Shelter from the Storm
THE CAMPAIGN TO ENSURE ACCESS, SAFETY & HOPE

Women’s Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh
Last year, Women’s Center & Shelter answered 5263 hotline calls, served 3881 legal advocacy clients, sheltered 259 women and 248 children, cared for 292 children in our children’s program, provided crisis intervention to 149 medical advocacy clients, counseled 501 clients in a support group setting, and delivered service to 339 civil law project clients.

Sadly, we also had to turn away 755 women and children.

Far too often, Women’s Center & Shelter had to turn away victims of intimate partner violence and their children because all of our 36 beds were full and someone was already sleeping on the sofa in each of our group rooms.

Over the past six years, WC&S has been forced to turn away thousands of intimate partner victims. We know that 75 percent of domestic violence fatalities occur when the victim attempts to leave the relationship or after the relationship has ended. When no beds are available, we always try to find alternative arrangements. Tragically, that isn’t always possible.

Recently, WC&S partnered with the City of Pittsburgh police to implement the Lethality Assessment Program (LAP). Police called to the site of a domestic disturbance ask the victim a series of questions to assess whether they are in immediate danger. The police officer then calls WC&S on behalf of the victim. While LAP has proven to be a life-saving program, it has increased our need to shelter even more victims.

Turning away victims of intimate partner violence simply isn’t acceptable. And with your support of the Shelter from the Storm capital campaign, we won’t have to.

More than 1 in 3 women in the US have experienced rape, physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner.

Last year, 47,000 individuals in Allegheny County were victimized by their partners.

Every day, three or more women will be killed by their spouse.

Every minute, 24 people experience intimate partner violence.

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On the day that the Pittsburgh SWAT team saved her life and the lives of her children, Deborah endured a nightmare. With her children napping, her ex-husband shot his way into her home. Over the next five hours, Deborah was repeatedly raped before finally hearing the words, “I’m just going to kill her.” It was at that moment that the SWAT team broke down the front door and ran upstairs. Within a split second, it was over. She was alive. He was going to jail.

Through her ex-husband’s bail hearing, trial and eventual retrial over a 10-year period, Deborah had the same WC&S legal advocate by her side. She answered Deborah’s legal questions, comforted her and provided connections to additional resources.

Deborah’s legal advocate has given her insight into what she may need to do in 11 years when her ex-husband is released from prison. “She knows my fears – that I am deathly afraid that he will finish what he started,” says Deborah. “We’ve talked about moving, name change, whatever I need to do. I know that no matter what I need, she’ll find a way.”

Happy and living with her two children, Deborah credits who she is today in part to the help she received at WC&S. “It’s just amazing that a program like this is out there to help people like me,” says Deborah, who now serves on the WC&S Advocate Bureau and is helping others in abusive situations. “I would do anything to help the next person. You just need to know where to begin. Maybe this is my beginning.”

“As I’m handing my son out the window, he had his gun to my daughter’s head – a loaded gun to his three-year-old daughter’s head.”

Deborah, WC&S Client
When Prerna came to America to work on her PhD, the last thing she expected was to become the victim of intimate partner violence at the hands of a fellow PhD candidate and assistant professor with whom she worked. “He came to my apartment at 2:30 in the morning. He put me in his car and took me to his apartment, where he beat me up for four hours. He dragged me down the stairs and threw me outside his house.”

While this kind of behavior had happened before, Prerna had discovered the Women’s Center & Shelter. “This time was different because I was different. I was strong. I could call 911. I could talk to my counselor. I immediately called the Women’s Hotline. They advised me when the next advocate would be in place and told me to go to the Protection From Abuse office immediately.

“The most important thing I learned from the Women’s Center was that I came first. Each time I called the Hotline they asked me, ‘Are you safe? Where are you?’

“Abuse exists in all countries and in all classes of society. It just depends on how you choose to deal with it. I chose to deal with it with a lot of strength. I could do that because of the Women’s Center. They’re like angels who are there by your side in times of difficulty. Life can be beautiful.”

The fact that I had a legal advocate with me every time I went to court was very assuring. My abuser was charged with six misdemeanors so there were a ton of court hearings. But there was not a single day when I was by myself.

Prerna, WC&S Client
When you’re a victim of domestic violence and your abuser is a police officer, where do you turn for help? Amber found help — and hope — at the Women’s Center & Shelter.

“When you have someone who is constantly nitpicking you, someone who uses force, puts his hands on you, you have no sense of hope. You feel defeated. You feel weak. I tried to reach out for help. But because my abuser was a police officer, no one took me seriously.

“There was no one there to tell me that it’s okay to walk away. A lot of times we feel we have to stay there for the sake of the children or financial reasons. But you don’t.

“Somehow I managed to get out of there. My three children and I ended up staying at the shelter. They taught me that I didn’t need to be a victim of domestic abuse. They didn’t judge me. They helped me.

“I went to school. I went to undergrad and then went on to get my graduate degree. I couldn’t have done that if I didn’t have the people at the Women’s Center & Shelter who believed in me and encouraged me.

“They helped me rebuild my life.”

Amber, WC&S Client
It’s hard to fully comprehend the severe trauma that Deborah, Prerna and Amber were forced to endure. It’s frightening to imagine what might have happened to Amber if the shelter had been full the day she called.

Connecting to a domestic violence program is the single most important factor in reducing intimate partner violence fatalities, injury and re-assaults. While reaching out for help can be difficult and scary, a welcoming environment that provides safety and security can also facilitate healing.

 Injury caused by a person you have loved and trusted damages beliefs about oneself, other people and the world. For victims of intimate partner violence, the right environment can provide safety and security. It can build trust and help people reconnect with others. It can quite literally provide Shelter from the Storm and empower survivors and their children to begin to build a new life – a life free from violence.

Since June 2014, the architects and designers at the Rothschild Doyno Collaborative and the staff of WC&S have grappled with every detail of renovating our three-story, 38,465 square foot facility.

We know that the right environment helps the healing process. The redesign of the Women’s Center & Shelter is at the forefront of current thinking regarding the environment, the relationship between people and buildings, the impact of trauma on individuals and communities and the role environmental design plays in rebuilding trust and healing.

YOU’RE SAFE HERE.

Nothing is more important than the safety and security of the women and children we shelter. Our number one priority is to create a safe haven for our “guests,” secure from intruders. To that end, sanctuary space will be moved to occupy the entire third floor, providing an open, trusting, safe and secure environment. We will increase our residential capacity from 36 to 47 beds to ensure that we aren’t forced to turn away the domestic violence victims who so desperately need our help.
A subtle but powerful change will be to provide public areas, as well as private and semi-private spaces. As women rebuild self-trust and trust in others, they can begin to demonstrate that trust by utilizing community space like the Great Room, where residents can interact and build relationships.

New skylights and windows offer a view of the outside from nearly every location on the third floor, creating a secure and direct connection to nature.

The redesigned third floor also affords better integrated and more functional staff space, enhancing interaction between residents and WCFS’s staff.

LEED CERTIFICATION

Design and construction take into account our goal of LEED Certification. LEED certified buildings have a positive impact on the health of occupants, save money and resources and promote renewable, clean energy.
WE ALL BENEFIT FROM THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT.

Architectural design is just as important for the WC&S staff who face the challenge of observing and responding to the effects of recent and past abuse. Enhancing our staff’s ability to interact with survivors is critical to the healing process. Toward that end, the new second floor design increases space for non-resident client services and brings together the direct services and administrative staffs for more efficient utilization of space and shared support areas. Understanding how people connect to their environment, our design reflects a warm, welcoming and accessible environment for the women and children we shelter, as well as the women we serve in non-resident programs. Thousands of women come through WC&S to attend support groups, meet with their legal team or drop their kids off at our Children’s Program on their way to court. WC&S will use space to help every woman and child rebuild trust and self-esteem. One indicator of regaining trust in the community at large will be the utilization of “public” spaces on the first and second floors, creating supportive, engaging and overlapping community areas to increase interaction among everyone. Residents will have an opportunity to interact with non-resident clients, staff and visitors. These shared public “centering” spaces are designed to help women successfully transition from the sanctuary of shelter to community living.
When we moved into our current building in 1996, we couldn’t have foreseen that over the years children would become nearly 50 percent of the residents we shelter. Indoor and outdoor playgrounds have become key components of the family healing process.

A vastly expanded Children’s Programs area will occupy half of the ground floor, with a greater variety of activities for children of all ages – toddlers to teens – to play, learn and heal together. Indoor and outdoor play areas will connect directly with one another, but with enhanced security.

The expansion of our outdoor garden will allow us to expand our Therapeutic Children’s Garden Project to a broader horticultural therapy program for women and children. At the same time, we will improve security and safety at all access points and the perimeter.

When we opened our facility, we also didn’t foresee the need for indoor and outdoor space for pets. Because victims understand the harm that abusers will likely inflict on their pets, leaving home without a beloved and vulnerable pet is simply not an option for many domestic violence victims.

WC&S is joining an increasing number of shelters who have added “kennels” to allow victims to take their pets with them when they escape an abusive relationship.
HELP US PROVIDE SHELTER FROM THE STORM.

Providing sanctuary and healing for the women and children who are victims of intimate partner violence has a price: $10,900,000 to be precise.

That’s the amount of money Women’s Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh needs to raise to completely renovate our facility and expand its capacity.

We all know people who are being abused, whether we realize it or not. That’s not hard to grasp when you realize that one out of every three women in the US have experienced rape, physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner. Every minute of every day, 24 people experience intimate partner violence.

The young are not immune. One out of four high school girls has been a victim of physical or sexual abuse. Seventy percent of college students say that they have been sexually coerced.

Women’s Center & Shelter has been privileged to help thousands of families rebuild their lives. We know we make a difference. But only with your help.

Nothing is more important than the safety and security of the women and children we shelter.

Shared “centering” spaces will help women transition from the sanctuary of shelter to community living.

Vastly expanded playground areas for children of all ages will allow them to play, learn and grow together.

PROJECT TOTAL | $10,900,000

SANCTUARY SECURED | $3,900,000

CENTERED SERVICES | $3,100,000

CHILD FOCUSED | $3,900,000

Please visit www.ShelterFromTheStorm.us to learn more about the Shelter from the Storm Campaign. You’ll find videos recounting the incredible stories of women who have survived intimate partner violence and rebuilt their lives. And you’ll discover more about the vital work of the Women’s Center & Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh.