



Content warning

Leah's Story: *From Survivor to Advocate*



Leah didn't initially recognize that what she was experiencing, including sexual assault within her relationship, was abuse. It wasn't until she began talking with friends and attending a support group at Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh (WC&S) that she found the language to fully describe what was happening.

After being referred to WC&S through a couples therapist, Leah began individual counseling and joined a support group. During one session, participants discussed different forms of abuse and the behaviors associated with them.

"The psychoeducation that I was provided from the support group was incredibly invaluable to not just leaving the relationship but also understanding certain dynamics of my family and a lot of things."

For the first time, Leah was able to identify and name the sexual abuse, sleep coercion, and financial abuse she had been experiencing, along with the stalking, violence, and verbal abuse.

Although her partner promised to change and seek help, his behavior continued to escalate. Leah ended the relationship and obtained a civil protection order. When he violated the order, she found herself pulled back into the relationship, caught in the cycle of trauma bonding.

"I started to feel that I was isolating myself from my friends and family again because I was embarrassed that I was back with him and allowed this to happen again."

Eventually, the abuse escalated further. After her former partner broke into her apartment and refused to leave, Leah knew she needed to take additional steps to protect herself.

She obtained a Protection from Abuse (PFA) order, moved to a new home, and changed her phone number. Throughout this process, WC&S provided legal advocacy, counseling, support groups, and assistance through the Immediate Needs Coordination Program.

With that support, Leah began rebuilding her life. She enrolled in graduate school, received scholarship assistance, and completed specialized trauma training that opened the door to a career opportunity immediately after graduation.

Today, Leah is a Licensed Social Worker and trauma therapist pursuing her Licensed Clinical Social Worker credential. She works with underserved populations, including LGBTQIA+ individuals and survivors of domestic violence. Leah is also a Volunteer Advocate for survivor wealth through FreeFrom, a national organization that builds economic freedom and survivor wealth.

Leah credits the support she received from WC&S and the tangible assistance from the Immediate Needs Program with being integral in her ability to leave her abuser and begin a path forward. *"I don't know where I would be without the kindness, groceries, and resources...I would not be in this spot helping survivors if it wasn't for the help WC&S and others provided."*

Leah wants other survivors to know that healing takes time and that growth is possible.

When asked if she has any advice for survivors Leah notes, *"To not be ashamed if you are not able to leave right away. To not blame yourself if you become isolated from friends and family. To not blame yourself for not leaving sooner."* ●

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

Dear friends,

Every day, our work is rooted in one core belief: safety, dignity, and respect are basic human rights. But the world survivors must navigate is changing quickly.



Alongside abuse that happens behind closed doors, we are seeing a dangerous rise in online misogyny, especially in spaces known as the “manosphere,” where harmful messages about power, control, and women’s lives are normalized and spread at alarming speed.

Recent reports about international “Rape Academy” websites are especially horrifying. These are not distant or abstract corners of the internet. They are places where real-life sexual violence, coercion, and drug-facilitated assault have been discussed, encouraged, and taught. They remind us that domestic and sexual violence do not happen in isolation; they are fueled by beliefs that excuse entitlement, dehumanize women, and teach people—too often young people—that abuse is acceptable.

As disturbing as this moment is, it also makes our responsibility clear. We cannot wait until harm has already occurred. We must speak earlier, teach earlier, and surround young people with stronger messages before destructive ideas take root. That is why we work in local middle schools, high schools, and colleges; why our **Supporting Survivors Summit** includes a session on the manosphere and its real-world impact; and why we are offering Safer Dating, a program that helps people recognize red flags, build skills needed for healthy relationships, understanding consent and boundaries, and how to minimize the dangers inherent in dating in today’s world. Prevention is not a side effort; it is central to ending violence.

These conversations matter because online harm can become offline harm when silence allows it to grow. By naming what is happening, equipping parents, loved ones, educators, service providers, and community leaders, and centering survivor experience, we can challenge the culture that makes abuse possible. Thank you for standing with us and supporting this urgent work to build safer futures for survivors, families, and our entire community.

With deepest gratitude,

Nicole Molinaro, President/CEO

Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM) October Events



Purple Thursday

Thursday, October 15, 2026

Join WC&S and other DV agencies and allies across the country on Thursday, October 15, nationally known as **#PurpleThursday**. Use wearing purple as a conversation starter and share why ending domestic violence and supporting the work of WC&S is important to you! 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!

#PurpleThursday



2026 SUPPORTING SURVIVORS SUMMIT

Uniting through Community

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Join WC&S and our extraordinary network of community partners for the 2026 Supporting Survivors Summit at the Regional Learning Alliance. Reflecting this year’s theme, **Uniting through Community**, this all-day conference will shine a light on the complex issue of domestic violence and the importance of a united response. Attendees will explore emerging issues, engage in meaningful dialogue, and help build a more informed, compassionate, and supportive future for survivors through three tracks: DV and Youth, DV and the Legal System, and DV and the Community Response.

A sampling of sessions features:

- Violence Intervention Prevention: Navigating Firearm Safety & Weapons Relinquishment Orders
- Doula Care to Support Perinatal IPV Survivors
- Children Living with DV: Understanding Trauma, Behavior & Healing

Expert presenters from across the region, including: University of Pittsburgh, Jones Day, K&L Gates, Blackburn Center, Domestic Violence Services of Southwestern PA, the Butler County District Attorney’s Office, the Allegheny County Bar Foundation Juvenile Court Project, and Women’s Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh.

Lunch includes a celebration honoring **Rhonda Fleming, WC&S Chief of Prevention, Intervention and Outreach**, whose 36 years of dedicated service has greatly helped to shape WC&S’ impact in our community.



The Summit presents opportunities for continuing education credits, networking, expert presentations, and collaboration across sectors.

Friday, October 23

Regional Learning Alliance
Learning and Conference Center
Cranberry Township, PA

8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Join us, registration is
now open!

For more information
or to register, visit:
survivorssummitpgh.org.

Changing Survivors' Lives Through Research

Women's Center & Shelter (WC&S) has spent the past several years collaborating with long-time advocate and researcher, Dr. Maya Ragavan, from the University of Pittsburgh and Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh with the co-design and implementation of a two-arm randomized clinical trial focused on supporting perinatal (pregnant and 6-month postpartum) survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV). This is the Thrive Project, a National Institutes of Health (NIH) funded study that is specifically looking at how intervention from doulas who are knowledgeable about domestic violence and IPV advocates could reduce IPV among perinatal IPV survivors.

Through this research, WC&S is working closely with survivors to provide resources and connection to services for those who are navigating pregnancy and the early postpartum period and are in an abusive relationship. Survivors will also have access to WC&S' 24-hour Hotline. Additional partners on the Thrive Project include MAYA, the Midwife Center, ob/gyns, Healthy Start, Proud Haven, and Casa San José.

During the most recently completed fiscal year (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026), one of WC&S'

Children's Program Advocates transitioned to a part-time role within the department so she could also work part-time as the WC&S Thrive Perinatal IPV Support Advocate. Pregnant and postpartum survivors enrolled in the research program are connected with her while pregnant and after having the baby. WC&S and the Thrive Perinatal IPV Support Advocate provide survivors with direct services such as safety planning, emotional support, tangible items to meet essential needs, and advocacy. She also provides longitudinal support for doulas working with survivors through this project as their point-of-contact.

WC&S is proud to partner in many projects to help facilitate critical research about domestic violence. Other ongoing research projects that WC&S is a part of include the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute's research on building capacity for Comparative Effectiveness Research on IPV intervention in a Pediatric Healthcare Setting; tailoring housing programs for IPV survivors (funded by the RK Mellon Foundation); the RISE Study which looks at how relationships influence sleep, emotions, and heart health; and FLARE: Family and LGBTQ+ Adolescent Relationship Education. ●

Using Intervention to End Intimate Partner Violence

WC&S was an early adopter of the belief that a critical part of ending domestic violence is changing the behavior of those who are choosing to use abuse. WC&S' Battering Intervention Program (BIP) is a vital service for individuals who use abuse and controlling behavior in their relationships. The program — which WC&S has been facilitating since 2007 — helps participants learn how to communicate, make healthier decisions in their relationships, develop self-awareness about their behavior, and experience accountability.

Recently, WC&S received a Technical Assistance grant from The Center for Justice Innovation partnered with Futures Without Violence. With this grant, we will aim to increase the number of in-person BIP groups offered, create an affinity group geared towards men choosing abuse between the ages of 18 and 25, and implement an after-care group for participants who have completed the 24-week BIP but would benefit from continued support.

This expansion of services will specifically target IPV offenders who are at high-risk of committing lethal acts of IPV in an effort to decrease their risk of committing future IPV and decrease their potential for community violence. Another change in BIP is an increase in data collection. Currently,

data is collected about participant demographics, income, the location in which groups are held, the number of enrolled participants, and the number of participants who have completed the program. With this grant funding, we will work to implement a pre-and-post survey that will provide insight into participant learnings and any need to update curriculum.

Since receiving the grant earlier this summer, the BIP team has attended training sessions focused on understanding the current BIP programming nationally and determining our program's Theory of Change as it relates to IPV perpetration. The Theory of Change is a framework for bringing about social change that maps out what is missing between an intervention happening and the goal of the intervention being achieved. In this context, it will be used to identify what additional steps are needed between a person choosing to abuse attending a Batters Intervention Program and that person no longer committing IPV.

WC&S is also meeting with the team from Center for Justice Innovation to inform them about our current BIP, the program's needs and goals, and the history of how the program was formed. By the end of the grant, WC&S will be better equipped to decrease rates of IPV in our community. ●



THANK YOU, KENT!

After more than 21 years of service to WC&S, Kent Bloom, Chief Financial Officer, retired on July 31st. During his time with WC&S, Kent was instrumental in developing a financial infrastructure built on best practices, navigating growth and a successful \$12 million+ capital campaign, and much more. We are truly grateful for Kent's commitment, insight, and the meaningful difference he leaves behind.

“Kent said of his time at WC&S, “For the last 21 plus years, I've had the good fortune to work for Women's Center & Shelter, an organization that truly, truly helps people. Prior to coming to WC&S, I had no exposure to IPV. Once I started working at WC&S, it wasn't long before I saw first-hand the atrocities that afflict the women and children in the community in which we live.

During my time at WC&S, I worked with and supported the staff, administration, Board of Directors, and friends of WC&S; all of whom are unsurpassed in their level of compassion, dedication, passion, and professionalism. They all care so deeply about our mission, provide exemplary leadership, and work diligently to provide services to make a difference in the community.

Over the time that I have been here, I feel that we have, in fact, made a difference and, although I'm now moving into retirement, I feel the good work that WC&S does will continue into the future.”

Moving into the role of Chief Financial Officer is Kim Colasante, who has been with the agency for 17 years as the Accounting Manager. Kim earned her degree from Duquesne University in Accounting and Finance and brings with her a wealth of knowledge, experience, and familiarity with WC&S. She and Kent have been working on the transition for the last few years, and we are confident Kent's legacy of fiscal responsibility will live on with Kim now serving as CFO. ●



Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh

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to a total of \$1,500** by former WC&S Board Chair,
Mary Anne Papale.

Help & hope are available

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Text: 412-744-8445 (9a-5p, M-F)

Chat: WCSCanHelp.org (9a-5p, M-F)

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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 2026: A Night of Hope, Strength, and Community

On May 9, 2026, supporters from across the region gathered at Nova Place for Women's Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh's annual Celebrating Survivors event, an inspiring evening honoring the courage of survivors while raising vital support for the programs and services that help individuals and families find safety, healing, and hope.

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our sponsors, donors, guests, volunteers, and community partners, this year's event raised a net total of more than \$160,000, exceeding initial projections. Guests also helped to make this one of our most successful silent auctions to date, generating more than \$14,400, while our Mission Moment inspired more than \$30,000 in donations to directly support survivors and their families.

We were honored to present the SUCCESS Award to **Burson Global** for their longstanding partnership and commitment to Women's Center & Shelter through their skills-based public relations expertise. We also proudly presented the Sherley and Ted Craig Humanitarian Award to Latasha Wilson-Batch, Charlie Batch, and **Best of the Batch Foundation** in recognition of their exceptional generosity, leadership, and dedication to strengthening our community.



Charlie Batch, Mayor Corey O'Connor,
Latasha Wilson-Batch, First Lady Katie O'Connor

The Burson Team

We extend a special thank you to our
Premier Sponsors, whose generous support
helped to make this celebration possible.

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We hope you'll save the date for
Celebrating Survivors 2027 on
Saturday, May 8, 2027, at Nova Place.