To protect, shelter, and empower people impacted by domestic and sexual violence.

NEWSLETTER | OCT 2022

Abuse Happens Behind Closed Doors but Awareness and Access Should Not

By Brooke Borgeson-Gray, WRC Board of Directors member, and retired Family and Women's Health Nurse Practitioner

This was not her first trip to the clinic where I worked as a women's health Nurse Practitioner.

A young mother of three small children, in the past she had pursued birth control to prevent another pregnancy. This visit was different. She had been a victim of intimate partner violence for several years, but, like many women, she was never able to leave her abusive relationship. Her partner hid her birth control pills and forced her to have sexual intercourse repeatedly without protection. She was pregnant, devastated, and desperate for help. She was a victim of Reproductive Coercion (RC), a very common form of abuse.

The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology describes RC as behavior intended to maintain power and control in a relationship which includes explicit attempts to impregnate a partner against her will, control outcomes of a pregnancy, coerce a partner to have unprotected sex, and interfere with contraceptive methods. All experiences of sexual violence, including rape, impact sexual and reproductive health. Although both males and females can be victims of sexual coercion, most forms of these behaviors impacting reproductive health disproportionately affect females.

The National Institute of Health reports that out of the 18 million women nationally who have experienced vaginal rape during their lifetimes, almost 3 million women have experienced rape related pregnancies. **Of women raped by an intimate partner, 30 percent experienced a form of reproductive coercion.** A recent National Crime Victimization Survey revealed that approximately one in five young women said they experienced reproductive coercion and one in seven said they experienced active interference with contraception.

As a health professional who worked in this community for almost 40 years, I am acutely aware that this form of abuse is more common in this community than most can imagine. One of the most critical ways to address this public health crises is through availability and access to comprehensive reproductive health care services. Ongoing public education and

Brooke Borgeson-Gray

support for access to care are needed to minimize the health consequences for women who experience RC.

Barriers to women's reproductive healthcare access are increasing at the local, regional, and national levels through numerous institutional, legislative, and regulatory restrictions. Lack of access to this critical care can cause serious negative consequences for women's health.

Comprehensive reproductive health services include screening, education, counseling and referral, pregnancy

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tests, multiple forms of contraception, including "morning after" pills, and pregnancy support or termination. Other interventions include counseling on harm-reduction strategies, and prevention of unintended pregnancies by offering long-acting methods of contraception that are less detectable to abusive partners, such as Depo-Provera injections, IUD, Implants, and even sterilization.

Education and support of comprehensive reproductive health care are the keys to helping women like the young mother who came to my clinic that day. Protecting access to these services and awareness of them, should have a powerful impact on women of our community now and in the future.

Breaking the Cycle

The effects of rape can impact generations. The story of Nadine* reminds us of this.

Statutory rape is defined as an act of sexual intercourse under the age of consent. When Nadine was born her mother was only 14 years old. Her father was 21. Nadine's mother reluctantly carried the pregnancy to term, and this decision would tie her daughter to lifetime of recovering from the rape that her mother endured.

Nadine was born into an abusive family. A mother who did not want her, and a father who kept a household in fear. Nadine's life story was complicated, and hard. She has spent her life consciously trying to break the cycle of generational abuse and is learning to love herself.

Nadine now has a family of her own. "My daughter asked me '*Mom, why do you fight so hard?*', I answered that: *I'm here to make the world better. I will always keep fighting for other victims because my story is not as unique as you might think.*"

**Name changed to protect survivor's identity.*

Helen's House WRC Safe House for Survivors

By Jamie Bell, Women's Resource Center Development Coordinator

Helen's House is a bright, sunny, and beautiful Victorian home that holds a sense of peace.

The ambience is more that of a bed and breakfast than a conventional women's shelter. The house is 136 years old, and since 1993 it has been the Safe Shelter for thousands of women fleeing from abusive relationships. Prior to acquiring Helen's House, The WRC shelter was smaller. It still served its important purpose dating back to 1984.

The name Helen's House is a tribute, honoring the memory of Helen Milliken, Michigan's longest serving First Lady. Milliken was a WRC board member and activist who had a passion for the safety and equality of women. She and her husband, former governor Bill Milliken, helped to secure the historical property for the WRC to serve survivors in our community. The home remains part of the long-standing legacy of The Milliken Family.

Old houses need lots of care. Maintaining the home is a critical focus for the WRC. Every year we apply for grants and raise funds that are specifically for the upkeep of Helen's House. Helen's House is often referred to as the "heartbeat" of our organization, because without it, survivors would be at risk of having no alternative to staying in an abusive home.

On most days, the house, which can accommodate 22 guests, is nearly at capacity. Last year alone, Helen's House hosted over 100 survivors and their children. Highly trained Advocates provide information, resources, and a judgment-free space where survivors receive compassion and support.

The WRC uses an empowerment-based philosophy. Shelter Operations Supervisor, Mikela Wilson compares it to a car ride: "The client is driving the car, and it's my job to help with navigation. I listen and I share information, like important stops and routes they may not have thought of. I'm here to help them get where they want to go." Each client plans a different journey, and their length of stay and particular needs vary. Some people come to the shelter with what they need; some arrive in the middle of the night in their pajamas.

Every client who comes to Helen's House is offered an opportunity to meet with an Advocate and is offered consistent support through their stay. Many clients have been blocked from resources, isolated, and oppressed; because the WRC staff is intentional about maintaining a calm and healing environment, Helen's House is a place where survivors can finally relax.

Mikela has seen a lot in her six years with the agency and reminds us, "Every situation is unique. There is no one-size-fits-all. All survivors deserve safety and healthy connections. I want people to know that the staff is really what makes this house amazing. I am really proud of the work we do."

WRC Staff Spotlight

Mikela Wilson
WRC Shelter Operations Supervisor

We are proud to introduce Mikela Wilson. Mikela has been with the WRC for six years, and in that time, she has continued to grow. Mikela started in 2016 as an intern while she was working on a bachelor's degree in Family Life Education. After receiving her bachelor's, Mikela applied for and was hired a Client Advocate at the WRC. As an advocate, Mikela always looked for ways to assist survivors with resources never wanting to turn anyone away without providing them with help. This past March, Mikela was promoted from Client Advocate to Shelter Operations Supervisor. In this position, Mikela is responsible for overseeing the emergency shelter operations including staff and maintaining the safety and security of the facility.

Mikela has a bright spirit, a grounded and focused demeanor, and a passion for serving the families who come to WRC for services. The passion for her work is fueled by a personal connection to the Mission of the WRC. Since she was young, she has always wanted to give back by helping to stop cycles of abuse. Through encouragement, empowerment, and embracing healthy connections, Mikela is truly a beacon of light for survivors and families during what is often one of the hardest periods in life.

To work in human services, self-care and work-home-life balance are essential. When Mikela isn't working, she is hiking, exploring, road-tripping, and adventure seeking. She loves spending time with friends and family, especially her little nephews and niece.

Mikela acknowledges two powerful women who inspire her to be the person that she is today: her grandmother, and poet Maya Angelou. Both women stood

Mikela Wilson

boldly in the face of adversity, and both were peaceful warriors. Mikela's favorite poem, *Still I Rise*, is shared below.

We are so honored to work alongside Mikela.

Still I Rise

BY MAYA ANGELOU

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

We have an opportunity to bring this critical issue to the forefront, advocate for change, celebrate survivors, and reflect on the loss of those who have died at the hands of abusers. Family members, friends, colleagues, and many other community members are affected by domestic violence. To address wellness and safety in our community, we must address domestic violence. Domestic violence includes: physical, emotional, economic, stalking and harassment, and sexual abuse. 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner.

We are here 24/7/365 to provide free and confidential help to survivors in need. Call: 800-554-4972.

Remembering Linda Lou Beaverson
1938-2022

Together we honor the memory of Linda Beaverson, a person who helped to make the WRC Thrift Shops what they are today. We will always remember Linda, as our very first Thrift Shop Truck Driver. She was an important behind the scenes organizer. Linda was involved with the WRC for 40 years. We are thankful for her commitment to the Mission. Her smile and spirit will leave a lifelong impact.

Remembering WRC Board Member Mardi Black
1947-2022

Mardi Black served on the WRC Board of Directors for five years. She was passionate about women's rights, and she had a way of putting people at ease. She used her talents as an attorney to help others without ever seeking attention for her work. She was humble and had an infectious laugh. We will remember Mardi as a smart, stylish, beautiful, mini cooper driving woman who knew how to have fun.

With Gratitude

We would like to thank these community members for helping to raise funds and awareness for the WRC.

Thank you for standing with us. Together we can continue to provide services with inclusion, integrity, compassion, respect and excellence. Together we can help survivors feel heard, understood and safe.

- **Rough Pony**
- **Taproot**
- **Rarebird**
- **Edson Farms**
- **Amical**
- **Oryana**
- **S2S**
- **The Filling Station**
- **Grawn United Methodist**
- **Traverse Area District Library**
- **Pillar Immigration Services**
- **Feast of Victory**
- **Blessed Be Tea and Apothecary**
- **Biederman Family Foundation**
- **Zonta Club of Traverse City**
- **Oleson Family Foundation**
- **mAIDen's of Michigan**
- **City Church of Traverse City**
- **Grand Traverse Public Health Department's Maternal Health Team**
- **Women Lawyers Association of Michigan**

If you would like to know more about how you can support the WRC, please contact Jamie Bell at 231-941-1210 or jbell@wrcgt.com.

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