

Womenews

Women's Center of Montgomery County



*Excerpted from our November 20, 2016 Volunteer Appreciation Brunch Program –
The Season of Giving Thanks for Our Volunteers*

Our Legacy of Volunteerism – The Spirit of Giving at Its Best!

By Maria Macaluso, Executive Director

The Women's Center of Montgomery County was started in 1976 by a group of passionate, committed and visionary women volunteers who wanted to create positive social change in their community through empowerment and community engagement.

At a time of great transition for women in our country – a time in which women were finding their voice and emerging as leaders and catalysts for social reform – these amazing women – our founding mothers - recognized that collectively, pooling their energies, resources, skills, and dreams, they could improve the quality life for others, in need, at risk and in crisis. Through volunteer engagement and activism our members could empower others by teaching them the skills, providing the support, and coordinating the resources needed to move toward safety and stability.

In so doing, our founding mothers received a great gift as well. Through their selfless dedication and altruism they experienced a sense of enrichment, empowerment and enlightenment that can only be achieved when we challenge ourselves to be more and to do more in service to our community. In creating a better world for others, we, too, experience the powerful energy, growth and insight that comes from engagement and activism.

Over the past 40 years, the Women's Center of Montgomery County has become well-known for our service to the community. Each year we provide services to more than 5,000 victims of domestic violence. We promote community awareness about the dynamics of abuse, reaching thousands of people each year. Through our systems advocacy efforts, we have truly reformed our court system, providing volunteer legal advocates accompanying more than 1500 victims annually through the protection from abuse process. We offer trainings to law enforcement, healthcare providers, educators, first responders – a vast array of allied professionals with a goal of improving access to services for victims of domestic violence.

All of these accomplishments are amazing and impressive and, as the executive director, I am extremely proud of what the Center has done to save lives, eliminate barriers for victims and for women, create social justice and reform social norms about domestic violence. These are wonderful achievements that inspire us and drive our vision for the future.

But when I really think about what makes the Women's Center of Montgomery County unique and incredible, it is the volunteers that make the difference; the hundreds – thousands – of individuals who, over the past 40 years have invested their time, energy and skills to helping others and bringing about social change. The passionate, caring and empathetic women and men who challenged themselves to learn the skills, to dedicate the time, to step beyond their personal comfort zone and sense of security to create a world that is safer for others.

For many of our volunteers, they themselves come to this work out of a personal experience, a connection with crisis or victimization. They have come through the trauma of abuse and emerged not only stronger but with a compelling desire to help others reached that same sense of strength and well-being. For me there is nothing more admirable than the spirit of our volunteers!

With seven locations and a paid staff of 17 full and part-time employees, we could only begin to dream of achieving all that the Center has become. Inspired, infused and driven by the power of more than 185 trained volunteers each year, our dreams become our reality and I am honored, proud and grateful of these incredible individuals!

Join Members of The Women's Center of Montgomery County for the Women's March on Washington

If there is sufficient interest, the WCMC will pursue arranging for a bus to take our member group to Washington, DC on Saturday, January 21st so we can participate in the Women's March on Washington. Per the event's organizers:

"On January 21, 2017 we will unite in Washington, DC for the Women's March on Washington. We stand together in solidarity with our partners and children for the protection of our rights, our safety, our health, and our families -- recognizing that our vibrant and diverse communities are the strength of our country.

The rhetoric of the past election cycle has insulted, demonized, and threatened many of us--women, immigrants of all statuses, those with diverse religious faiths particularly Muslim, people who identify as LGBTQIA, Native and Indigenous people, Black and Brown people, people with disabilities, the economically impoverished and survivors of sexual assault. We are confronted with the question of how to move forward in the face of national and international concern and fear.

In the spirit of democracy and honoring the champions of human rights, dignity, and justice who have come before us, we join in diversity to show our presence in numbers too great to ignore. The Women's March on Washington will send a bold message to our new administration on their first day in office, and to the world that women's rights are human rights. We stand together, recognizing that defending the most marginalized among us is defending all of us.

We support the advocacy and resistance movements that reflect our multiple and intersecting identities. We call on all defenders of human rights to join us. This march is the first step towards unifying our communities, grounded in new relationships, to create change from the grassroots level up. We will not rest until women have parity and equity at all levels of leadership in society. We work peacefully while recognizing there is no true peace without justice and equity for all. HEAR OUR VOICE."

Please contact the Elkins Park office by telephone at [215-635-7340](tel:215-635-7340) or by email at mmacaluso@womenscentermc.org by 12/14/2016 if you want to participate through the WCMC. If there is sufficient interest, we can reserve a bus at a cost of \$40.00 a person. In the alternative, we can coordinate car pools based on the level of response

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO!

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 3, 2016

Contact: Teresa Harris, Communications & Public Relations Coordinator
tharris@montcopa.org, 610-278-5955/Office

Sheriff's Office, Laurel House and Women's Center partner for greater domestic violence awareness and victim support

Norristown, PA (November 3, 2016) – Montgomery County Sheriff Sean P. Kilkenny and local domestic violence agencies are deepening their relationship, in an effort to better serve the increasing need for domestic violence victim services. Kilkenny and all of his staff have completed two days of mandatory domestic violence awareness training with Laurel House and the Women's Center of Montgomery County. The training focused on understanding domestic violence, the impact it has on victims, safety planning and local resources.



PHOTO: MCSO Cpl. Carl Robinson, Womens' Center Community Educator Specialist Robin Jordan and Program Director Denise Flynn, Laurel House Domestic Abuse Response Team member Stacy Dougherty and MCSO Dep. Kayla Oelschlager.

“I will continue to build on my commitment to help support and advocate for domestic violence victims,” said Kilkenny.

In addition to the updated training, the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office is part of the Domestic Violence Legal Network, collects 9-1-1 phones for victims, and donates old cellphones to support domestic violence hotlines. Deputies also provide supervision during child custody exchanges; escort victims in fear of confronting their abusers, in around the courthouse; and retrieve weapons, which are to be surrendered in protection from abuse order cases.

“Through our daily duties, we come in contact with hundreds of citizens each day,” said Chief Deputy T. Michael Beaty. “We are committed to making sure that we are able to immediately serve victims in the most educated and compassionate way.”

In other counties, protection from abuse orders are mailed, or delivered by a constable for a fee. However, the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office has a dedicated team of deputies, who hand deliver the court orders as a part of their service. As a result of the additional training, office and law enforcement staff, are better equipped to immediately help victims get the resources and assistance they need, even before speaking with someone at either of the domestic violence agencies.

Laurel House is a nonprofit domestic shelter, which provides counseling, a 24-hour hotline, legal advocacy and an immediate in-person response team. The agency reported 1,700 hotline calls, which is a 25

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percent increase over the previous year. Laurel House also experienced a 50 percent increase in Domestic Abuse Response Team Program crisis response calls, and provided more than 7,300 hours of individual counseling hours to clients.

“I am not aware of any other sheriff’s office in the state that provides this level of service,” said Laurel House Domestic Abuse Response Team Member Stacy Dougherty. “We need as many resources as possible out in the community.”

At the risk of suffering backlash from an abuser, victims may be hesitant to ask questions or receive help, especially if the abuser is present. Having trained resources, who can detect or assist victims on the spot is critical.

“We have already seen the impact of our training, said the Women’s Center Community Educator Specialist Robin Jordan. “Sheriff’s Office deputies accompanied two victims to our Legal Advocacy Project Office the day after the training.”

The Women’s Center nonprofit domestic violence victim agency also provides a way for victims to get help discreetly through their Permission Slip Program. The program allows law enforcement officers to get permission from the victim to be contacted by a representative from the Women’s Center of Montgomery County, who can work with the victim before, during and after the PFA hearing and court process.

The Women’s Center served 5,000 victims in 2015. They served 1,700 victims in the first quarter of 2016, which puts them on track to surpass last year’s figures.

“The theme for the training was ‘See something. Say something,’” said Women’s Center Program Director Denise Flynn. “This opportunity allowed us to further collaborate with the Sheriff’s Office to help empower victims, and sheriff’s deputies by providing them the resources they need to help as they perform their daily jobs.”

“I hope that, after this training, we are able to better support Laurel House, the Women’s Center and victims, by being an extended resource,” said Kilkenny.

Board of Directors News

The next meeting of the Women’s Center of Montgomery County Board of Directors will be held on **Thursday, December 15th at 6:45 pm** in our Colmar office at 2506 N. Broad Street in the Walton Meeting Room.

Board meetings are open to current members of the Center.

Also, as a reminder, current members can also join most of our Board committees. If you have an interest on serving on our standing committees – Finance, Special Events, Planning, Governance or Development – please contact our Co-Presidents Amy Stern and Rosie Santulli c/o the Elkins Park office.

Strategic Planning Status Update

From the Board of Directors Planning Committee

Over the past forty years we have seen our Center grow in wonderful ways that enhance our services to victims while also providing opportunities for our members to empower and enrich their lives through community engagement. To maintain and build upon those efforts, this year, we initiated the essential process of developing a long-term Strategic Plan for the WCMC.

A Strategic Plan is crucial for established organizations that are serious about growth and sustainability so as to avoid stagnation. It is an inclusive process which develops a roadmap for growth and takes into account the need for proactive changes based on revised priorities or outside influences. It provides a guide for implementing our mission with measurable goals and targeted actions to achieve those goals.

To complete this visionary process, our Board of Directors has sought the guidance of experienced consultants. We have been working with GLOW Strategies, who, because of their commitment to our mission, have discounted their services at a 50%. Through their generous support, our initial work with GLOW was invigorating and along with volunteers, staff, Board members and other key stakeholders we developed our preliminary PAVE (Purpose, Approach, Values, Economics) the first step in Strategic Planning:

- **Purpose:** WCMC empowers members to be catalysts for change in our community in order to improve the lives of women and girls.
- **Approach:** Eliminate domestic violence, champion gender equality, increase enrichment programs.
- **Values:** Committed, empowering, compassionate.
- **Economics:** Increase organizational growth through volunteerism and diversity of services with budgetary increases to support that growth.

In order to continue and complete the remainder of our Strategic Plan, we require additional funding in the amount of \$3,000. Over the next few months our committee is exploring potential funding options, so that the Center can develop a long term growth oriented Strategic Plan, with assistance from GLOW Strategies.



Condolences Saying Goodbye to Our Friend and Colleague, Leah Blumenthal

It is with great sadness that we report the loss of our friend and long-time volunteer, Leah Blumenthal, who passed away on Monday, November 7th following a long battle with Lewy Body Dementia

For those of you who knew Leah and share our affection and respect for her as a friend and as a colleague, we remember fondly her sharp wit, compassionate nature, and strength of character, Although we mourn her passing, I know that all the special qualities she brought to her work here have touched us all, and she will continue to inspire our work and our vision.

On behalf of the Board and staff of the Women's Center of Montgomery County, I would like to offer our deepest sympathies and condolences to Leah's family and friends. She was a very strong and special woman who will be sorely missed!

Thanking Our Friends at Anytime Fitness

Ryan Murphy, owner of Anytime Fitness located at 1029 West County Line Rd in Warminster, had a wonderful idea to draw attention to Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Partnering with the Women's Center of Montgomery County, he devised a fun competition between his three trainers to see who could get their clients to bring in the most clothing to donate to our thrift shop. To incentivize their clients, the trainers agreed to do multiple Burpee pushups for each item donated in front of the entire gym.

The event was so successful that Ryan wants to recognize Domestic Violence Awareness Month with an annual event. "What a fun way to bring attention to a very serious problem in our society. We were happy to help."





A special thanks to Judge Kelly Wall, her family and friends who joined us at our November 20th Volunteer Appreciation Brunch during which Judge Wall was recognized for her generous support and friendship to the Center and our mission. With Judge Wall's assistance and intervention we have achieved a ten-year dream of completing a PFA courtroom orientation video that will soon be viewable on our website and at the courthouse.

For all of us here at the Women's Center of Montgomery County, we are truly grateful to our community friends and partners who share our commitment to eliminating domestic violence and improving access to services!



24 hr Domestic Violence Hotline is [1-800-773-2424](tel:1-800-773-2424)

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