

GOOD-NEWS

Women's Resource Center gives survivors of domestic violence a place of support



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The Providence Journal and United Way of Rhode Island have partnered to highlight the state's nonprofits. Each week, a nonprofit identified by United Way will be spotlighted in the Providence Sunday Journal, and the United Way will share how it supports that organization.

This week, we feature the Women's Resource Center, which is continuously working to strengthen domestic violence response and support.

We asked Executive Director Jessica Walsh to tell us more about the organization.

What is your mission and vision?

The mission of the Women's Resource Center is to empower survivors by providing trauma-informed services with equity and compassion, while working collaboratively with the community to eliminate the root causes of interpersonal abuse. We envision an informed, supportive and thriving community free from oppression and abuse.

This mission and vision drive our programs, delivered to 1,300 people annually. We offer shelter, food and other basic human needs, as well as transitional housing, individual and group counseling, a 24-hour hotline, walk-in services, court and law enforcement advocacy, and referrals to survivors of domestic violence.

Our nationally recognized prevention programming uses innovative strategies to improve community health and reduce domestic violence rates by addressing the social determinants of health in the Newport Health Equity Zone.

We are a proud member of the Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV), whose member agencies work together to provide domestic violence services across the state.

How do you measure success?

We succeed when our clients find safety and hope:

We help families stop the cycle of abuse: “With the Center’s support, I’ve begun to heal in deeper, more lasting ways. I’ve come to understand that the abuse wasn’t my fault. I’ve also started to make sense of the dynamics behind the abuse – what drove it, what enabled it – and how to ensure it ends with me.”

We help survivors find safe, stable housing: “The housing advocacy was truly lifesaving. The stability I gained through safe housing was foundational to my healing journey.”

We help survivors navigate the court system: “Having someone who listens, guides and answers my questions has made a huge difference.”

We build community: “I found something I hadn’t had in a long time: community. I met other survivors who understood without explanation. These women became my friends – people I trust, who remind me I’m not alone.”

What are your biggest challenges currently?

Domestic violence rates: Nearly 1 in 2 Rhode Islanders experiences domestic violence in their lifetime.

The growing housing crisis: The average stay in our emergency shelter has tripled, and it’s taking longer for clients to find safe, affordable housing. This means that

people trying to escape abuse are facing longer shelter waiting times. We've launched a case management program for survivors seeking housing but facing consistently full shelters – and in the first six months we've served 60 individuals and families.

The federal landscape: As part of the RICADV, we're engaged in legal challenges to new grant restrictions that would cause harm, especially to the most vulnerable survivors who already face significant barriers to safety and threaten to disrupt lifesaving services. We are concerned about future funding, but we're committed to being as courageous as the survivors we serve. All survivors deserve safety and justice, and we won't waver in that commitment.

How can volunteers or donors get involved?

As we face an unpredictable and challenging landscape, support from our community is critical. Knowing that our community is behind us – that our community supports survivors, that our community will not let us fail – allows us to focus on those we serve.

Individual contributions are central to helping WRC weather the funding storm without programmatic changes, ensuring that all survivors have compassionate support on their journey to safety and healing. As one of our clients described, "Services like this don't just offer help, they offer hope and they make long-term healing possible."

There are many ways volunteers can support our work. Whether through board membership, hosting a screening of our film, attending an event, advocating with decisionmakers, donating or volunteering, we are always grateful for the support of our community. Visit the "Get Involved" section of (wrcnbc.org) to learn more about the many ways you can champion alongside us.

What are some recent accomplishments or projects you're proud of?

We proudly partnered with award-winning filmmaker Sue Sipprelle to create "Women's Resource Center: Tipping Point." In this powerful documentary, eight survivors share their experiences overcoming the many barriers to leaving an abusive situation and how the WRC empowered them on their journey.

Over the last two years we've made both our emergency shelter and transitional housing program fully pet-friendly. Now, survivors can bring their pets to live with them, eliminating a significant barrier to survivors seeking safety.

WRC was included in the CDC Museum's "Health is a Human Right: Achieving Health Equity" exhibition for our work in advancing health equity through the Newport Health Equity Zone project.

We were also proud to play an active role in the RICADV achieving two legislative victories. Both the Address Confidentiality and Abusive Litigation Bills passed in their first year of introduction with overwhelming support and are making Rhode Island a safer place for survivors.

For more information about the Women's Resource Center, visit wrcnbc.org/#