonderful fundraisers to benefit our clients — and so can you! Whether you plan an in-person or virtual event, or a donation drive, your collection of cash, gift cards, or essential items helps WC&S provide for the needs of survivors and their children during some of the most challenging moments in their lives.



“Working with WC&S was a great experience,” said Andy Patton, a college freshman at the University of Pittsburgh who hosted a donation drive last spring. Andy set up multiple donation sites as part of his Eagle Scout project for Scouts BSA and collected an abundance of full-size toiletries, hygiene products, and gift cards that helped WC&S meet client needs throughout the summer.

“It felt really good to know I'd done something that was going to help people in a direct way,” Andy said.

Tony Urbanek, owner of Inka Dinka Doo Tattoo in Lawrenceville, and his partner, Elizabeth Clay, put their artistic skills to use by selling limited edition t-shirts at their parlor and donating the proceeds to WC&S' annual Adopt-a-Family holiday gift card drive last winter.

“Inka Dinka Doo has been a part of Pittsburgh for over 25 years and we are always looking for ways to get involved with the community,” said Tony, “When we found out about the holiday gift card program at WC&S, we knew we wanted to be involved and designed the shirt. We sold out of our first run of them almost immediately.”

The shirts were such a hit, that they've continued to sell them as an ongoing fundraiser benefitting WC&S.

“WC&S is such an amazing organization and we are thrilled we could help,” said Elizabeth. “I hope we continue this fundraiser for many, many years to come.”



Sri Venkateswara Temple (S.V. Temple) reached out to WC&S last winter to see how they could support our clients. After discussing different options, they committed to donating a prepared meal once per month for residents in WC&S' Emergency Shelter to enjoy.

“The Holy Bhagawad Gita, a sacred Hindu text, teaches that all life springs forth from food,” said Suchitra Srinivasa, the Humanitarian Chair for S.V. Temple who coordinates the meals. “Donating food has a special significance. It has a spiritual meaning of connecting with others at a deeper level and to make a positive impact.”

Make your own positive impact

Visit wcpittsburgh.org/community and find out how you can host a fundraising drive or event, donate a meal, or begin volunteering.





Women's Center & Shelter
of Greater Pittsburgh

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Domestic Violence Awareness Month Schedule of Events

Learn more
and register at
dvampgh.org

October 7

DV Awareness Month Kickoff Event

5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Rhododendron Shelter in Highland Park

Join WC&S, Eckert Seamans, YWCA Greater Pittsburgh, and our community sponsors for a preview of this year's Domestic Violence Awareness Month programming. Find out how you can "Be Nebby" and become a part of the community solution to DV this October (and beyond!) while enjoying food, drinks, and meaningful, hands-on activities in a beautiful outdoor pavilion.

Registration is free with a suggested donation of \$25.

**ECKERT
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ATTORNEYS AT LAW

eliminating racism
empowering women
ywca
Greater Pittsburgh



October 8

DV and... the Media | 12:00 p.m. – 1:15 p.m., via Zoom

Join a panel of experts as they explore the complexities of **covering domestic violence in the media and the role reporters play in navigating the issue in a responsible, safe, and caring way.** The importance of consistently reporting on DV and the magnitude of the issue, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, will also be discussed.

October 21

Wear Purple for Domestic Violence Awareness

Wear purple for domestic violence awareness on Purple Thursday, October 21. Put on your favorite purple shirt or any purple gear, post a picture on social media with a caption about why ending domestic violence is important to you, and use hashtags **#PurpleThursday**, **#WearPurple**, and **#DVAM2021**.

October 28

DV and... Racism | 12:00 p.m. – 1:15 p.m., via Zoom

Join Women's Center & Shelter and YWCA Greater Pittsburgh for a panel discussion on the intersection of domestic violence and racism. **Angela M. Reynolds, Ph.D.**, CEO YWCA Greater Pittsburgh, will serve as panel moderator.