

Women's Services, Inc.

Annual Report 2013-2014

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Executive Director's Report

By Bruce Harlan

Humorist Dave Barry once quipped, "If you had to identify, in one word, the reason why the human race has not achieved, and never will achieve, its full potential, that word would be 'meetings.'" Ironically, Women's Services scheduled more meetings last year than in previous years but probably accomplished more than in any recent combination of years. Most of our meetings centered around our strategic planning process. However, I am confident that the groundwork conducted in these meetings will hold great promise for the immediate future. Already we are seeing the fruits of this extensive planning process. For example, a text chat-line is up and running. Strength-based management and performance reviews are operational and include our newly adopted core values of empathy, collaboration, empowerment, integrity, respect, and hope. An active community partnership to address LGBTQ issues is functioning and producing results. Efforts to enhance volunteerism are underway and yielding positive outcomes. Other initiatives are in their infancy but pushing forward. These are exciting times for Women's Services and I am proud to be leading an effective and competent team of advocates who also share this organization's vision to end violence in our community.

On another note, I would like to acknowledge a group of people who make this job pleasant and worthwhile. I'm speaking of the Board of Directors, of course. This group of dynamic leaders bring a wealth of information and experience to our organization. Their varied talents and diverse backgrounds have helped this organization grow and remain strong despite many economic and social challenges. Not only does this Board take its fiduciary responsibilities seriously, but it actively engages in policy-making, budgeting, planning, fundraising, human resources, program evaluation, and board development. Even though they are an active board, they give me room to lead and provide me with support whenever and wherever I need it. I can say without a doubt that Women's Services has the best Board of Directors in the county and, quite possibly, in the Commonwealth.



Executive Director, Bruce E. Harlan, with incoming Board President, Marcia Yohe.

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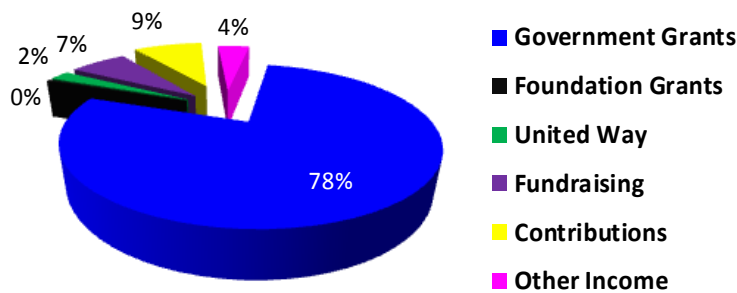
STATEMENT OF ACTIVITY

7/1/2013 to 6/30/2014

REVENUE AND SUPPORT

Government Grants	703,529
Foundation Grants	4,500
United Way	20,182
Fundraising	61,342
Contributions	78,756
Other Income	35,753
TOTAL REVENUE & SUPPORT	<u>904,062</u>

REVENUE & SUPPORT

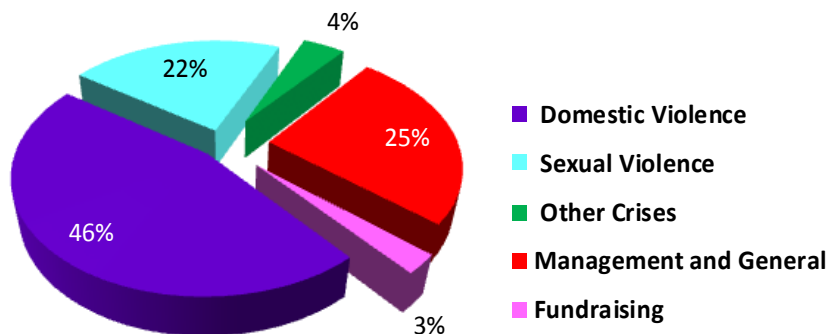


EXPENSES

Domestic Violence	425,370
Sexual Violence	201,584
Other Crises	40,613
Management and General	235,289
Fundraising	24,005
TOTAL EXPENSES	<u>926,861</u>

Net Assets, beginning of year	\$653,309
Net Assets, end of year	\$651,853

EXPENSES



Marketing & Media Report

by Julie Hunter

Text hotlines have been on our radar for a couple of years but this past year I devoted a lot of time and research to getting one implemented at Women's Services to augment our telephone hotline. Given the meticulous and circumspect nature of our organization and the litigious disposition of our society, I'm amazed we're about to get it off the ground so soon. I credit local attorney and Women's Services General Counsel, Max Weiss, with the pearls of wisdom I think helped those still hesitant about a text hotline to get on board. "What is the good you wish to do and the evil it will engender." Brilliant! As most of us already know, we're missing a big demographic that needs our services by not offering a text hotline. There is a significant amount of data that shows quantitatively and qualitatively teens and young adults prefer texting to talking about their issues. Studies from both Michigan and UC Berkeley report that text is preferred when individuals are required to talk about emotional issues or reflect on their personal health.

This past year, Erie's Nonprofit Partnership honored Women's Services with their award for best Large Business Annual Report along with \$2,000. We also received an award from the Winslow Foundation for \$1,500, which will be used towards the purchase of a stair lift to provide private counseling space for handicapped individuals unable to navigate our steep staircase to our Counselor/Advocate offices. Women's Services was the recipient of \$5,000 from Meadville BPW, which raised funds via their third annual Judith's Jig 5k. We submitted a grant application to PCAR for their Vision of Hope Grant proposing a project that prevents child sexual abuse by engaging adults as active bystanders. We proposed utilizing the Spectrum of Prevention model to expand traditional prevention efforts beyond education and to promote a multifaceted range of activities for effective prevention. Although we were not awarded the \$50,000 grant, we received very positive feedback from the judges who indicated that we were the runner up and gave us input for next year's application.

In July, we officially launched our eNewsletter and are currently sending out monthly updates to almost 500 subscribers. Our Facebook page surpassed 500 likes and our monthly articles in the Meadville Tribune are eliciting lots of positive feedback as well as engaging the community in dialogue on topics including feminism and anti-discrimination legislation, therapy dogs, primary prevention and bystander intervention.

Speaking of bystander intervention, we rolled out our first community bystander trainings as our collaborative grant project with Allegheny College, which utilized the University of New Hampshire's Bringing in the Bystander curriculum, came to a close. Embracing our collaboration core value, we partnered with The Center for Family Services and Master Gardener Liz Gabel to expand our community garden, which was also aided by a \$1,000 grant from Walmart. We really got into the gardening this year, even invested in a composter, which we anticipate will bring a whole new level of meaning to "The Greenhouse" next spring.



Some of the children staying at The Greenhouse pitched in to help staff and volunteers get the garden ready this past spring.

Shelter Services Report

By Jane Buchanan

At The Greenhouse, we are always looking for ways to evolve and grow. As new struggles arise, we endeavor to think creatively about how to overcome them. For example, some of our guests face a variety of barriers that cannot be overcome in a 30 day shelter stay. However, in our weekly case management meetings, we work very hard together to find ways to overcome barriers to permanent housing. One of our board members, Marcia Yohe, has agreed to attend these meetings and assist with brainstorming solutions. Her prior experience with housing and human services has been a tremendous asset to our efforts.

During the past year we implemented Mobile Advocacy services. This program provides follow-up support and resources for recently exited shelter guests. We have learned that it is extremely helpful if we are able to accompany our transitioning service recipients as they navigate multiple complex systems, i.e. the Public Welfare system, Social Security office, AA meetings, etc. Attending these meetings and appointments are much less daunting to our clients when we can support them physically and emotionally.

Two other projects that I am excited about are the “Mommy and Me” and “Hope and Power” programs. The “Mommy and Me” program is designed to help mothers and their children experience quality time together. Over the years, I have seen many moms with just enough energy to survive each day lose out on opportunities to spend quality time with their children. Some of the activities in this program include craft-making, cooking, playing games, etc. Thus far, the clients are very excited about participating in this program and we hope this may be something they continue to do after they leave The Greenhouse. The “Hope and Power” group is educational in its focus and is designed to help adult women manage their finances responsibly and prudently. We’ve seen our service recipients make great strides in being able to save money and our hope is to be able to match each dollar they save.

A committee of staff and board members was formed last year to outline plans for achieving transitional housing. Over the years, we’ve seen an increase of women leaving shelter to move in with a family member or friend. A transitional housing program could help exiting shelter guests obtain the necessary financial stability required to maintain their own homes. Once housing is removed as a barrier for leaving an abusive relationship, many more women and children can escape the traumatic consequences of remaining in violent households.

We are confident that with increased knowledge and skills, along with additional support and advocacy, program participants can live independently and achieve positive outcomes. As proponents of women-centered advocacy, we support autonomous decision-making power as we provide service recipients with every opportunity to lead empowered lives from positions of strength.



Lastly, words can’t express how thrilled I was with the completion of our hotline office renovations, including new furniture and flooring. It looks fabulous! However, all of us were thrilled with the renovation to one of our shelter bathrooms. This job finalizes all major renovation projects for the shelter facility begun five years ago. All of us who work in the shelter are proud of what we have accomplished.

I left my abuser 12 times. Twelve times I left my home beaten and battered. Twelve times I needed to be sheltered at The Greenhouse. Even when the physical abuse caused me to have a stroke, I went back to him. I'm sure the staff at Women's Services wondered if I would ever be strong enough to leave him. Eventually I was.

When I married my husband, I was young and trying to escape a bad situation at home. Even though he was considerably older than me, I had no idea he was abusive. It never occurred to me that the man who offered me a new life would also try and take my life. However, looking back, the signs were all there. He isolated me from family and friends and moved us out into the country away from neighbors. He wouldn't let me drive or have a car. He would not let me work or join clubs and organizations. He told me I was worthless and that nobody would help me or be my friend. After my 12th trip to The Greenhouse, something finally clicked and I decided I would never again subject myself to his abuse. I thank God every day that Women's Services never gave up on me. The staff helped me with job applications, finding an apartment and taught me how to use public transportation. With their guidance and steadfast support I now have a home and a job for the first time. Through donations from people in the community, I was able to furnish my new apartment with basic necessities like pots and pans, cleaning supplies and even a TV! Next year, I would like to take the Volunteer training at Women's Services so I can begin to help others as I have been helped all these years.



STATS

Total Number of Guests

Sheltered in The Greenhouse

	2013	2014
Total Domestic Violence Adults	82	86
Total Domestic Violence Children	<u>80</u>	<u>65</u>
	162	151
Total Other Crisis Adults	24	54
Total Other Crisis Children	<u>12</u>	<u>40</u>
	36	94

Total Number of Days

Guests Spent in The Greenhouse

	2013	2014
Total D. V. Adult Days	2,522	1,711
Total D. V. Children Days	<u>2,126</u>	<u>960</u>
	4,648	2,671
Total O. C. Adult Days	731	1,524
Total O. C. Children Days	<u>788</u>	<u>423</u>
	1,519	1,947

Family Advocacy by Rose Hilliard

One of the more interesting facets of my year in 2013 was the assignment to complete the *Strengths Finder 2.0* Survey to determine my top 5 strengths. I was very excited to learn that my top strength is “input.” What does that mean exactly? Well, it means that I am inquisitive, that I like to collect information, and that I find many different things interesting. By using this strength, I collect information that is useful for our shelter guests. For example, I help service recipients find homes, doctors, social services, employment, welfare benefits, social security information, etc. It means I can listen to someone’s idea and dissect it. I can see the good, the bad and the reasoning behind each idea and perspective. It means that my mind is always open and absorbent and that I love to answer questions. Having a better understanding of my strengths has helped me focus on what I do best and to use that to help our service recipients.

One of my biggest accomplishments last year was helping our community obtain an Emergency Solutions Grant (EMS). This means that a Housing Advocate from CHAPS (Crawford County Mental Health Awareness Program) can be stationed at our facility to meet regularly with our service recipients. The Housing Advocate assigned to this position is Kim Phillips. She is particularly wonderful with our guests; she gently guides them into utilizing the services in our community while finding them a home. Before we obtained the grant, getting our shelter guests connected with a Housing Advocate was problematic. Phone calls were missed, transportation was a barrier, and finding suitable child care could be daunting. With this grant funding, Kim is now able to be at The Greenhouse twice a week, making meetings with shelter guests so much easier and more efficient.

*Honoring survivors
of domestic & sexual
violence.*



One of my favorite things about this job is speaking in public about domestic violence/sexual violence and homelessness. Every year I put together the Candlelight Vigil at Ford Chapel on the campus of Allegheny College. Last year the chapel was almost full but what really was surprising was how many men were there. I chatted with one of the fraternities afterwards and they said that they came to show their support for Women’s Services and for survivors of these crimes. It made me feel proud for Allegheny College and to be a part of this organization. Another speaking engagement that I enjoyed last year was serving on a panel discussion hosted by CHAPS entitled, “Shape of Homelessness.” One of the questions we addressed was, “how does homelessness look different here in Meadville than in other cities?” Most of the panel talked about how we may not see people sleeping in doorways or on the sidewalks but there are many homeless people in Crawford County, along French Creek in tents, staying with family or friends, even in their cars. This panel was a great experience for me and I believe it helped others learn a great deal about homelessness. Once again, my input strength was utilized in a way that I both enjoyed and contributed positively to the community.

Legal Advocacy Highlights by Dee Munhall

Last year was a busy year for Donnarae Morrison and myself. We feel honored to do this work on behalf of survivors of domestic and sexual violence and work very hard to ensure that the system responds in the most survivor-centered manner possible. As a way of describing our work this past year, I have included some highlights below:

- Women's Services' safety plan was adopted by Crawford County Judges and mandated for survivors of domestic or sexual violence when a PFA (Protection From Abuse) is vacated or modified.
- The Legal Advocacy team developed an information brochure describing our support group at the Crawford County Jail. This information was well received by the inmates.
- The Legal Advocacy team sponsored a law enforcement training on stalking. At this training we presented our inaugural "Above & Beyond Award" for law enforcement officers who respectfully helped survivors of violence.
- The Legal Advocacy team and the Board of Directors for Women's Services nominated and awarded Judge Anthony Vardaro for the Sheridan Humanitarian Award for his extension of fairness and impartiality to all who enter his courtroom.
- The Legal Advocacy team worked with local officials to bring a Batterer's Intervention Program to our area.
- The Legal Advocacy team participated in two immigration webinars and helped one immigrant successfully navigate the immigrations website so she could complete a DV Self-Petition for Citizenship.
- The Legal Advocacy team has seen several more elder abuse cases in 2013-14 and were able to successfully advocate for them throughout the civil and criminal justice system processes.
- The Legal Advocacy team attended several workshops throughout 2013-14 to keep their skills current.
- The Legal Advocacy team hosted several guest speakers for WSI staff, including John Shuttleworth, Crawford County Court Administrator to talk about the PFA process and procedure, Greg Keenan, Crawford County Juvenile Court Master to talk about the Juvenile Court process and procedure, and Kevin Burke, Attorney from Northwest Legal Services to talk about PFA's and custody cases.
- The Legal Advocacy Team attended "The Use of Technology in Intimate Partner Stalking Conference" in Pittsburgh, PA. The team learned about a "Danger Assessment Form". This form was presented to Judge Vardaro for his review. He liked the idea of using this form and has now incorporated it in the PFA process.
- Currently the Legal Advocacy team is moving forward to implement the Lethality Assessment Program in Crawford County. The Lethality Assessment Program will enable law enforcement officers to identify survivors at high risk of homicide and connect those survivors with the appropriate services. The Meadville Police Department has agreed to be the first local department to implement this protocol.
- In December, the Legal Advocacy team continued its holiday tradition of baking cookies (with the assistance of Board Vice President, Marcia Yohe) and distributing them to police stations throughout Crawford County.

In closing, I would like to mention that I was able to attend a national conference on human trafficking in New Orleans. This opportunity was made possible through a scholarship obtained from the National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project. I gained a lot of useful information that will be beneficial as we investigate and respond to the growing problem of human trafficking.

Special Projects and Education Report By Vicki Wood

As Director of Special Projects, I have my fingers in just about everything: training, teaching, scheduling, planning, organizing, and special initiatives; some old-some new. Much was accomplished in 2013/2014 and there is much to do in 2014/15. The fall seems to be the busiest time for me as everyone wants to start “something” as the season changes from summer to fall, warm to cold, kids home to kids back to school. For one, we continue to offer a very professional, in-depth 60-hour Counselor/Advocate training which begins in mid-September and continues through mid-November. An independent-study option, aka “The Binders”, is also available. The fall class of 2013 had 16 students, 14 of which completed their training and received their certificate. I assisted four “binder students” in completing their training and five classroom students in completing their class make-up assignments in order to receive their certification. These new volunteer Counselor/Advocates have varied interests including: serving on the LGBTQ Committee, survivor speak-out, bystander training facilitator, Texting Committee, serving on the Board of Directors, hotline, on call, childcare, public awareness fairs, and volunteer coordination.

WSI’s education staff: Connie Graham, Matt Capron, and myself received a ‘Train the Trainers’ training on mandated reporting prior to the fall of 2014 in preparation of providing those trainings in our community. New laws have increased training requirements for some mandated reporters; including persons who work in educational settings. The training curriculum was developed by PCAR, approved by the PA Department of Education and meets the requirements for Act 126. As noted in the *Mandated Reporting Suspected Child Abuse: Knowing Your Role in the Protection of Children*, “Mandated reporters are professionals who, due to their contact or work with children, have special responsibilities to protect children and are required by the Child Protective Services Law to report suspect child abuse. You are of critical importance in the child abuse protective effort.” Each of those persons is now required to have three hours of mandated reporter training every five years. We presented trainings for all three of our school districts this current school year. School administrators and teachers seemed very appreciative of our assistance in fulfilling this requirement. In addition we held mandated reporting training at WSI for anyone who had missed the trainings offered in their districts or who were not affiliated with the three school districts but were still required to have the training. These trainings have generated some additional revenue for WSI.

With reallocated funds from PCAR, WSI’s Prevention team was able to purchase a number of new educational resources including books, curricula, training DVDs, logoed pens, pencils, and NO MORE pins as well as a beautiful table cloth with our logo on it for community events. Education Specialist, Connie Graham was especially excited about a new resource entitled, “Mike’s Crush”. She is using this resource in the autism classrooms and in middle school life skills classes. Teachers really like it, students seem to relate well to it, it’s easy to use and to adapt when necessary, and it’s up-to-date. It addresses many of the problems that people with autism or other developmental delays face when trying to forge new relationships – especially romantic relationships. “I’m excited to have this resource; it’s very difficult to find resources that are both appropriate and modern” said Connie. For one week in October it felt like Christmas with new deliveries of our orders coming in each day!

WSI was granted rape prevention funds to engage the Allegheny College campus and Crawford County LGBTQ communities in the primary prevention of sexual assault. Community leaders were identified and asked to join a WSI-initiated LGBTQ Task Force that would address the needs of the LGBTQ members of our community. Task Force members include five WSI staff, two pastors from the Meadville community, an Allegheny staff member, a parent

Continued on page 10...

During a third grade ‘quiet time’; the opportunity to talk privately about worries or questions with an Education Specialist, a young girl came to talk to me. She talked for a very long time. It was excruciating for me to hear this child describe the sexual assaults that were regularly being committed on her by a member of her extended family. Along with the abuse and manipulation, she was also threatened with several ‘punishments’ if she told anyone. Despite the threats, she had told a parent. She wasn’t sure if the parent believed her, but the parent did not protect her. With those threats in mind, she also chose to tell me. I returned to WSI and made the mandated report. That’s where I thought my involvement ended, although I thought of her often in the coming months. The next year, when we were at the same school providing the P.E. program, I walked by as my co-worker was in the hallway, having ‘quiet time’ with that same child. I talked with my co-worker afterwards. She had told him the same things that she had told me the previous year, and she was still spending time with the alleged offender. I was LIVID. Very upset that no one was protecting her. After my co-worker made his mandated report, he also called our local Children and Youth Services as a courtesy. He and I then talked again. He told me that when he had called CYS, the caseworker told him that they had recently closed that child’s case, but that a safety plan was in place. The safety plan included the stipulation that the child was to have no contact with the family member who had abused her. Because that very brave child had our educational services and chose to talk to us, the C.Y.S. caseworker had valuable information regarding her safety. The caseworker told us that they would not discontinue their contact with the child, and may look into punitive measures against the parents for not following the safety plan and not protecting her.



The Education Team presented 946 programs to 7,194 individuals (unduplicated).

Preschool:	90 presentations	342 pre-school students
Elementary K, 3, 5 & 6:	280 presentations	2,639 elementary students
Middle School:	215 presentations	943 middle school students
High School:	181 presentations	726 high school students
Special Needs	100 presentations	153 students
Post-High School:	39 presentations	637 college students
Community Education:	41 presentations	1,754 community adults

Our PE team conducted 30 Mandated Child Abuse trainings to 1,454 adults (mostly teachers and school administrators). Only those agencies affiliated with Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape or the Family Support Alliance are authorized to conduct these trainings.

Also, the “team” spoke with 404 students after classroom presentations that had a variety of concerns ranging from minor bullying issues to child victimization. A total of 10 mandated reports to Child Line were made (7 sexual assault

...continued from page 10

representative, two social services representatives, one business owner, two WSI volunteers, and someone representing the local high school. Ted Hoover from PERSAD and Liz de Jesus, President of PFLAG (PARENTS, FRIENDS & FAMILIES OF LESBIANS AND GAYS) and PA Regional Director of National PFLAG joined us for our second meeting in order to provide us with background information and a direction by which to operate. The Task Force's priorities were established: support, establishment of welcoming communities, youth, and education. Task Force member and WSI volunteer, Ana Silva began working on a LGBTQ community curriculum that will be offered to local businesses, church groups, and other interested parties next year.

Internally, WSI staff received five hours of mandatory training to increase their LGBTQ cultural awareness and highlight the specific issues members of the LGBTQ community face in regards to domestic and sexual violence. WSI service recipient forms were modified to be inclusive of all genders/relationships and we added an LGBTQ section to our website resources page that provides links to sites with resources LGBTQ individuals affected by intimate partner violence. They also provide information about empowering LGBTQ individuals to advocate and educate to end all violence. Additionally, revisions were made to our Date Abuse Teen Education ("DATE") high school and middle school curricula to be inclusive and affirming of LGBTQ school community members.

Although not directly tied into this initiative, Bruce and I conducted a Primary Prevention Community Readiness Survey with selected community members including Lynn McUmbler (CHAPS), Sarah Roncolato (Stone UMC), John Higgins (MASH), Denise Johnson (MMC), Mayor Christopher Soff, Dan Crandall (Fine Print), Judge Anthony Vardaro, Francis Schultz (District Attorney), and Pat Bywater (Meadville Tribune). Our conclusion was that the Meadville area is indeed "ready". That is, ready for more bystander training in the community and in our schools, ready for safe zones, and ready to share the responsibility for making this community safe from domestic and sexual violence.

The idea of adding a WSI Text helpline was initiated last fall and has taken most of the year to plan its inception and launch, which is scheduled for October 2014. The Text Helpline will be offered to teens first, with hopes of eventually making it available to the general public. Julie Hunter has been instrumental in organizing staff in becoming familiar with the software and I have been screening staff and volunteers who might be interested in becoming a responder. This is an exciting endeavor.

I worked closely with Allegheny Student and WSI Counselor/Advocate, Nicole Masters, in developing an updated five-day curriculum for 7th and 8th grade middle school students. The new curriculum includes information on bystander intervention and provides students the opportunity to practice intervention through role-playing. We were able to form a focus group of 8th graders from Conneaut Lake Middle School who provided us valuable feedback regarding the details of the curriculum. We then piloted the new curriculum at Meadville Middle School. The "bugs" were worked out over the summer and we look forward to presenting this in the fall.

Lastly, I prepared a thorough training and resource file for staff who are required to keep track of "General Efforts" for our funders, PCAR and PCADV. General efforts include services such as community education, training, media outreach, volunteer time, and system advocacy. Although our funding does not rely on this information, it does give funders a more comprehensive idea of the people we serve and services we provide. We were in need of an updated, professional on-call guide and now we have that, too. New on-call packets were developed and distributed to everyone who performs on-call duties.

Training the Trainers

For more than 25 years, Women's Services (WSI) has provided our local Head Start preschool programs with either the *Child Abuse Prevention Program* or the WSI-created *Three Kinds of Touches Program*. Every March and April, Education Specialist, Connie Graham, provides prevention programming to approximately 100 classrooms for 360 four and five year olds. Falling in line with primary prevention efforts, WSI introduced the idea of Train the Trainer to Twin Creeks Head Start Program. With Twin Creeks Head Start providing this necessary service, WSI Education Specialists are freed up to pursue new avenues of prevention in the community. Head Start Family Coordinators were very receptive. Connie provided a two-hour training which included information about sexual and domestic violence, handling disclosures, and basic presentation tips for young audiences prior to the classroom presentations. Training also included classroom observation. Connie was videotaped during her presentations as a tool for future training. Twin Creeks has always been so impressed with Connie's delivery and style that they wanted to capture it on film! She trained about 13 Family Coordinators servicing the Meadville area, Cochranon, Conneaut, Maplewood, Cambridge Springs, Saegertown, Gill Village, Forest Green and also those Head Start Centers in Titusville and Venango County. Connie will continue to offer training and act as a consultant during the transition and thereafter.



During a mandated reporter training, a teacher came up to talk with Connie during the break. She was sobbing. She said that she was not crying because she had been abused, but because in the 20+ years that she has taught school, she couldn't help but wonder how many child victims she did not help because she didn't know how to. Needless to say, she was very thankful for the presentation.

Dear Miss Connie and DNA-MATT
THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING. THANKS
FOR TEACHING ME ABOUT "IF SOMEONE
DOES SOMETHING TO ME IT'S NOT MY
FAULT. IT WAS A NICE TIME.
FROM: CJ



I make it a point to visit and talk with the shelter guests staying with us and have gotten in the habit of asking the children arriving back home from school what they've learned that day. One young boy looked at me when I posed this question and proudly announced he had learned to spell the word dog. I asked him to spell it for me. Puffing up his chest and squinting in concentration he replied D-O-G! Duly impressed I asked him if he knew what dog spelled backwards was. He thought for a moment and then as if a light bulb went off in his head he said "Yes, it spells puppy!"

Bruce Harlan, Executive Director

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Education Specialist III
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Legal Advocate II
Counselor/Advocate
Shelter Services Supervisor
Family Advocate
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Night Manager II
Support Staff
Support Staff
Support Staff
Support Staff
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Women's Services



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Unlike my boss, I'm an introvert who tends to avoid engaging anyone, let alone strangers, in conversation unless required. Recently, however, I moved outside my comfort zone and it had the most surprising outcome. "Joe" came to Women's Services with his neighbor "Mary", a former shelter guest, to help her move a donated TV and console into her new apartment. The older tube TV was wedged into the console requiring that the two be lifted as one. As Joe struggled to get it from our conference room to their van, I realized they were going to need some help. After we managed to get it into their van, he looked at me and said "Do you want to ride along to Mary's apartment with us?" Which I astutely recognized as code for can you help us? As we travelled the few blocks to Mary's place, I realized we were in my neighborhood and I told them where I lived. Joe said he lived on the same street and we must be neighbors. Once at Mary's, Joe and I managed to get it up the stairs. As Joe gave me a ride back to Women's Services, we got to talking and I actually enjoyed it. We talked about racism, civil rights, and humans in general. He talked about growing up as an African-American boy and how he had been inspired by Robert Kennedy and his quote: "There are those who look at things the way they are and ask why. I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?" We talked about our mutual dream of an end to violence and I shared the quote I keep above my desk. "Every problem is an opportunity in disguise". He smiled broadly nodding his head and said to me "Moving that big ole TV to Mary's place started out as a problem, but it turned into an opportunity to meet a really good human who's doing really good stuff for other humans. You are the most awesome lady ever." And with that, he shook my hand and reminded me about the annual neighborhood party he threw. Maybe this striking up conversations with complete strangers isn't so bad after all I thought as I walked back to my office.

Julie Hunter, Marketing & Media Supervisor