



Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh

SPRING 2024



Accepting a Helping Hand: Tara's Story

For someone experiencing abuse, there can be many reasons they can't or don't feel ready to reach out for help. Fear of retaliation from their abusers, coupled with social isolation and financial dependence, often creates a sense of entrapment.

Concerns about the safety and custody of children further complicate the decision to leave an abusive relationship. Women's Center & Shelter exists to provide programs and resources at no cost to those who may be experiencing domestic violence to help them on their journey and let them know they aren't alone. For survivors like Tara, making the process of getting help as easy as possible was exactly what she needed. Tara was represented by an attorney in our WC&S Civil Law Project for her Final Protection from Abuse (PFA) hearing, and received assistance from our Legal Advocates with navigating the criminal process for charges related to the abuse she experienced.

"This whole experience was made much easier with the assistance of WC&S. I cannot emphasize this enough, I truly can't," said Tara.

Asking for or accepting help isn't an easy task and it's one that many survivors can struggle with. For Tara, her abuser was prohibited from having violent contact with her as a condition of his bail, so she felt "safe enough" and didn't attend her PFA hearing. However, WC&S reached out to her several times during and after the hearing to follow up and make sure she understood her options. The persistence of Tara's lawyer meant a lot to her; it showed her that she hadn't been abandoned as she grappled with feelings of guilt over missing the hearing.

"One of my biggest fears was that I was wasting their time — which I never wanted to do. I never wanted to waste time or resources that could have been available for someone else," said Tara.

Once she spoke with her lawyer, Tara felt supported in her decision, was emailed final paperwork, and referred to other departments in WC&S for continued support, which included a packet of information and resources that were available to her.

Despite feeling safer after her abuser was incarcerated, Tara couldn't stop thinking about the packet of information provided to her by WC&S. After a few days, she opened the envelope and was overwhelmed at the information she had been given — everything she had mentioned during her PFA intake process had a corresponding program or service.

"I have reached out for counseling services. I asked for security cameras, which I financially couldn't afford, and they were shipped straight to my house. I felt strong enough to start the process of filing charges, but it was all the resources available to me that gave me the courage to continue moving forward. Without them, I am not sure how this would have turned out."

The best was yet to come for Tara when Caitlin, a Staff Attorney with WC&S' Civil Law Project, reached out and said she had referred Tara for the WC&S Adopt-a-Family gift card program. She ended up receiving \$200 in gift cards that paid for household products, diapers, and other items for her kids that she had been putting on hold until she had the money to pay for them. She was also able to visit the Holiday Workshop, an annual event at WC&S that provides a chance for clients to come in and shop for holiday presents for themselves and their children, which was incredibly impactful for her.

"I seriously can't thank you enough for what you've done. It's not easy for me to accept help and not feel "less than." I usually want to help others but we all can find ourselves in need, in one way or another in this life. So many people are going through things and when you become a person that is chosen or thought about for something like this, it truly means the world."

Getting to participate in the Holiday Workshop created a domino effect for Tara. When she visited WC&S, she was reminded of her own time spent in a shelter as a child, with her mother. This memory ignited a need to give back and she's now pursuing volunteer opportunities with WC&S, creating a full-circle moment for her.

"Being involved with WC&S has led me to a place of self-reflection on my career path and participating in something more meaningful and that makes a difference. I hope to get that chance one day." ●

Dear friends,

As we reflect on the journey of our organization, it fills me with immense pride and gratitude to write this letter, marking the significant milestone of our 50th anniversary.



The steadfast support of our donors, volunteers, partners, and staff has been instrumental in our success, and I am thrilled to share the remarkable achievements we've accomplished together.



Half a century ago, two women, Ellen Berliner and Anne Steytler, came together with a shared vision — to create a safe meeting place for women in the Pittsburgh area. What started as a small storefront in the South Hills with three beds, three couches, three sleeping bags, and one crib became a comprehensive program whose mission is to create safe spaces, break the cycle of domestic violence, and empower survivors to reclaim their lives. Thanks to the incredible efforts put forth by two women 50 years ago, we are now able to serve over 7,500 survivors and their children each year. Today, as the President/CEO of this extraordinary organization, I am honored to stand on the shoulders of those who laid the foundation for our organization and to lead a team that is making a profound impact in the lives of countless individuals.

As we have grown over the years, we have witnessed the transformative power of collective action. With your support, we have provided emergency shelter to thousands of survivors and their children, offered counseling and legal assistance, and developed educational programs to raise awareness about domestic violence. Together, we have been a beacon of hope for those in darkness, demonstrating that change is possible, and healing is achievable.

As we celebrate this 50th anniversary, it is crucial to acknowledge the challenges we have faced and the progress we have made. Our work is far from over, and the need for our services continues to be urgent. With your ongoing commitment, we aspire to continue this life-saving work and advocate for systemic change to end domestic violence in our communities.

To celebrate this milestone, we are planning a series of events throughout the year, including a vigil to commemorate the lives lost to domestic violence in the last 50 years in Allegheny County, a community-centered event to honor our 50 years of service to survivors and the community, and a conference during October, which is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Your continued support will be central to the success of these efforts, as we aim to not only celebrate our achievements but also gather support to propel us into the next chapter of our work.

Included in this edition of Rosewood is a brief timeline of our work over the last 50 years. We know it could have been much longer if we highlighted every accomplishment and important moment from our history. Though this timeline may not be all-encompassing, I hope it serves as a testament to the incredible journey we have undertaken together and the legacy we are building.

Thank you for being an essential part of our story. Your generosity of spirit, time, talent, and treasure fuels our mission, and we are excited about the opportunities that lie ahead. Together, we will continue to be a force for positive change and create a future free from domestic violence.

In partnership,

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.

50 years of Hope...

1974

Women's Center & Shelter (WC&S) founded by Ellen Berliner and Anne Steytler.



1976

Pennsylvania's Protection from Abuse Act was enacted in 1976. Pennsylvania was the first state to enact such a civil protection order statute — now every state in the country has one. PA's PFA Act has been amended and expanded over the years several times since 1976.



1981 – 1983

Raised more than \$1 million during Capital Campaign to purchase a building with a shelter capacity of 32.



1986

Non-Resident Counseling Program started. Many victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) may not need the safety of our Shelter, but they need an emotionally safe environment in which to talk about their experiences.

1994

New, larger building purchased and \$5 million Capital Campaign launched. Medical Advocacy project began with a full-time on-call WC&S staff person at Mercy Hospital.

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was signed into law by President Clinton on September 13, 1994. VAWA provides grants to improve response to violent crimes against women and children, encourages the development of coordinated prevention efforts and creates new legal remedies for certain victims of violent crimes motivated by gender.

2001

Women's Center developed a Civil Law Project (CLP) with funding from the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Since then, CLP has grown to be a respected provider of free, legal services in Allegheny County with a statewide reputation for high-quality legal work on behalf of domestic violence victims.

2004

WC&S adopted the Alcoa Business System "ABS" which is a problem-solving model based on the Toyota Production System. The structure of ABS principles allows staff to more easily identify and solve problems to root cause, creating increased efficiency, accuracy and time savings.



2009

WC&S was honored to receive certification from the Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations (PANO), a certification that only 53 of all the nonprofits in Pennsylvania had accomplished at the time.

2013 – 2014

Beginning December 16, 2013, the City of Pittsburgh implemented the Maryland Lethality Assessment Program. City of Pittsburgh police officers who are called to a home where IPV is suspected are now required to administer an 11-point lethality assessment, measuring how lethal a woman's situation truly is and connecting them to immediate help through WC&S' 24-Hour Hotline.

2014

Women's Center & Shelter celebrates 40 years of service to the Pittsburgh Community.



History Continued...

2015

Through initial funding provided by the United Way of Southwestern PA, the Immediate Needs Coordination Program was established to meet the immediate safety and basic needs of survivors.

2015 – 2017

WC&S embarks upon and completes the \$12 million *Shelter from the Storm* capital campaign for a total transformation of our current facility. Rothschild Doyno Collaborative was awarded a Social Equity in Design Award in 2019 by the American Institute of Architects, Pittsburgh Chapter, for creating an environmentally and socially responsible space.



2017

The RIL Team is created to serve the emerging and evolving needs of domestic violence survivors who are refugees, immigrants, and/or limited English speakers.



STANDING FIRM, the business case to end partner violence, officially becomes a national program of Women's Center & Shelter. This strategic merger adds vibrancy to prevention efforts, deepens connections within the corporate community, and broadens WC&S' national reach.

2020

As COVID-19 becomes a global pandemic, WC&S transitions much of its programming to virtual and begins campaigns to reach those experiencing domestic violence as much of the world is on lockdown. Text and chat features are added to Hotline Services.



WC&S received a competitive, two-year grant from the PA Commission on Crime and Delinquency to once again deliver prevention curriculum in Pittsburgh schools.



2022

The IPV Reform Initiative is created in May 2022 to coordinate policy and system level work across agencies to improve a complex and fragmented system for IPV survivors in Allegheny County. WC&S' President/CEO serves on the IPV Reform Initiative Leadership Team and the WC&S Chief Legal Officer co-chairs the IPV Reform Task Force which carries out the priorities identified by the Leadership Team.

WC&S changes the way we work with high-danger survivors who are most at risk for being killed by their partner or ex-partner. This life-saving initiative identifies survivors in need of additional and intense coordination among external systems and case management to remain safe.

2023

The Bright Sky DV app and website is launched in the United States by WC&S and Vodafone Americas Foundation at a panel discussion event that ran parallel to the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 2023).



WC&S receives re-accreditation by PANO. The accreditation establishes that WC&S upholds the highest standards of ethics and accountability in nonprofit governance, management, and operations.



WC&S is named a Vibrant Champion through participation in the Vibrant Index Initiative, a voluntary diagnostic tool evaluating how organizations institute diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) measures in comparison to best practices.

2024

**With the community,
we honor and recognize
50 years of serving
survivors of domestic
violence and their children.**

New Partnership Serves Local Medical Facilities

Since 1994, Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh (WC&S) has offered medical advocacy to area hospitals, providing support, resources, and trainings to medical providers (doctors, nurses, social workers, and hospital staff), and crisis intervention to patients through a full-time Medical Advocacy Coordinator.

This past fall, WC&S was able to expand our medical advocacy footprint from primarily UPMC-affiliated facilities to Allegheny Health Network facilities, through a formal, funded partnership with Allegheny Health Network's Center for Inclusion Health (AHN CIH). We are excited to have added a full-time Mobile Medical Advocate to serve Allegheny Health Network facilities in the city of Pittsburgh, which includes providing in-person services to two hospitals and a large clinic. This partnership is also in collaboration with Alle-Kiski Area HOPE Center Inc., who is serving the AHN facilities outside of the city of Pittsburgh that are within Allegheny County.



Avery M., our Mobile Medical Advocate, preparing for client needs outreach.

AHN CIH removes barriers to make healthcare more accessible for all patients. Recognizing a deep need for intimate partner violence (IPV) intervention in a medical setting, AHN CIH created a program to directly support survivors who disclose domestic violence concerns while seeking medical treatment. Doing this work in tandem with domestic violence organizations ensures the program is equipped with the expertise to give patients the best care possible.

The goal of the program is to help

survivors in ways that work best for them, which often requires support and services outside the healthcare system.

In action, medical advocates go into hospitals to provide outreach, education for hospital staff, and crisis intervention for survivors. Janice G. has been in the role of Medical Advocacy Coordinator for 17 years now, providing these services to primarily UPMC facilities. In total, this new partnership's Mobile Medical Advocates have a presence in seven AHN facilities, including West Penn Hospital, Allegheny General Hospital, and Federal North Outpatient Clinic (served by WC&S) and Wexford Hospital, Forbes Hospital, Allegheny Valley Hospital, and Jefferson Hospital (served by the Alle-Kiski Area HOPE Center Inc.). Since December 2023, WC&S' new Mobile Medical Advocate, Avery, has worked within West Penn, Allegheny General, and Federal North to provide medical advocacy. Her work is primarily comprised of serving as an advocate for domestic violence (DV) survivors, ensuring they have the resources, information, and emotional support they need to access support programs and services, and educating hospital staff on identifying and talking about IPV with patients. The Mobile Medical Advocate is a consistent point of contact who can build trust and familiarity with staff and patients, while providing information to determine what services and options will work best to fit their needs.

Explaining the importance of her position, Avery says, "I get to provide a sense of stability and comfort to people while they are in a very vulnerable space. I am a friendly face who can provide a warm, hands-on transfer into services and I get to build up a relationship with them, get to know their story, and remember their history as I help them. I think this is a really supportive approach."

This work is integral for furthering WC&S' vision of ending domestic violence and creating safe spaces for help, healing, and hope. Medical advocacy succeeds by getting survivors connected to support services with confidentiality and compassion. However, another key aspect of the work is to increase awareness and education for medical providers. This includes anyone who works within the hospital system, not just nurses and doctors, but importantly



Janice G., our Medical Advocacy Coordinator, with client resources.

social workers, and other hospital staff members. When a medical provider feels more confident and more skilled around talking about IPV, they are more likely to broach that topic with a patient. Especially in instances when IPV is not readily apparent, such as having a patient come in for an asthma attack, or a routine check-up, having a medical provider who feels comfortable asking if a patient is experiencing IPV can lead to that patient seeking care that they might not have otherwise sought out.

Kristin Lazzara from AHN CIH notes one key component of the program that keeps it effective in navigating challenges and handling changes is, "The leadership from WC&S and Alle-Kiski Area HOPE Center Inc. that has allowed this program to evolve and flourish." Their innovative thinking and creativity has helped to give survivors access to services they may not have had access to before." As with all of the work that WC&S does, we aim for this program to increase awareness of the resources that are available to survivors within the greater Pittsburgh area as we work towards reducing and eliminating domestic violence. ●

Save the Date Candlelight Vigil

Join us as we honor the memories of those who have lost their lives to domestic violence.

**Thursday, April 11, 2024
6:00 - 7:00 p.m.
City County Building's Portico**

More details to follow.





**Women's Center & Shelter
of Greater Pittsburgh**

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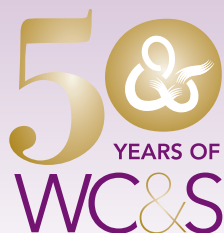
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Click the chat bubble to begin

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**A COMMUNITY
CELEBRATION**

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**SATURDAY
MAY 11**

5:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Nova Place
in Pittsburgh's North Side

100 S Commons
Pittsburgh, PA 15212

Join us for a special evening celebrating 50 years of WC&S and the community that makes our work possible. Bring your friends and family to enjoy a delicious three-course family style meal prepared by DiAnoia's Eatery, frozen treats from Millie's Homemade Ice Cream, specialty cocktails, a cookie table, silent auction, and more as we gather with our incredible community of supporters to recognize all we have accomplished together and the work still ahead.

Guests will hear from brave survivors served by WC&S throughout the years, learn more about WC&S' history as one of the first six domestic violence programs in the country, and honor our founders, Anne Steytler and Ellen Berliner, posthumously with the prestigious Sherley and Ted Craig Humanitarian Award.

Register today and find more information on wcs50.org.

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