



Rising Strong: *A Survivor's Path to Peace*

Content warning: description of violence

When Christine walks through the doors of her workplace now, a position she earned as a certified medical coder with a local health provider, she carries more than a badge or a degree. She carries her story — one of resilience, rebuilding, and reclaiming a life once nearly stolen from her.

Just a few years ago, Christine found herself in a place she never imagined. After surviving a brutal and violent relationship, she was hospitalized with severe injuries. Her face was shattered, her jaw wired shut, her body battered. But it was in that moment of deep crisis that her path toward healing began. She was transported from the hospital directly to WC&S, where she found something she hadn't had in years: safety.

"I showed up with the clothes on my back and my jaw wired shut — no money, no support," she recalled. "I didn't have anywhere else to go. WC&S gave me everything, food, clothes, a roof over my head. But more than that, they gave me a chance to start over."

For three months, Christine stayed in WC&S' emergency shelter, regaining strength, processing trauma, and accessing critical services. Her newborn son had been placed in temporary foster care while she was hospitalized, but with WC&S' help, was reunited with her soon after.

"They made sure I could see him every day. When I got him back, they housed him with me. That meant everything," she said.

The support she received was comprehensive. WC&S provided legal services, accompanying her to court hearings during what would become a five-year legal process. The lengthy process resulted in a total sentence for her abuser of

180 to 360 months of incarceration, followed by 10 years of probation. WC&S paid a \$200 fine that surfaced during the filing of her protection order, offered her a thrift store voucher for clothing, and bus passes to help her get to school so she could earn her medical billing diploma.

Even after moving out of the shelter, the support didn't stop. WC&S continued to check in, helped with holidays like Christmas, and stayed connected through referrals to services like Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR) since her case involved sexual violence. And when Christine began to regain her footing, WC&S was still there cheering her on in the background.

"Without WC&S, I honestly don't know where I'd be," she said. "I had no family, no support system. They filled that role completely."

Today, her life is nearly unrecognizable from where it was. She's been sober since the day she entered the hospital. She's a Certified Coding Professional, back in school studying healthcare administration. She's buying a house with her new partner and has a car, a career, and — most importantly — peace.

"I can buy my kids what they want. I can take care of them. I'm living a normal life," she said. "This is a far cry from where I was. I'm proud of who I am today."

When asked what WC&S meant to her, she didn't hesitate. "They gave me the stepping stones I needed to be self-sufficient," she said. "They showed me what I went through wasn't normal. And that I deserved better."

She wants other survivors to hear that message, too. "You don't think you're in a domestic violence situation until you're really out of it," she said. "I used to think it was just smacks or words. But it escalates. It doesn't get better."

Now, as she stands at the threshold of closing on her first home, Christine reflects on how far she's come. "It's wild to think about. I used to feel like I was nothing. Now I have a future. I'm building something real — for myself and for my kids."

She recently reconnected with WC&S after seeing a colleague at work mention the organization. "I told them, I can't give much, but I'd like to donate a little," she said. "It felt full circle."

Her story is a testament to what's possible when survivors are met with compassion and resources. But above all, it's a story about her own strength.

"I was ready to leave it all behind. And because of WC&S, I could." ●

If you or someone you know needs support, WC&S is here to help all survivors.
You are not alone.

Dear friends,



The landscape of domestic violence is complex and constantly shifting. Survivors' needs today are not the same as they were five, ten, or twenty years ago. Systems change. Communities change. Crises emerge. And yet, through it all, WC&S has remained responsive, flexible, and innovative. We strive to meet each challenge

with thoughtful intention, adapting our services, expanding our reach, and embracing new strategies — while holding steadfast to what has always grounded us: the needs and safety of survivors.

Whether we face public health emergencies or shifts in the economic and legal landscape, our work has never wavered. And now, as we find ourselves once again living in uncertain times, we draw on the same reserve that carried us through the COVID-19 pandemic. Like then, we are again planning, preparing, and adapting so that we can strategically and thoughtfully address whatever may come our way.

We remain grounded in the motto we adopted during the pandemic: “**Keep Calm and Keep Serving.**” Those five words have become more than just a rallying cry — they are a philosophy that carries us forward as we continue to embrace flexibility as a strength, staying the course with clarity and purpose, even through difficult times.

**KEEP
CALM
AND
KEEP
SERVING**

The domestic violence movement has always been about strength, resilience, and community — about banding together to overcome, survive, and thrive. In these times of instability, we find ourselves reaching back to those roots. We are focusing on what is most essential: staying grounded, staying strong, and remaining committed to serving all survivors with dignity and compassion.

This commitment is deeply personal. Every member of the WC&S team, from advocates and counselors to administrators and volunteers, shares a dedication to supporting survivors at every stage of their journey. Like the flight path of a paper airplane, each survivor's path forward begins with a moment of decision, and with the right support and guidance, they can gain the lift they need to soar.

And we know we are not alone in this work. We are ever grateful to our community of supporters, partners, donors, Board of Directors, and champions for walking alongside survivors on their journeys. Your dedication, passion, and generosity have made it possible for WC&S to grow, stretch, and deepen our impact over the last 51 years. Because of you, we are able to say “yes” when a survivor calls. Because of you, a child fleeing violence has a safe place to sleep. Because of you, a survivor finds their voice in a courtroom, a counseling session, or a moment of peace for the first time in a long time.

We know the path forward will have its share of obstacles, but it also holds incredible promise. Together, we can continue to meet the moment, adapt with strength and creativity, and rise to every challenge with the same clarity of purpose that brought us here.

Thank you for standing with us. Thank you for believing in this mission. We are proud to be on this journey of hope and transformation — with you by our side, lifting survivors toward safety, healing, and lasting change.

With deepest gratitude,

Nicole Molinaro, *President/CEO*

Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM)

EVENTS



To register, or for more information on all of our DV Awareness Month activities, visit DVAMPGH.org.

Explore a Survivor's Journey at WC&S' DVAM Mixer

Thursday, October 9, 2025

5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Workspace | 2912 E Carson St, Pittsburgh, PA 15203

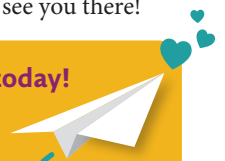
Plenty of free, off-street parking is available in Workspace's private lot.

Join WC&S for a Domestic Violence Awareness Month Mixer, an evening of networking and elevating awareness in honor of more than 50 years of unwavering support for survivors of domestic violence and their children. Enjoy refreshments, beverages, and a raffle, while exploring WC&S' lifesaving programs and services, reliving the moments that shaped us, and learning about our path forward. Bring a friend, share your messages of hope and support with survivors, and learn about ways to further engage with the WC&S mission. We hope to see you there!



Scan the QR code to register today!

The cost to attend is \$25 and space is limited.



PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Wellness Department

Women's Center & Shelter is pleased to share recent developments within our Wellness Department, which has undergone several exciting changes in 2025.

In January, WC&S welcomed **Mikea W., LCSW**, as our new Clinical Director. In her role, Mikea oversees the Wellness Team and provides support with direct client services and case management as needed. She has brought renewed energy to the department through a wellness philosophy that emphasizes open communication, a sense of joy, and practical strategies for connecting with resources.

Among the new initiatives Mikea has introduced is a regular **"Ask a Counselor"** program. These informal sessions are held in the Shelter's dining room and are designed to foster connection and conversation between survivors and counselors. Survivors are encouraged to ask general questions or express concerns in a familiar environment, without the pressure often associated with traditional therapy settings.

To further support healing through creativity and engagement, the team has been hosting monthly events that blend therapeutic support with enjoyable, lighthearted activities. One recent event, Wellness Jeopardy, offered residents an opportunity to win prizes and enjoy snacks while learning about emotional regulation, community resources, and general trivia in a fun, game-show format. Activities were also provided for children residing in Shelter, and a dedicated counselor was available for anyone needing individual support during the event. Adding to the experience, Wellness Team members embraced the game show theme by dressing as hosts — complete with playful costumes and faux mustaches.

In addition to this initiative, the Wellness Department continues to offer a wide range of group programming, including:

- A weekly writing group
- A weekly mom's support group
- A monthly smoking cessation group
- Women's Advocacy Groups held twice monthly
- Two recovery support groups



Members of the WC&S Wellness Team

The department is also in the planning stages of launching an **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy group** during the 2025–2026 fiscal year. EMDR is an evidence-based treatment option for PTSD, which has been gaining popularity as of late and shows great signs of success.

The Wellness Department continues to play an essential role in the healing journey of survivors. We are proud to highlight their innovative, compassionate work, and the meaningful impact these programs have within our community. ●

Legal Protections for Survivors at Home and Work

Thursday, October 30, 2025
3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

K&L Gates | 210 6th St, Pittsburgh, PA 15222
(Networking Hour immediately following)

STANDING FIRM, a National Program of WC&S, is hosting a two-hour Continuing Legal Education panel addressing protections for survivors at home and at work at Pittsburgh's K&L Gates office. Expected panelists include: Brittany Mellinger, Fair Housing Training & Outreach Coordinator with the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission; Rachel Shepherd, Executive Director of the Pittsburgh Commission on Human Relations; Megan Confer-Hammond, COO Fair Housing Partnership of Greater Pittsburgh; Erin Gibson Allen, Management-Side Labor and Employment Attorney and Non-Profit and Tax-Exempt Group Practice Co-Chair with Fisher Phillips; and Mike Pavlik, partner in K&L Gates' Labor, Employment, and Workplace Safety practice.



Scan the
QR code to
register.

Purple Thursday **Thursday, October 16**

Join WC&S and other DV agencies and allies across the country on Thursday, October 16, nationally known as **#PurpleThursday**. Use wearing purple as a conversation starter and share why ending domestic violence is important to you!

#WheresYourPurplePGH

Join WC&S this October for our **#WheresYourPurplePGH** campaign! Purple is the color of Domestic Violence Awareness, and we're challenging you to notice just how often it appears in your day.

When you spot purple — whether it's a shirt, a sign on your commute, or even your morning coffee mug — snap a photo and share it on Facebook or Instagram using **#WheresYourPurplePGH**.



Be sure to tag us (**Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh on Facebook** or **@wcs_pittsburgh on Instagram**) for a chance to be featured on our social channels!

By tuning in to the purple around you, you might be surprised how often you see it, and each time, we hope you're reminded that Domestic Violence Affects Everyone. Let's flood our feeds with purple this month!



Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh

P.O. Box 9024 • Pittsburgh, PA 15224

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WCSCanHelp.org

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Available 9am-5pm, Monday - Friday

United Way Contributor Choice **#110**

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.

Leaving a Legacy to WC&S

We are thrilled to welcome Board Director, Katharine "Kit" Needham, to the Lovelace Legacy Society!

This special Society is for those who have made WC&S aware of their intent to make a planned gift to the organization or those who have made a planned gift to WC&S during their lifetime. Planned or legacy gifts help to support WC&S' long-term sustainability while also assisting donors to achieve their own financial goals, working alongside a financial planner and/or attorney.

When asked why she chose to leave a legacy gift to WC&S specifically, Kit responded, *"Having been on the Board for many years, I had come to appreciate not only the value of the services being provided, but how critical it is to have sufficient funding to be able to provide those services. What better way than to leave a legacy. My daughter was in full agreement with my intention."*

When deciding to make this gift through her IRA, Kit said, *"After talking with my lawyer about the options, gifting through my IRA was by far the simplest. I only had to fill out one form revising my beneficiaries to include WC&S with the percentage it was to receive."*



WC&S is truly grateful to Kit and all of our incredible donors. If you have included WC&S in your estate plans or 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.



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.