



Women's Center & Shelter
of Greater Pittsburgh

FALL 2023



Leah's Journey to Safety

Leah met Neil on a videogame streaming site and started chatting online before deciding to meet in person. Once they met, they immediately hit it off and began dating. Leah said it wasn't long before the relationship took a turn.

She said Neil began to get very controlling, often forcing her to choose him over making plans with her friends. Because their relationship was so new and Neil didn't have many other friends, Leah guilted herself into putting more energy into their relationship.

"I've been blaming myself so much for making that choice. Why didn't I see the warning signs?"

The relationship started getting worse and worse.

"If I went a few hours without texting him back, he wanted to know who I was talking to and what I was doing. There was zero trust."

Leah decided she didn't want to be in the relationship and attempted to end it, but Neil wouldn't take no for an answer.

"He started making anonymous calls to my work to lie about me. He would give away my phone number to random people so that I would get all sorts of calls."

She also found out that he was a convicted felon and was in possession of illegal firearms, even showing them to her on video calls and making threats if she ever tried to leave him.

Leah didn't know what to do. Because she wasn't from Pittsburgh, she didn't know what options were available to her. After an online search, she found Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh.

"I immediately got good vibes from your website."

"I immediately got good vibes from your website. I read some stories of survivors and testimonials, and I felt like you could help, so I thought 'Why not give it a try?' I called the hotline and talked to someone who listened to my issues and problems and said if I was feeling unsafe, they could connect me with their legal department to talk about my options."

Leah started working with a WC&S Legal Department staff member, who explained the process of getting a PFA (Protection from Abuse) Order and even arranged transportation for Leah to get to court. Often, survivors tend to minimize the abuse they've endured, so the Legal Department staff gave Leah guidance on what to include in her paperwork so a temporary PFA could be granted and supported her while they waited for the final PFA to be served. After months of waiting, Leah ended up being awarded a Protection from Abuse Final Order of Court for the maximum period allowed by law.

"I'm so glad that I found WC&S because I had tried to report the situation previously, and I wasn't listened to. WC&S was supportive and believed me."

"Getting the final protection order made me feel so relieved; it was like taking a weight off my shoulders. To have someone say 'Hey, you're not crazy. What you're saying is real' meant a lot to me."

Though her abuser is currently serving time in prison for unrelated charges, Leah says she's grateful the PFA is still active and that she reached out to WC&S for help.

"I'm so glad that I found WC&S because I had tried to report the situation previously, and I wasn't listened to. WC&S was supportive and believed me." ●

Dear friends,

The transition from summer to fall, and specifically heading back to school, can be exciting for many children and parents alike. But along with school supplies, new academic classes, and Friday Night Lights, at WC&S, we think it is extremely important to learn the difference between safe, healthy dating relationships and potentially harmful ones.



According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), about 1 in 3 teens will experience physical or sexual dating violence and are afraid to tell friends or family. Teen dating violence is a major issue that can have both short- and long-term effects. These relationships can have a lasting impact on a teen's mental and physical health and often set a precedent for how individuals will engage in relationships later in life.

In order to help mitigate this issue, it is crucial that young people are taught the skills to start and sustain healthy relationships, including learning emotional intelligence, boundaries, and effective methods of communication. The younger this information is learned, the better; with this in mind, WC&S' "Hands Are Not For Hurting™" curriculum actually starts at the kindergarten level. But learning this at any age is helpful to prevent violence, and thankfully, last summer Pennsylvania took a great stride in introducing teens and young adults to domestic and sexual violence and ways to get help.

In Summer 2022, then-Governor Wolf signed Act 55 into law, requiring all Pennsylvania post-secondary educational institutions to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a domestic violence crisis center and rape crisis center to, among other things, develop educational programming for students, student-facing staff, and administration on the topics of sexual violence, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

Since then, two WC&S programs — STANDING FIRM and our Education Department — have been working together to offer consultation and training services designed to meet these dating violence-related requirements. So far, we have signed MOUs with 12 local schools and have worked with these schools in two ways: compiling packages of resources, including links to materials and information that the school can disseminate however they feel will work best, and tabling for events at local schools, including Carnegie Mellon University, the University of Pittsburgh, and Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC). We look forward to this new school year and taking the next steps to deepen these partnerships.

Prevention education can mean the difference between spotting or not recognizing the red flags of an abusive relationship, learning the cycle of violence, and how to safely leave an abusive relationship, and we appreciate opportunities to spread information about domestic violence awareness and prevention. The implementation of Act 55 means equipping future generations with resources to help them better navigate their relationships and build a strong foundation that will hopefully and likely have a lasting impact. We thank you for your ongoing support as we continue our outreach efforts and life-saving work to help survivors and their children.

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Nicole".

Nicole Molinaro, President/CEO



Matt G. at a tabling event in partnership with the University of Pittsburgh.

Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM) Events and Awareness Activities

You're invited!

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM) and Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh (WC&S) is hosting two panel discussions to educate the community and bring our supporters together. Each panel discussion will be followed by a reception with light food and drink.

> Learn more and register at dvampgh.org

+/- Technology and Domestic Violence

Wednesday, October 4

5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. | Alloy 26 at Nova Place

The advent of smartphones, GPS, and social media have made finding safety more challenging for survivors of domestic violence, though they have also brought great benefit. Our panel will explore these complications and also how DV programs are using technology for good.

Accept Regardless of Space: Working with High-Danger Survivors of Domestic Violence

Wednesday, October 18

5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. | The Union Project

Every survivor's situation is different, and some have to navigate extreme danger before they reach safety. Find out how WC&S and our partners in the Greater Pittsburgh community are working together to meet the needs of high-danger survivors.

Wear Purple Day



Thursday, October 19

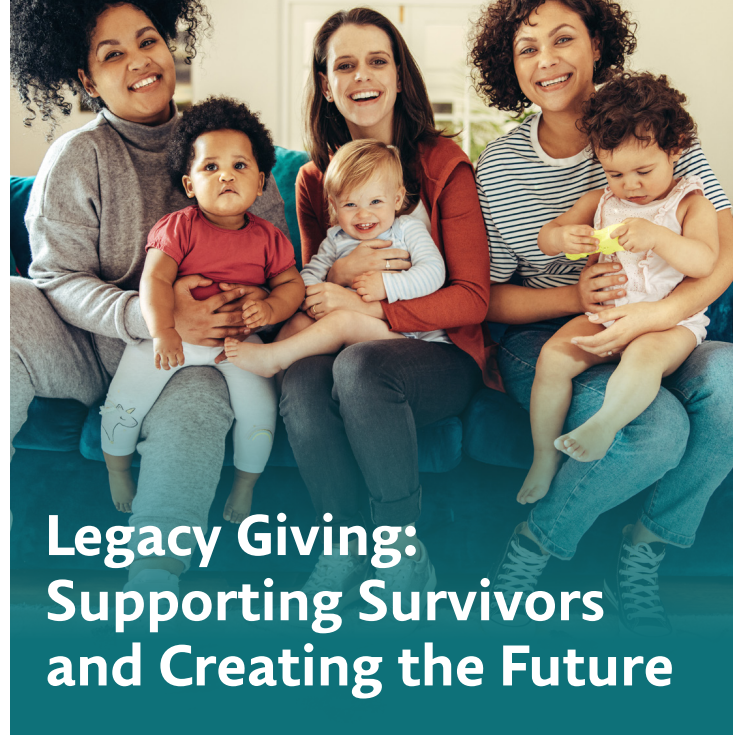
Join WC&S and other DV agencies and allies across the country on Thursday, October 19, nationally known as Purple Thursday, to wear purple and bring awareness to those currently experiencing or those who have survived domestic abuse.

#WheresYourPurplePGH

All month long, participate in a [#WheresYourPurplePGH](https://www.instagram.com/wheresyourpurplepgh) campaign along with WC&S! Purple is the color that represents Domestic Violence Awareness, so during the month of October, we ask that you pay attention as you go throughout your day and notice when you see the color purple.

Snap a picture and post it to Facebook or Instagram with the hashtag [#WheresYourPurplePGH](https://www.instagram.com/wheresyourpurplepgh) and tag our account (Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh on Facebook and/or [@wcs_pittsburgh](https://www.instagram.com/wcs_pittsburgh) on Instagram) to be featured on our social channels! We hope that by bringing attention to the number of times you see purple during your day (it's probably more than you think!), you'll be reminded that **Domestic Violence Affects Everyone**. See you online! ●

Information on the **STANDING FIRM Awards Luncheon** can be found on the back panel.



Legacy Giving: Supporting Survivors and Creating the Future

Many generous and kind donors have made thoughtful planned gifts to Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh. Planned giving enables philanthropic individuals to make larger gifts to charitable organizations than they could make from ordinary income (plannedgiving.com). These gifts have assisted in enriching and supporting our many life-changing programs and services for survivors of domestic violence and their children throughout our nearly 50 years in existence.

WC&S Board member, Mary Anne Papale, is one of these generous donors. *"I think every donor wants to know that their contribution is impactful in some way. (Through planned giving) you can ensure that a portion of your estate is truly a lasting legacy of your life's work."*

There are many ways to support WC&S through planned giving. In addition to naming Women's Center & Shelter as a beneficiary in a will, here are two other examples of planned gifts:

• Life Insurance

You can name WC&S as a primary, secondary, final, or remainder beneficiary of your current life insurance policy. You can also assign your yearly dividends to WC&S. You can give a fully paid policy or one on which you are still paying premiums or obtain a new policy.

• Individual Retirement Accounts (IRA)

Charitable giving from your Individual Retirement Account may be a smart, tax-wise way to support WC&S. If you're 70½ or older, you can make a tax-free charitable gift of up to \$100,000 per year directly from your IRA. This gift allows you to meet the annual Required Minimum Distribution, exclude the distributions from your taxable income, and support the critical work of WC&S.

When considering a planned gift, it is always important to engage an attorney and/or financial advisor to explore your options. If you would like to learn more about making a legacy gift to WC&S, please reach out to Kristin Brown, Chief Development Officer, at brownk@wcpittsburgh.org or by phone at (412) 894-4551 or visit our website at wcpittsburgh.org/legacy. ●

Breaking the Cycle: Substance Use & Domestic Violence

According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM), studies have found that substance abuse is involved in 40% to 60% of the reported domestic violence incidents. Each survivor who has struggled with substance use has their own story, but a common theme is the role that power and control plays in the relationship with their partner.

Individuals experiencing domestic abuse are in relationships where the person choosing to abuse them wants to have power over them. People who choose abuse will sometimes force their partners to engage in substance use to form a dependency that will give them further control. By outing their partner as a substance user, the abuser can discredit the survivor's stories of abuse and instead paint them to seem out of control or untrustworthy. The threat of having their partner report their substance usage to authorities may make them feel trapped out of fear of being arrested or losing access to their children, effectively preventing them from getting help. The overwhelming feelings of anxiety and lack of agency can drive them to seek out dangerous coping mechanisms, like further substance use, in order to regain control in their life.

When seeking treatment, survivors may face pushback from their abuser, including lack of support, refusal to help with childcare, or disparaging their recovery plans. Due to the stigma that surrounds survivors with substance use disorders, many avoid telling the people in the domestic violence programs designed to offer support to prevent their reputations from being damaged. The stigma towards these survivors may be seen in some treatment programs that punish them for experiencing a relapse in their progress instead of offering the support they need. *Kelly N., the Substance Use & Recovery Specialist at WC&S, is working to change this stigma. Read more about her work with survivors below.*

What is the first thing you do when meeting a new client?

I usually just try to get to know the person first. Substance use is a sensitive issue, and sometimes people feel really shameful about it, and so it can be really hard to ask someone to open up about that. I let them tell me what they think they need help with and what they feel is the biggest issue they're facing right now because substance use is usually just a symptom of a broader thing that's happening.

What are the common reasons a survivor might have a substance use disorder?

It's not completely black and white, but a lot of the time an abuser will start their partner on substances, or they'll start them together to bond and then it develops into a full-blown dependency. Often, abusers will either force their partners to use or force them into withdrawal as a form of control.

It can also be a way to survive the relationship. Substances may help survivors get through the day or may help them survive their partner's abuse. Survivors often use substances to help them function.

If a survivor is dealing with substance use and domestic violence, does their treatment plan focus on addressing both issues simultaneously?

It's been widely studied that it's more beneficial to address both simultaneously because they are so intrinsically connected. I always say substance use and trauma are like sisters. Although they look different, they



are highly related to each other. The cycles are very similar, and that's why they're so connected to each other, and they feed into each other.

Is there a stigma around survivors who also struggle with substance use?

It's interesting how similar domestic violence and substance use are when it comes to stigma. I feel like the biggest stigma around substance use is that it's a moral failing rather than a complex disorder. Because it's biological, it's social, it's psychological, it's cultural. It's not just a "I've decided to use, so now I can easily decide to stop using" choice. I think the stigma around domestic violence is similar — that they've chosen to be in this situation.

How can a loved one of a survivor with substance use disorder help?

It can be very painful and difficult to feel like you're throwing out a life raft to someone in the water who just will not grab it. What I would recommend is to be very specific about what you are willing to help with because that person may be living a very chaotic life. Be able to set your own boundaries as a loved one and protect yourself at the same time.

What advice would you give a survivor currently in this situation?

What you've been through in your life, your substance use, and your current relationship, are very connected. It's okay if you didn't recognize the unhealthy relationship between substances and your partner bond; it may not have been obvious at first. Don't feel guilt or shame about that. Reach out to people who you feel safe with and all paths to recovery are valid. It is so common, so please don't think you're alone.

Is there anything else you'd like people to know about your position and your role at WC&S?

Having this service doesn't encourage people to use more. It encourages people who are already struggling to reach out and get the help they need. I hope that all domestic violence agencies can adopt something similar to what we're doing here. So many survivors suffer in silence, but we provide a safe space, which is essential to a survivor's journey. ●

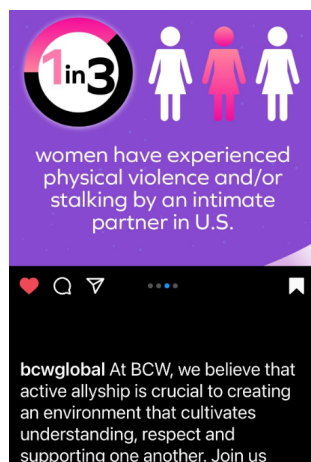
Paying It Forward: BCW Elevates the Voice of WC&S to Support Survivors

The mighty efforts of two incredible volunteers are how Women's Center & Shelter got its start and volunteers continue to play an integral role in our everyday operations.

From providing meals to maintaining the garden, we rely heavily upon volunteers to support the WC&S mission. We are extremely grateful to all of our volunteers for the time and talent they bring to WC&S, and it's even more wonderful when a group of volunteers can support us in a variety of ways. This embodies our relationship with BCW, a global communications agency with an office right here in Pittsburgh.

One must be willing to learn about the complexities and nuances of domestic violence and understand that it must be done with a great deal of thought in order to communicate appropriately and strategically about DV. This is one of the many reasons we enjoy working with the BCW team. Over the years they have collaborated with WC&S, providing communications support in a variety of ways, including:

- Developing and executing the earned media strategy and efforts in support of Pittsburgh's 2018 Connection of Hope Day Event/ RUSafe app relaunch and mayoral proclamation in partnership with Aspirant.
- Helping to drive awareness and earned media coverage tied to pandemic DV-related awareness via a national press release and local outreach efforts.
- Embracing awareness for DV and promoting resources, including RUSafe, across BCW North America through BCW's Women Empowered and In Sync (WISE) Employee Resource Group to thousands of employees yearly during Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM) — WISE has championed education and prevention of DV/IPV as a key cause.
- Most recently, leading the media relations strategy, public relations efforts, and execution of the U.S. launch of Bright Sky, a free, safe, and easy-to-use DV app and website, securing coverage in outlets such as *KPRC-TV/Houston*, *Pittsburgh Magazine*, and *Technical.ly*. To date, there have been almost 85,000 Bright Sky users across the United States.



Members of the BCW team in the Pittsburgh office have also served as ongoing champions of WC&S through on-the-ground volunteer efforts, including packing the pantry with essential items, holiday parties and costume donations, providing homemade baked goods during the pandemic, employee participation in Purple Thursday and Denim Day, and membership with STANDING FIRM, a national program of WC&S.



BCW's WISE North American Employee Resource Group wears denim to support sexual assault survivors. The idea for the #DenimDay is to fight against dangerous accusations that a victim's clothing invites assault.

Rachel Hopkins, Executive Vice President, Brand Solutions, is a long-serving member of the WC&S Communications Committee, providing strategic communications support for key initiatives and senior communications counsel to the organization's leadership team. Rachel said of BCW's commitment to the WC&S mission, *"It's a privilege to support this organization that has deep purpose and dedication to an issue that impacts many. We remain focused on helping WC&S drive awareness and action to prevent DV in our local community and around the country."*

WC&S President/CEO, Nicole Molinaro said of the relationship with BCW, *"It has been amazing to see how the expertise of BCW has helped us to elevate our mission both locally and nationally. Ultimately, through their various strategic public relations and grass roots efforts, they have assisted us in reaching more survivors, which is of utmost importance. We are truly grateful for BCW and for all of our volunteers."* ●



Women's Center & Shelter
of Greater Pittsburgh

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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26 2023 AWARDS
THE WESTIN PITTSBURGH LUNCHEON

STAND UP FOR STANDING FIRM

Join us as we honor Beth Lewis with **Champion Changemaker of the Year** and
the United Way of Southwestern PA with **Partner of the Year**.

PRESENTED BY

UPMC HEALTH PLAN
UPMC **MAGEE-WOMENS**
HOSPITAL



SCAN FOR
TICKETS

STANDING FIRM
The Business Case to End Partner Violence
A National Program of Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh

Save the Date for Women's
Center & Shelter of Greater
Pittsburgh's **50th Anniversary
Celebration** on the evening of
May 11, 2024 at Nova Place.

More details to follow.



**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.**

Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization — donations to which are tax-deductible to the fullest extent permitted by law. The official
registration and financial information of Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within
Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.