



Finding safety, one step at a time.

For Tanya, safety was not a single moment — it was a process that unfolded over years, shaped by persistence, fear, advocacy, and ultimately, support.



Her first connection with WC&S came in 2021, during a Protection from Abuse (PFA) hearing. She was navigating the legal system while also enduring escalating violence from her former partner, all while caring for an infant. WC&S advocates were present at the courthouse, offering guidance during one of the most overwhelming moments of her life. That support would become a constant.

“Legal advocacy was really helpful with letting me know what to expect,” said Tanya. “They were really wonderful at kind of assessing what my needs were at that point while trying to get myself out of the situation.”

As the violence continued and criminal charges followed, WC&S advocates remained by her side — at hearings, during filings, and through repeated delays in the legal process. The organization's legal advocacy services helped her understand what was happening, what her options were, and how to prepare for what came next.

At the same time, safety at home became a pressing concern. After multiple break-ins and terrifying incidents, her sense of security was gone. WC&S' Immediate Needs Coordination team stepped in to help her reclaim it. Security cameras, window locks, burglar bars, and personalized safety planning were provided to help restore a sense of safety.

Safety, Tanya explains, is not just about physical barriers — it's about preparation. Now with two young children, she needed plans in place for emergencies and reassurance that she wasn't navigating fear alone. WC&S advocates worked with her to create a “go-bag,” talked her through next steps, and helped her anticipate what she might need before she needed it.

During one of the most difficult periods — when gas prices were soaring and her baby was only five months old — WC&S once again met her immediate needs. Gas gift cards helped her to get her children to daycare and maintain

some sense of stability during a time when everything felt uncertain.

“WC&S really helped me at a point when I didn't know how I was going to make it work,” she said.

Even after her abuser was incarcerated, safety remained complex. Fear didn't disappear overnight. Every creak of the house triggered anxiety. When he was later released on electronic monitoring, that fear resurfaced. WC&S continued to respond — providing additional safety planning when she moved to a new home, ensuring she felt supported during each new phase of uncertainty.

Over more than two years, WC&S' legal team continued to assist her as she represented herself in family court, custody matters, and appeals. The work was ongoing, layered, and emotionally exhausting — but she never felt alone.

“I can't say enough about everyone. Every single encounter has been wonderful,” Tanya said.

Today, her journey is still unfolding. She feels safe in her home. She has a confidential address. She is fighting to protect her daughter through the courts. And she is beginning to imagine a future where she can help others who are walking a similar path.

Looking back, she describes safety not as something that arrived all at once, but as something built — step by step, service by service, moment by moment. Her story reflects what WC&S strives to provide every survivor: not just crisis intervention, but sustained, comprehensive support that recognizes safety as physical, emotional, and deeply personal. Because safety isn't just surviving — it's being able to live, heal, and move forward.

Her message for others who may be dealing with similar situations is one of hope: “I would say you can do it. You can get out of this, and you are gonna get out of it, and that you're stronger than you think you are.” ●

Bright Sky gets a National Audience

Bright Sky launched in March 2023 as a free app and website available across the US that exists to support anyone concerned about the safety of a relationship — their own or someone else's. In October 2025, WC&S Marketing Communications Manager, Emily Fitzgerald, and Development Manager, Tayler Hutton, attended the National Conference on Domestic Violence, hosted by NCADV, in Kansas City to spread the word about Bright Sky to other DV advocates. Bright Sky was present as a sponsor of the conference and Emily served on a panel discussion for a conference session: **Exploring Two Global Innovations in Combating Domestic Violence & the Power of AI Playing the Part**. During the panel, the five global panelists shared their various experiences regarding using technology for good in situations of domestic violence. First, through the introduction of Bright Sky and its expansion to 13 countries and additionally, through the use of artificial intelligence and the ways that it is reshaping prevention and intervention strategies. Though there are many ways that technology can be used to harm, hearing how organizations are harnessing tech to serve survivors and improve prevention measures inspires optimism for the future.

As of January 2026, Bright Sky US has had 186,586 users. Visit the Bright Sky website (us.bright-sky.org) or download the app to learn more. If you are interested in displaying Bright Sky materials at your place of business, email emilyf@wcpittsburgh.org. ●



Panelists (left to right): June Sugiyama (Panel Moderator) with Vodafone Americas Foundation, John Nehme with Allies Against Slavery, Emily Fitzgerald with WC&S/Bright Sky US, Floretta Mayerson with Hey Violetta, Jemima Gawn with Vodafone Group, and Rebeca Camarena with Fundación Origen.



Dear friends,

Recently, Women's Center & Shelter posted a statement on our social media platforms about the importance of safety in our work and our world. In it, we said the following:

Safety is a foundational pillar of our work at WC&S. Yet true safety cannot exist when people live in fear of unjustified arrest, violence, or loss of life. We are deeply heartbroken and resolute in response to recent actions and events that have undermined safety, dignity, and trust for many across our country.

Our work has taught us powerful truths:

that one person can make a difference;

that accountability is essential to achieving justice;

that silence in the face of injustice is not an option;

and that collective action strengthens us all.

Now is the time to unite our voices, to stand against brutality and injustice across the United States, and to demand accountability where it is due.

At the heart of WC&S' work is a commitment to holding systems accountable and advancing meaningful change in the systems that affect domestic violence survivors. We recognize that lasting change rarely occurs all at once. Instead, it is built steadily over time — case by case, policy by policy, and person by person. Our work extends beyond outcomes alone; it is centered on restoring choice, dignity, and safety for those we serve. In the face of injustice and oppressive structures that disproportionately impact domestic violence survivors and some of our most vulnerable neighbors, this sustained and intentional work is itself a form of resistance.

As we navigate a changing and uncertain landscape, we remain grounded in the values and practices that sustain our mission:

- Believing survivors
- Prioritizing foundational self-care so we can continue this work with intention and compassion
- Remaining engaged in advocacy at both the individual and systems levels
- Being active and present in our communities, particularly in support of those most at risk

As we affirmed in our statement, WC&S has always stood with those at risk of abuse or violence — both at the individual level and within the systems that shape our society. Together, we are stronger. Together, we can protect the rights of our community and work toward a safer, more just future for all.

This issue of Rosewood highlights the steady, powerful impact of our legal programs and the dedicated individuals who make this work possible. They are at the center of our systems work, day in and day out.

Thank you for standing with us — not only in moments of crisis, but in the long, meaningful work of change over time

With deepest gratitude,

Nicole Molinaro, *President/CEO*

Navigating the Legal System with Survivors — and Working to Change It

For survivors of domestic violence, the legal system can feel overwhelming, intimidating, and at times retraumatizing. Courtrooms, police stations, and legal filings are often necessary steps toward safety — but they can also be spaces where survivors feel unheard, unsupported, or unsure of what comes next. At Women's Center & Shelter, our Legal Advocacy Department and Civil Law Project work in tandem to ensure survivors are not only supported as they navigate these systems, but that the systems themselves are continuously examined, challenged, and improved.

Together, these programs reflect a dual commitment: meeting survivors where they are in moments of crisis and engaging in systems advocacy to create a legal response to domestic violence that is more survivor-centered, equitable, and effective.

Legal Advocacy: Support, Safety, and Survivor Voice

The Legal Advocacy Department (LAD) helps survivors of domestic violence access relief through the court system by providing information, resources, accompaniment, and ongoing support. Services are voluntary, confidential, and free, and survivors can engage with an advocate as much as they choose.

Legal Advocates are not attorneys and do not provide legal advice, but their role is critical. Advocates help survivors understand their legal options, develop safety plans, navigate moments of crisis, and access community resources. Perhaps most importantly, they offer a steady, informed presence in a system that often prioritizes procedure over people.

Listening is at the heart of LAD's work. Survivors are supported in identifying their own goals and maintaining control over their decisions. Advocates help survivors prepare to have their voices heard — whether that means talking through what to expect in court, explaining legal processes step by step, or simply being present as a survivor faces their abuser in a courtroom.

LAD also assists survivors involved in criminal proceedings. When police have been involved or arrests have been made, advocates may accompany survivors to preliminary hearings or trials, connect them with prosecutors or law enforcement, explain victims' rights, and provide crisis counseling and safety planning throughout the process.

In civil matters, LAD assists survivors seeking Protection from Abuse (PFA) orders by helping complete petitions, safety plan around court involvement, and connect with free legal representation for final hearings. Advocates also provide information about related criminal matters and referrals to additional support.

Beyond individual cases, LAD staff participate in committees, task forces, and collaborative initiatives aimed at improving how the justice system responds to domestic violence. These systems-level efforts are grounded in the realities survivors face every day — and informed by what advocates witness firsthand in courtrooms and legal processes across the county.



WC&S' Legal Team with the DV District Attorneys at our 2025 Celebrating Survivors event.

Civil Law Project: Legal Representation and Systemic Impact

While Legal Advocacy focuses on navigation and support, the Civil Law Project (CLP) provides direct legal advice and representation. CLP is a small law firm within WC&S, established to offer free civil legal services to current, qualifying WC&S clients who are survivors of intimate partner violence.

CLP attorneys represent survivors in civil legal matters such as Protection from Abuse orders, custody, support, and divorce. For related immigration cases, attorneys can also provide legal advice. The CLP team, comprised of attorneys, paralegals, and a legal administrative assistant, works to help survivors achieve safety, autonomy, restoration, and long-term stability.

Because CLP is a limited resource with specific qualification requirements, including income guidelines, survivors interested in these services are first connected through the Legal Advocacy Department. This close partnership ensures survivors receive the right level of support at the right time, without navigating the system alone.

In addition to direct representation, CLP attorneys play a vital role in systems advocacy. They regularly provide training on domestic violence law, legal procedures, and the dynamics of abuse to attorneys, court personnel, law enforcement, and community groups. These trainings help to shape a justice system that is more informed, trauma-responsive, and accountable.

CLP attorneys also serve on committees and collaborative projects aimed at strengthening legal responses to domestic violence across the region. By addressing gaps, barriers, and inconsistencies in the system, they help to create change that extends far beyond individual cases.

Collective Change in Action

This commitment to both individual safety and systems-level change is further strengthened by a Violence, Intervention, and Prevention Grant awarded to WC&S for work being done by members of our legal team. The grant supports Pennsylvania organizations working to reduce gun violence-related homicides — a critical focus given that, while these rates have declined in recent years in Pittsburgh, they remain significantly higher than in surrounding counties.

Through this funding, our legal team has expanded efforts to identify survivors who may be at the greatest risk of gun violence perpetrated by an abusive partner. Clients are identified through multiple channels, including referrals from other WC&S advocates, careful review of Lethality Assessments for specific risk indicators, and reviews of Protection from Abuse (PFA) orders that are filed in Allegheny County. There are certain legal protections survivors have if their abuser possesses a firearm and/or illegal weapon.

Our legal team then plays a critical role in accountability and follow-through by cross-referencing Weapon Relinquishment Reports with survivor reports to ensure that all weapons have, in fact, been removed. This work not only supports the immediate safety of individual survivors, but also reinforces the importance of consistent, enforceable procedures within the justice system. By regularly coordinating with police in this way, the goal is to strengthen systemic practices that help prevent gun violence homicides in situations of domestic abuse — creating safer outcomes not just for one survivor, but for the community as a whole. ●

Passing the Torch

After more than four decades of unwavering advocacy, WC&S bid a heartfelt farewell to Lorraine Bittner, Esq., as she retired from her role as Chief Legal Officer at the end of December. We are excited to welcome our very own Brittany Conkle, Esq. into this role, which will now be titled Chief of Legal Services.

Lorraine's impact on survivors and the broader legal landscape cannot be overstated. A University of Pittsburgh School of Law graduate, she began her career at Neighborhood Legal Services before becoming a leading expert in Protection from Abuse cases. Since joining WC&S in 1996, Lorraine helped shape survivor-centered legal advocacy, most notably by founding WC&S' Civil Law Project, which now provides free legal representation to more than 450 survivors each year. Her leadership extended beyond WC&S in significant ways, driving systemic improvements such as specialized courtrooms, attorney training, and IPV-related reform throughout the county.

Stepping into this next chapter is Brittany, who brings nearly a decade of experience at WC&S and a deep commitment to direct service and continuing Lorraine's legacy of improving survivors' experiences. Since joining as a Staff Attorney in 2016, and most recently serving as Legal Director, Brittany has balanced leadership with hands-on advocacy — believing that staying connected to survivors is essential. Her passion for the work is rooted in a simple truth: safety is a basic need and helping survivors secure it is both challenging and profoundly meaningful.



Chief of Legal Services, Brittany Conkle, Esq. and Former Chief Legal Officer, Lorraine Bittner, Esq.

This transition honors a remarkable legacy while affirming WC&S' continued commitment to survivor safety, justice, and systemic change. ●



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.



Help & hope
are available



412-687-8005

Available 24/7



412-744-8445

Available 9am-5pm, Monday - Friday



WCSCanHelp.org

Click the chat bubble to begin

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.

Celebrating Survivors

Honoring The Best of the Batch Foundation and Burson

This evening will feature delicious food by DiAnoia's Eatery, opportunities to connect with fellow supporters, and a silent auction. Proceeds from the event benefit WC&S' programs designed to bring safety and empowerment to individuals and families affected by domestic violence. Please consider joining us for this inspiring night of celebration and advocacy.

To learn more, visit
CelebrateSurvivors.org.

Women's Center & Shelter (WC&S), in partnership with UPMC Health Plan, our Presenting Champion of Hope, invites you to join us on Saturday, May 9, 2026, at Nova Place beginning at 5:30 p.m. for our annual Celebrating Survivors event. This special evening will celebrate survivors of domestic violence, remember those we have lost, and recognize the extraordinary contributions of two of our community partners: The Best of the Batch Foundation, recipients of the Sherley and Ted Craig Humanitarian Award, and Burson, recipients of the SUCCESS Award.

For many years, WC&S and the families served through our mission have benefited greatly from the kindness and compassion of Best of the Batch Foundation. Latasha Wilson-Batch serves as Chief Executive Officer of Best of the Batch Foundation and is a dedicated, long-time WC&S Board Director. Founder Charlie Batch's deep connection to and care for the issue of domestic violence can be felt whether he is speaking at events, serving as an ambassador of the Bright Sky app and website, or advocating to schools on behalf of the children staying in our Emergency Shelter.

As a Foundation, Best of the Batch has stood with survivors of domestic violence and their children during the best and the darkest

of times. They've provided school supplies through their BatchPacks program, essential items during the COVID-19 pandemic through Comfort in a Basket, and gifts and cheer during the holiday season. Through their combined efforts, Charlie, Latasha, and Best of the Batch Foundation are making our community safer, one survivor and family at a time.

From the very beginning of our relationship, Burson, a global communications agency with an office right here in Pittsburgh, has demonstrated a deep commitment to understanding the nuance and complexity of communicating about domestic violence. Over the years, Burson has partnered with WC&S on a range of public relations and communications initiatives, helping to expand our supporter base and elevate awareness of domestic violence in our community. Beyond this work, members of the Burson team have been steadfast champions of WC&S through hands-on volunteerism, including hosting donation drives, holiday parties, providing homemade baked goods during the pandemic, participating in Purple Thursday and Denim Day, and ongoing membership in STANDING FIRM, WC&S' national program. ●