



## The Women's Resource Center:

### A SAFE PLACE FOR SURVIVORS AND THEIR FAMILIES

BY JULIETTE SCHULTZ

#### JUST LAST YEAR, THE WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER IN TRAVERSE CITY CARED FOR OVER 800 SURVIVORS.

Some of these individuals sought our shelter, while others leaned on us for emotional support or criminal justice system assistance. Some of these survivors we have never met. They called our 24-hour helpline answered seven days a week by trained client advocates who provide resources, encouragement and support.

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, on a typical day Michigan domestic violence hotlines receive approximately 21,000 calls. Annually, the WRC receives over 4,400 calls, over 400 of which are from survivors in crisis.

What are calls like for a Women's Resource Center (WRC) client advocate?

#### CRISIS CALLS

"The first thing I try to do is figure out if the person is safe," said one client advocate. "I ask, 'Are you safe? Is this a safe number for me to call you back on if we get disconnected?'"

A client advocate shared that she's been on the phone with survivors and the call has dropped. One time was especially unforgettable.

"The survivor said, 'He is walking in right now.' Then, the line went dead."

All the services the WRC provides are confidential, so a client advocate can't call the police without permission. If a caller says the line isn't safe for calling back, there is no way for a client advocate to reach them again either.

"A feeling of shock came over me," our advocate said. "We are exposed to trauma all the time and it is very intense."

It helps to remind herself, she said, that when she gets a call, to put aside how she feels about it. Helping the survivor is all that matters.

#### BEING AN ADVOCATE

Client advocates may ask the survivor if she or he would like to call the police, or if she or he would like the advocate to call the police. An advocate may ask questions like: Can you get to a safe place? Would you like to come into the shelter? Do you have family or friends in the area whom you might stay with?

A client advocate tries to get to the core issue the survivor is facing. This way, the advocate can provide the survivor a resource and the support he or she needs in that moment. WRC client advocates use an empowerment-based approach to advocacy, meaning that they meet survivors where they are, without judgment.

There are many guiding principles of the client advocacy philosophy. Some of these include: Intimate partner violence affects all of us; abuse is a deliberate act of power and control by the perpetrator; the victim does not provoke, enjoy or deserve it. All women, children and men have a right to their own identities and qualities that make them unique individuals;



#### HOW TO SUPPORT A SURVIVOR

- Continue to support the survivor, whether they end their relationship or not. A survivor must feel that you are not judging them for them to continue to confide in you. A helpful phrase could be, "You're not alone. I'm here for you and I'm glad you told me."
- Help develop a safety plan. Brainstorm ways for the survivor to stay safe, whether that means remaining in an unhealthy or violent relationship or leaving the relationship. The safety plan will look different depending on the survivor's circumstances including whether there are children and pets in the household and whether the survivor has access to financial resources and transportation.
- It is okay to tell a survivor that the abuser's behavior is not acceptable or safe, but do not criticize the abuser. A survivor will feel the will need to defend the abuser and it may further isolate the survivor.
- A survivor might blame herself for the abuse. You can remind the survivor that no one deserves to be abused. Helpful and validating phrases are: "This is not your fault," or "No one ever has the right to hurt you."
- Offer resources and ask what you can do to help. It is important to remember that the survivor is the expert when it comes to their relationship. They will know when it is safe to leave and what actions are possible.

Education of the root cause of abuse is essential for everyone. Gender inequality and oppression should be questioned and confronted.

And perhaps the most important: **All people have the right to live without fear.**

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN SOCIETY**

In the book *No Visible Bruises: What We Don't Know About Domestic Violence Can Kill Us*, author Rachel Louise Snyder writes: "A study by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime cited 50,000 women around the world were killed by partners or family members in 2017 alone, and the report called home the most dangerous place for women."

The author goes on to say that "domestic violence, rather than being a private problem, is the most urgent matter of public health."

It is our mission at the WRC to address this urgent matter. It is our mission to protect, shelter and empower domestic and sexual violence survivors and their families.

**A SAFE PLACE**

"I know first-hand that the WRC is a safe place for those who have been victimized by domestic and sexual violence," said one WRC shelter resident. "The WRC gave me shelter and a place where I could heal. They helped me find my voice and reminded me that I matter."

According to the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, half of all homeless women report that domestic violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness.

The WRC is the only organization that provides emergency shelter (at Helen's House) to survivors in the four-county region (Benzie, Leelanau, Grand Traverse and Kalkaska). Annually, we have nearly 200 women and children who reside at Helen's House.

At the Women's Resource Center, survivors find hope, safety and restoration. All our services are available at no cost.

**HEALING THE HURT**

A common aphorism in the world of domestic violence is "hurt people, hurt people." Domestic violence is not a men's nor a women's issue. It's a community issue. In the United States, every minute, an average of 20 people experience intimate partner violence. In 2017, Michigan domestic violence programs provided services to an average of 2,359 survivors a day.

Domestic violence affects all of us at some level or other. At the WRC, our mission is to help our community heal that hurt. One survivor at a time.



**WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?**

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, domestic violence is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systemic pattern of power and control by one intimate partner against another. It includes:

- **PHYSICAL VIOLENCE**
- **SEXUAL VIOLENCE**
- **THREATS AND EMOTIONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE**

Juliette Schultz is the executive director of the Women's Resource Center in Traverse City. There, she works alongside 45 others to protect, shelter and empower people impacted by domestic and sexual violence. When she isn't at the WRC, she looks for vintage Saabs with her son, Rowan, and cycles the back roads of Northern Michigan.



**RESOURCES TO HELP**

**WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER FOR THE GRAND TRAVERSE AREA**

Main Office Phone Number: **231-941-1210**

Helpline – Answered 24/7/365: **800-554-4972**

Website: **womensresourcecenter.org**

Service Area: Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Benzie, & Leelanau counties.

Mission: *The mission of the WRC is to protect, shelter and empower people impacted by domestic and sexual violence.*

**TRAVERSE BAY CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTER**

Main Office Phone Number: **231-929-4250**

Website: **traversebaycac.org**

Service Area: Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau and Wexford counties and the Sovereign Nation of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians.

Mission: *To protect children by providing prevention education and multi-disciplinary intervention in an environment that is child-sensitive, supportive and safe.*

**WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER OF NORTHERN MICHIGAN**

Main Office Phone Number: **231-347-0067**

Helpline: **800-275-1995**

Website: **wrcnm.org**

Service Area: Charlevoix, Emmet, Otsego, Cheboygan, & Antrim counties.

Mission: *The mission of the WRCNM is committed to equality, justice, and the well-being of women. To that end we will engage and encourage our community to work with us toward those goals.*

**MICHIGAN COALITION TO END DOMESTIC & SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

Main Office Phone Number: **517-347-7000**

Michigan Sexual Assault Hotline: **855-VOICES4**

Website: **mcedsv.org**

Mission: *To develop and promote efforts aimed at the elimination of all domestic and sexual violence in Michigan.*

**NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT HOTLINE 800-656-HOPE**

**NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE 800-799-SAFE**

**NATIONAL TEEN DATING ABUSE HELPLINE 866-331-9474**

