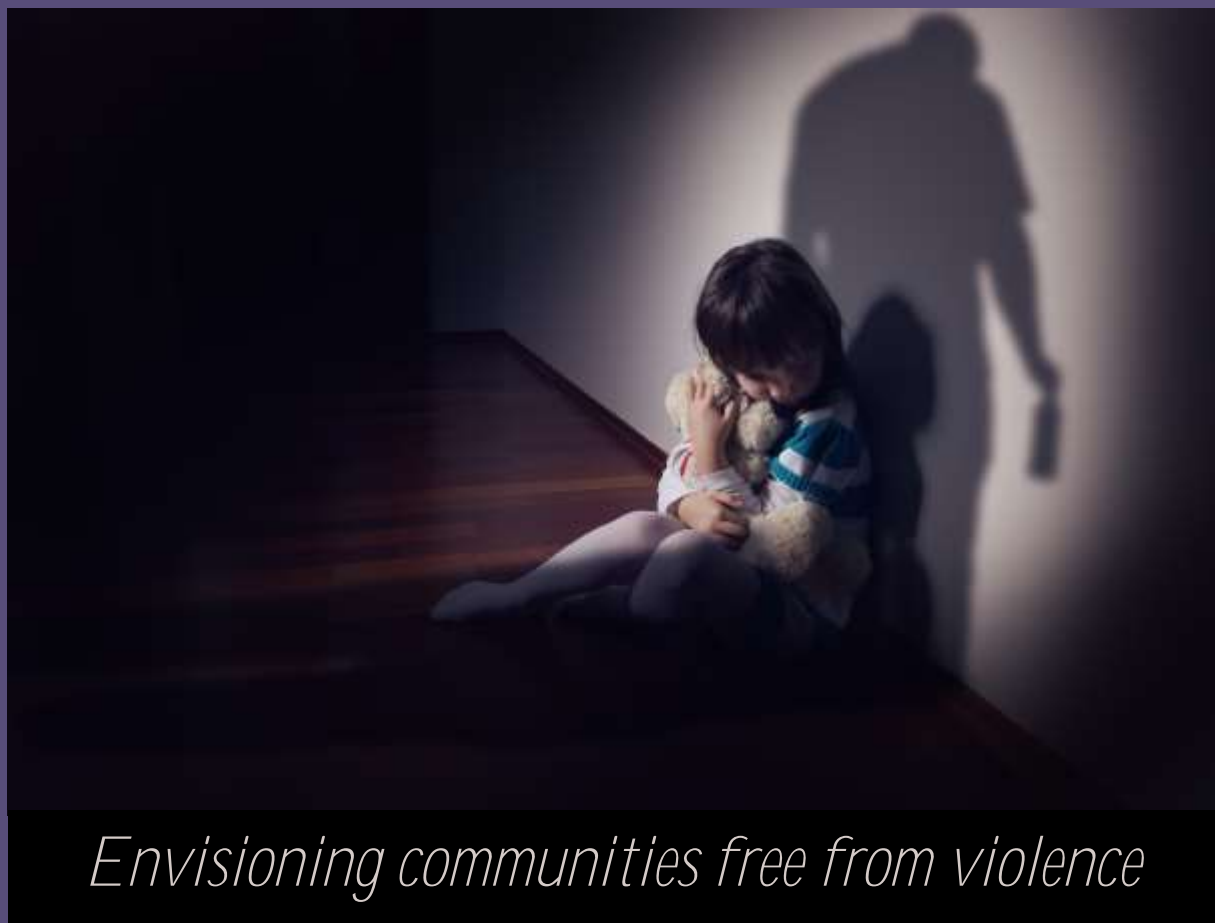


Women's Services, Inc.

Annual Report FY 2014-2015



Envisioning communities free from violence



Engaging our community



Bruce E. Harlan

Executive Director

“Women’s Services is uniquely qualified to engage, lead and inspire. Providing hope and resources is our moral imperative.”



...one person at a time.

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At Women's Services, we have made community engagement a priority. Although it sounds relatively easy, engagement doesn't happen automatically. It takes time and work, and much of the right formula is deduced through trial and error.

One of the principles we have learned along the way is that we have to lead. Stuff doesn't get done on its own. If we truly envision communities without violence, then we have to lead the way for others. Leadership means we have to be inclusive and make it easy for community members to participate. It means we have to be willing to listen to diverse opinions and accept alternative ways of achieving our collective goals. We have to be willing to engage with popular existing groups while embracing newbies to the process. And, of course, we cannot forget to thank contributors.

Another important principle is the role "hope" plays in reducing violence and fostering resilience. At Women's Services, we believe in the power of hope. In fact, it's one of our core values. You could say we are "hope" merchants. We inspire hope among our clients and stakeholders. It's our bread and butter. To be clear, hope is defined in the dictionary as "an optimistic attitude of mind based on an expectation of positive outcomes related to circumstances in one's life or the world at large. Among its opposites are dejection, hopelessness, and despair. As you can well imagine, we see a lot of that in our line of work. The poet Emily Dickinson described hope as "the thing with feathers that perches in the soul and sings the tune without the words and never stops at all." I like that description.

Throughout this annual report, the reader will be immersed in the accomplishments of staff and clients who powered through difficulties and challenges with nothing more than hope in their back pockets. Make no mistake, however, our belief in hope is not an exercise in Pollyannish behavior. We are not advocates of "wishful thinking" that denies actual circumstances or harsh realities. Quite the contrary, our reliance on hope is well documented and founded on solid research. Positive psychologist, Charles Richard Snyder (1944-2006), spent a lifetime developing a body of scholarly work on hope and forgiveness and the impact that hope can have on aspects of life such as health, work, education, and personal meaning. Mr. Snyder postulated that individual's who develop a belief in their ability are hopeful people who can establish clear goals, imagine multiple workable pathways toward those goals, and persevere, even when obstacles get in their way.

From this perspective, it's clear that Women's Services is uniquely qualified to engage, lead and inspire. We have the "right stuff" to assist people in their healing and recovery. We are qualified to engage local constituencies, lead our peers, and inspire a hopeful vision for violence-free communities. Providing hope and resources is our moral imperative!

Empowering others



Knowledge
Empowers
You

Jane Buchanan
Shelter Services Supervisor

“My goal for everyone who passes through our doors is to find peace and safety and to leave feeling empowered to tackle the issues that led to their homelessness.”



...one person at a time.

Our shelter, commonly referred to as The Greenhouse, provides a safe and supportive environment for women and children who are temporarily made homeless due to domestic violence or other crisis. It has been my honor and privilege to work in The Greenhouse for many years. My goal for everyone who passes through our doors is to find peace and safety and to leave feeling empowered to tackle the issues that led to their homelessness. It is my firm belief that knowledge is the key to their success.

How can we maximize success? For starters, every woman entering The Greenhouse develops a plan with one of our counselor/advocates to determine how they will acquire the knowledge they need to move forward. Each guest must outline the steps that must be taken to reach her goals, such as: finding permanent housing, exploring employment opportunities, and accessing available legal protections. In addition, each shelter guest is invited to participate in any number of groups and activities that teach useful skills, such as: parenting, budgeting, and problem-solving. With counseling and emotional support, every woman is given an opportunity to become successful and achieve her goals.

Last year, The Greenhouse provided shelter for 142 women and children fleeing domestic violence. Without this vital resource, these 79 adults and 63 children would have been limited in their options to remove themselves from abusive situations. I have no doubts that some of them would have been seriously injured or killed if not for The Greenhouse. Another 53 women and 33 children were homeless for other reasons. Many of these adult women were displaced due to unemployment, poor credit histories, medical and mental health issues and criminal histories. The lack of safe and affordable housing in our community contributes to this problem, as well. To the extent possible, Women's Services connects these women with the appropriate community resources and helps them overcome barriers to permanent housing.

Since the Great Recession of 2008-09, we continue to see a strong demand for our shelter services. We are full or nearly full everyday. The average stay continues to increase, too. Last year, women and children stayed for an average of 25 days. In 2014, the average stay was 19 days. Therefore, it is not surprising that we saw a 20% increase in the number of shelter days (5,714) provided last year over the previous year. Despite the difficulties, Women's Services helped 31% of our adult shelter guests obtain permanent housing. With the addition of mobile advocacy, nearly all of them maintained their housing during the ensuing months. It is our belief that they have a greater chance of maintaining self-sufficiency if they continue to receive support in the weeks and months after they leave shelter. In this manner, we can continue to impart timely knowledge and assist them with overcoming new obstacles as they arise.

Not surprisingly, 42% of our shelter guests returned to their abuser or moved in with a family member or a friend. It is not uncommon for women experiencing domestic violence to return to their abuser. We know that leaving a violent relationship is often a process that requires many attempts. Women's Services never looks upon these situations as a failure. In fact, we know that each time she makes another attempt to leave she is one step closer to leaving permanently. Some of the reasons other guests could not obtain housing on their own has to do with very difficult barriers. Many of them have no income whatsoever. Some have serious substance abuse issues, criminal histories, and lack transportation or other employability skills. For those who want to work, many only qualify for low wage jobs. This means they must work two or three jobs if they are to make ends meet. If they have children and lack childcare resources, then working these additional jobs becomes impossible. Facing such insurmountable barriers, many women choose to move in and double up with friends and family members.

Of the remaining women who exited our shelter last year, 16% left without any forwarding information and 11% entered some form of transitional programming. This option afforded them more time to find a job and obtain permanent housing. Some were admitted into in-patient mental health rehabilitation and/or a drug and alcohol program. In the past year we have seen an increase of shelter guests with serious mental health and/or drug and alcohol challenges. In order to work more effectively with these challenges, I scheduled mini in-service trainings for my staff. For example, we heard from many of our community partners who specialize in these areas, such as behavioral health professionals and counselors with the Crawford County Drug and Alcohol Executive Commission. On one occasion, we invited representatives of Crawford County Human Services to our staff meeting to discuss some of the difficulties our guests experience adapting to a shelter environment. In the course of the conversation, it was mentioned that maybe we need two facilities: one for victims fleeing domestic violence and one for women and children who are homeless for other reasons. In this manner, many more community resources could be brought into our facility to assist women and children who are facing some of these challenges.



As a way of making our programs and services more trauma-focused, we participated in a project with one of our community partners, Parkside Psychological Associates, who obtained a grant through the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency to make our community more trauma-informed. In addition to myself and our executive

director, clients, staff and volunteers were given a survey tool to ascertain our level of trauma sensitivity. Some of the results indicated that our guests would like to have a greater stake in decision-making around programmatic improvements. Previously, we would ask for their input upon exiting the shelter. Now, we ask them to evaluate our services periodically throughout their stay. Receiving this vital feedback not only helps us to see what we could do differently moving forward, but it also has an empowering effect on our shelter guests. After we receive the feedback, we have discussions at our staff meetings and shelter house meetings to examine how changes might be implemented.

One of the ways survivors of domestic violence can become empowered is through peer support offered weekly through group activities. This past year, we added a new wrinkle to our support groups; arts and crafts. With the assistance of some very talented Allegheny College students, group members have been busy making craft items and selling them at community events. With the revenues generated by sales, more supplies can be purchased and other group activities can be planned. Last year, the domestic violence survivor group took a field trip to Niagara Falls for the annual lighting of the Falls for Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Everyone who attended the event found this to be a rewarding and empowering experience.

In closing, I would like to report on an empowering personal moment. Not too long ago, a person from another community agency brought a monetary donation to our agency. I happened to be working when he arrived at our door. We got to chatting and he told me how he and his mother once stayed at our facility. He went on to say that he has fond memories of those times at our shelter. He remembered playing in our back yard and racing up and down the long hallways. He particularly remembered feeling safe here. He strongly believes we gave his family a chance at a new life. The Greenhouse holds a warm place in his heart, and he said he will continue to make donations to us.

Having this firsthand experience of knowing how we helped this young man and his mother has been KEY to my empowerment. Moments like this inspire me to keep working, especially though the tough times.



My name is Sonya and I am broke and homeless. I have always known about The Greenhouse but I never thought that I would end up a resident there. The first time I came to the shelter was in late September. At the time, I did not realize what a blessing it was to be there. The shelter doesn't ask for anything except that you follow the rules and try to do a chore once a day. I didn't do that. The shelter is there to keep you safe, provide food, and offer you a warm bed to sleep at night. However, I never participated in any of the programming or counseling offered by

staff. Also, I wasn't minding my own business and I breached another woman's confidentiality. So, after thirty days and on my 46th birthday, I was asked to leave the shelter. Once again I found myself broke and living out of a cardboard box.

After about a week, I ran into my ex-boyfriend and talked him into letting me stay at his place for about a month. As it turned out, that was not a good idea and once again I turned to The Greenhouse for help. This time around, I took advantage of the counseling and discussed things I never shared with anyone before. When I got those horrible secrets out in the open and dealt with them in a healthy, safe environment, I felt a change come over me. I can't explain it. Over time, I think I became the person I was meant to be. I started walking around with my head up and learned to take direction from others. The Greenhouse has taught me a new way to live. Even though I came here a broken down and scared little girl, I will be leaving a strong and independent woman.



One night of violence displaced three generations when a grandmother, daughter, and three children sought the safety of our shelter. Thankfully, we were able to provide what they needed, including clothing, diapers, food, and support. We also needed to assist the grandmother in taking care of her health concerns, some of which were a result of the recent abuse. Through the Victim Compensation Assistance Program, we were able to get her financial reimbursement for her medical expenses. The little girls adopted our executive director as their "goof ball". I think it is safe in saying he was one of the first good male role models they experienced in their young lives. The grandmother was one of the first clients we helped here many years ago. For some families, the cycle of violence seems never-ending.

Educating each generation



Vicki Wood

Director of Special Projects

One of WSI's goals for its five-year strategic plan states that WSI will develop a stronger, well-coordinated volunteer component. Although this goal has always been in the forefront of the agency's thinking, stronger efforts and initiatives are taking place. We held both a fall and spring counselor/advocate training class this year. A total of 19 volunteers and 2 new employees completed the 60 hours of training. Training classes are typically composed of 50% students from Allegheny or surrounding colleges and 50% community members. Two members from the spring training class jumped right into volunteering in the shelter as support staff. Last fall, the Prevention Education team was in need of elementary school Child Abuse Prevention Program (CAPP) facilitators. It has always been difficult finding trained volunteers willing to take on the task of facilitating our classroom presentations. Hence, we formed the retired teacher facilitators' group. This group consists of three retired teachers who are trained to facilitate either our kindergarten, 3rd or 5th grade presentations. Our current retired teacher facilitators are Annette Boswell, who taught 3rd grade at First District, Chris Payne, a retiree from

"We conducted 705 educational programs and reached an audience of 10,845 students and adults. Also, we distributed over 7,000 informational materials."



... one person at a time.

Conneaut Valley's 5th grade classroom, and Sandy Holland, a math specialist with teaching experience in a number of elementary schools. They have proven to be an asset to our team and are interested in continuing their service.

Although the majority of school district trainings on the topic of mandated reporting took place last year, Women's Services continues to offer trainings and provided 6 trainings to a total audience of 314 teachers, para-professionals, and staff this past year. The child abuse reporting laws were amended by the General Assembly and went into effect on January 1, 2015. Education specialists, Connie Graham, Matt Capron, and I participated in a webinar which provided the updated version of the official train-the-trainers course. This was an opportune time to train our staff and direct-service volunteers; making the training a required training every three years. A new online training course developed by The University of Pittsburgh, "Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse: Mandated and Permissive Reporting in Pennsylvania" became available at this time. The online training has some real benefits: it is free; it refers to the law directly in that you can view the wording of the law and how that transfers to specifics; and you can go back and review parts of the training at any time. Connie Graham continues to be our key contact person who fields questions from community professionals and maintains a close connection with PCAR's education staff.

With trauma-informed care as our focus, WSI welcomed Kerry Bakkin, a workshop facilitator and writer, who proved to be very gifted in bringing healing to others through expressive autobiographical writing. Kerry says, "Writing allows us to create order out of the often chaotic experience of memory. In developing a narrative, we can create meaning and ownership over our stories. When we rewrite our stories, we can move from disempowered victim to empowered hero." Kerry facilitated both a fall

and spring writers' workshop which were open to WSI clients, former clients and community members.

In October 2014, we officially launched our text helpline with eager staff and volunteers ready to respond. Counselor/advocate responders were equipped with a guide that Spencer Vincente, a student intern from Allegheny College, and I developed together. The guide includes a variety of issues that individuals may be facing, and a list of web and phone resources that can be shared with the users. We were expecting a huge influx of texts so we began our media outreach solely with teens. When, to our surprise, we did not receive the numbers of texts as expected, we expanded our outreach to include the general public and made the text service available 24/7. The staff and volunteers who cover the telephone hotline are now covering any incoming texts as well and doing a wonderful job.

Rape and prevention funds continue to financially support Women's Services in its efforts to engage the LGBTQ community of Crawford County in the primary prevention of sexual violence. The newly formed LGBTQ Committee members, including WSI representatives, made great strides this year. A PFLAG (Parents, Friends, Lesbians, and Gays) group was organized and continues to meet monthly. With the committee's assistance, LGBTQ posters and brochures were created to disseminate within the community. The brochure is used as a tool for "talking points" when approaching local businesses while encouraging intentional dialogue about gender and sexuality between community members regardless of how each person individually self-identifies. Bruce Harlan, and WSI volunteer, Ana Silva, continue to meet with business owners to share our brochure and engage in a dialogue. Business members are now requesting our newly designed "window cling" which promotes equality and serving the "whole community".

Providing support



Corrine Livingston

Counselor/Advocate Specialist

“I have learned that when kids are able to meet me first in class, they are much more comfortable reaching out for counseling and support”



...one person at a time.

A year ago, I knew nothing about Women's Services. Back then, I had just obtained my Master's Degree in Counseling and I was working for another agency. Fortunately enough, if you asked me this year, I could tell you a lot more. You see, I am very grateful to be working at Women's Services and for this opportunity to help others who have been affected by violence. But then again, I feel as though we are all affected by violence and abuse in one way or another.

Some of the things that I have been involved in over the course of the past ten months have been varied and challenging. For example, as I get up to speed with counseling duties, I have been mentored by senior counselor, Deb Olivieri, and have learned a great deal about the empowerment model we use for counseling clients. Last spring, I accompanied the Prevention Education team to local schools and learned how to present numerous curriculums to many different age groups. That work continues and recently I started counseling two new clients who met me in class and afterwards, reached out to their guidance counselor because they wanted to talk to me further. I have learned that when kids are able to meet me first in class, they are much more comfortable reaching out for counseling and support. Also, I have spent time with our Legal Advocates, Donnarae Morrison and Dee Munhall, and learned how to file Protection from Abuse orders and how to effectively advocate for our client's needs. Over the summer, I accompanied our Medical Advocate, Rose Hilliard, in rural outreach and met with members of our medical community throughout the county. I have been active on the campus of Allegheny College, too, working closely with the Title IX office. In addition to giving various presentations, I am providing on-campus office hours for students who wish to talk about interpersonal relationship concerns and/or sexual assault issues. As you can see, it has been a busy ten months and I have learned a great deal about providing emotional support to victims of violence.

Learning how to empower others has taught me how to care for myself, too. All of my colleagues have reminded me to maintain a healthy work-life balance and have gone above and beyond to teach me as well as support me when I may be having a rough day. Matt Capron once told me you have to hang onto the good memories and rewarding experiences when difficult and negative situations occur. That has been good advice although the good times have certainly outweighed the bad so far. For example, just the other day, I had a second grade student say to me "I'm really glad that you come to talk to me because we talk about all of the things I worry about." My response to her was "Well, I'm glad this is working for you." Happily, this was only after the third time that I had met with her. On another occasion, a third grade student asked me if I went to church. Before I could answer, she chimed in and said, "The first day I went to church and found the Lord, I was hooked!" It's the little stories like these that make my day because I'm able to chuckle at myself all day long. If you ask me, I'm sure I could recall more stories to share with you that would make you chuckle, too.

Although I am at the beginning of my social services career, I am very happy to be a part of the Women's Services family.



Promoting advocacy

Providing support means **ADVOCACY**. Specifically, legal advocacy. With federal funds through the STOP Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), our County is able to support an Assistant District Attorney, a Law Enforcement Coordinator, and two Legal Advocates. In recapping the year, the STOP Team accomplished the following:

1. PFA WALLET CARD: With the help of the Crawford County Pro Se Litigant, Ashley DuBose, and President Judge, Anthony Vardaro, we were able to implement a wallet-size “Final Protection From Abuse” identification card. What this means is that the Plaintiff that is granted a Final PFA does not have to carry around a large 8 x 10, 3 page document anymore. All the information is recorded on a small 3” x 2” card and is now recognized by law enforcement if and when an incident with her or his abuser occurs.

2. DANGER ASSESSMENT FORM: A danger assessment form informs us and the court about the potential lethality of a situation. This tool has become very important in our safety planning with the victim.

3. ELDER ABUSE TASK FORCE: In the past year we have seen an increase in senior citizens seeking relief under the PFA (Protection from Abuse) Act. We made it one of our strategic goals to meet with Active Aging to implement a training program for seniors on PFA's and Safety Planning. We met with the Director of Active Aging in Meadville to outline our plan to present this information to the various Senior Centers. The Director liked our idea and invited us to serve on the Elder Abuse Task Force.

4. INFORMATION FOLDERS: An information brochure describing a support group for survivors of domestic and sexual violence incarcerated at the Crawford County Correctional Facility was developed and distributed. This information is also being used in court at the time of sentencing. A Custody Information Folder is currently being approved by Judge Vardaro to be circulated at the time of a custody hearing. This folder is being developed to provide families with important information to help them navigate the child custody process.



“It’s a privilege and an honor to advocate for survivors of domestic and sexual violence.”

Donnae Morrison

Dee Munhall

Legal Advocates



...one person at a time.

5. CRAWFORD COUNTY STOP ABUSE PROJECT:

The STOP Violence Against Women Grant Program is awarded to enhance the capacity of local communities to develop and strengthen effective law enforcement and prosecution strategies to combat violent crimes against women and to develop and strengthen victim services in those same jurisdictions. The Team Chair, District Attorney Francis Schultz, recently commented that, “The Stop Grant project has fostered a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect amongst the entities that are involved in the fight against domestic violence here in Crawford County. By regularly meeting and discussing issues that are unique and sometimes similar to various stakeholders, we have learned from one another and grown to understand that we must work together in order to serve the victims of domestic violence.”

6. LETHALITY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (LAP):

The LAP Program, created by the Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence in 2005, is a multi-pronged intervention that consists of a standardized, evidence-based lethality assessment instrument and accompanying referral protocol that helps first responders make a differentiated response that is tailored to the unique circumstances of high-danger victims. Here is how it works: The LAP is initiated when a trained officer arrives at the scene of a domestic incident. If there is any doubt about the risk of lethality a victim may be facing, the officer will ask the victim to answer an evidence-based series of eleven questions known as the Lethality Screen for First Responders. If the victim's response to the questions indicates an increased risk for homicide, the officer states he/she is going to place a phone call to the local domestic violence hotline and encourages the victim to speak with specially-trained advocates. It is hoped that by connecting a victim with an advocate, lives will be saved. This program was successfully launched on March 1, 2015.

7. COMFORT DOGS IN THE COURTHOUSE:

Bruce Thaeler, Tipstave for Judge Stevens, and Donnarae Morrison both have an interest in dogs and they thought it would be very beneficial to have Comfort Dogs in the hallways of the Courthouse. Bruce Thaeler met with Judge Vardaro to discuss this proposal and he asked that a committee be formed to begin lengthier discussion about where and how we could best utilize the dogs. The committee met and suggestions were made that we start this program at Custody DeNova hearings, mediation hearings, and juvenile hearings with the dogs sitting in the hallway with the children. We are very excited about this program and think it will help alleviate some of the stress children experience during these difficult periods in their lives.

8. LAW ENFORCEMENT AWARDS:

Several years ago the Legal Advocacy team implemented an award program that would recognize Police Officers for going “above and beyond” when helping a victim of domestic and sexual violence. This award expresses our thanks for the extra help and care these officers convene to victims. It confirms our commitment to them in a joint effort to combat domestic and sexual violence.

IN CLOSING: *This year has been particularly difficult for the Legal Advocacy team. In May, 2015 we were heartbroken when one of our clients, Debra Eschweiler, was brutally murdered by her estranged and abusive boyfriend. Despite all of our efforts, sometimes the unthinkable happens and reminds us why we do this work. That being said, the Legal Advocacy team is doubling down on its commitment to ending domestic and sexual violence and we dedicate all of our accomplishments to the memory of Debra..*

Changing hearts & minds



Be a BUDDY,
Not a BULLY!

Julie Hunter

Marketing & Media Director

“We must take upon ourselves the desire to learn about issues and identities that do not impact us personally and that may even make us uncomfortable.”



...one person at a time.

Every year the Oxford Dictionary crowns a word of the year. Words or expressions worthy of consideration include those that have attracted a great deal of interest during the year and reflect the ethos, mood, or preoccupations of that particular year. It is with those same qualities in mind that I've decided to dub "intersectionality" our word of the year for Women's Services.

Intersectionality is a concept that describes the way social constructs like -isms and phobias are interconnected. Over the past year I have written about classism, sexism, racism, privilege, poverty, LGBTQ issues, food security and other forms of oppression, which has left some wondering what these topics have to do with Women's Services. My answer: EVERYTHING! I think intersectionality is so relevant and timely to our work here at Women's Services especially given our expanded mission statement which includes providing hope and resources to all victims of violence, not just victims of domestic and sexual violence. Also, we have adopted a vision statement wherein we envision communities free of violence. Intersectionality is the framework we must apply to all our work, a frame that recognizes the many facets of identity that enhance our lives and experiences and that compound and complicate oppression and marginalization.

The feminist movement has long been criticized for relating and appealing only to privileged, mostly white, women. This is why intersectionality is such an important component of all social justice issues. As a feminist organization, we need to recognize that the experiences of the LGBTQ and people of color communities do not exactly mirror those faced by white women. Privilege conceals itself from those who have it and without an intersectional lens, we cannot be truly anti-oppressive. Intersectionality necessitates that we deliberately look within ourselves — at the places where we don't understand and where we feel challenged. We must take upon ourselves the desire to learn about issues and identities that do not impact us personally and that may even make us

uncomfortable. The discomfort we may feel with intersectional feminism is meant to inspire change.

At about this time last year, I received a telephone call from one of our stakeholders, Jeff Moody. He had recently attended our ninth annual Moveable Feast fund-raising event and asked me "What do we need to do to make this happen now?" The *this* he was referring to was making an agency vehicle a reality. While we had begun raising funds for an agency vehicle, we didn't envision being able to do so until 2015. However, when Moveable Feast hosts Jeff Lang and Sandy Wycoff challenged guests to make matching donations to their own, things took off from there. Although guests responded generously, we were still short of the amount we would need to make it happen in 2014. This was not an acceptable scenario for Jeff. He wanted it to happen now, if not sooner. Jeff's persistence along with the generosity of several dozen stakeholders, and our collaboration with Palmiero Toyota Scion of Meadville and their families, we were able to take possession of a 2014 Toyota Sienna LE, less than a month after the Moveable Feast event.

I have witnessed this same tenacity for action and results-oriented drive in another one of our stakeholders, Jan Hyatt. Jan was the recipient of the Foster Torchlight Award at our annual meeting last year and true to the award's standard of advocating for social change in the community, Jan invited community stakeholders to join her in envisioning how best to raise consciousness about the role of nutrition literacy and how nutrition impacts student/family performance. The ensuing initiative was dubbed *Food for Thought*. And once our AmeriCorps VISTA Brynya Bowden came on board shortly thereafter with her goal of increasing access to healthy food, improving food security, and ensuring the children and adults in our community have the information and education they need to make healthy food choices, Women's Services active participation in this community collaborative seemed preordained.

Providing hope & resources
one person at a time.



NO MORE | TOGETHER WE CAN END
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE & SEXUAL ASSAULT