2011 - 2012 Annual Report
Now that we have transitioned into our new BWIC Center at 255 Chestnut Street, we can return our focus to the core of our work, ensuring safety, life and hope to the women, men and children in the Berks County community struggling with the impact of domestic violence and sexual assault.

The construction of our new Center required an enormous amount of collaboration, energy and commitment. For the more than 500 individuals in Berks County who have called this facility home since its opening, let me thank you again for making our dream a reality.

But on their behalf and on behalf of the more than 1500 individuals receiving counseling, the 400 individuals who sought our legal representation and 750 seeking legal advocacy and the 50 who needed our help at area hospitals and medical facilities, I must remind you that your work is far from complete.

We begin 2013 focused on the ongoing and emergent needs of those who come to us. We continually seek to improve and refine the programs and services we offer so that our clients are assisted in their efforts to recover from the trauma of domestic violence and sexual assault, and to build the connections to family, schools, and community that are essential to their future. We strive to help them to tap into their strengths, and to the resilience that allows them to fulfill their own dreams for themselves and their families.

We also begin by renewing our commitment to prevention – to preventing domestic violence and sexual assault before it occurs – by refocusing our educational efforts as well as making a commitment to “infuse” prevention into our daily intervention work. We embark upon this process together with our local and state partners, and informed by the public health model advanced by the Centers for Disease Control.

We are thrilled to be fully operational in our new, permanent home, the BWIC Center, and to continue our work to eliminate domestic violence and sexual assault in Berks County.

Mary Kay Bernosky, Esq.
Executive Director

Our Vision

To eliminate domestic violence and sexual assault in Berks County.
Our Services

Berks Women in Crisis provides comprehensive services to assist victims and survivors, as well as educational programs, training, and advocacy to educate the community and our professional systems partners about domestic violence and sexual assault. Our services and programs have expanded over the years to best meet the needs of victims and survivors, and to address the barriers they face in seeking help.

CRISIS SERVICES
• 24-Hour Hotlines in English (610-372-9540) and Spanish (610-372-7463)
• Rapid Response – 24/7/365 response by a BWIC counselor/advocate to the courthouse to assist a victim seeking an Emergency Protection from Abuse order – evenings, weekends and holidays
• Medical Advocacy – provides a trained counselor/advocate to assist victims of domestic violence in the local hospitals and health clinics, and to assist rape and sexual assault victims in the emergency rooms, alongside the SANE (sexual assault nurse examiner) nurses

COUNSELING
• Individual Counseling for victims and survivors, family members, and significant others
• Support groups
• Trauma-focused, based on an empowerment model

HOUSING
• Emergency Safe House for 50 individuals for up to 30 days
• Bridge House for six families for 1 to 3 months
• The Emma Lazarus Place – safe transitional housing for 3 months to 2 years
• Housing Advocacy and placement – assisting clients with permanent housing options in the community

LEGAL SERVICES
• Representation by an attorney at final Protection from Abuse (PFA) order hearings
• Court Accompaniment to criminal hearings and trials
• Legal Referrals
• Civil Legal Clinics – education sessions on related issues, such as custody, divorce, and immigration

EDUCATION & COMMUNITY OUTREACH
• Programs for children and youth (pre-K through college) in schools, colleges and universities, and community settings
• CAMPpeaceworks: Teen Alliance for Social Justice
• Professional trainings for systems partners, law enforcement, employers
• Programs and initiatives that raise awareness of DV/SA in the community

SYSTEMS ADVOCACY
• Advocating for the advancement of best practices and a victim-centered response to domestic violence and sexual assault
• Advocating for the rights of victims, offender and systems accountability
• Advocating for justice for individual victims, and for all survivors of DV/SA.

OUR SERVICES are confidential, and free of charge with the exception of transitional housing.

All services are available in English and Spanish, and provided without regard to race, gender, income level, ability, religion, immigration status, or socio-economic status.
An independent accounting firm conducts an annual audit of Berks Women in Crisis. A copy of this independent public accounting audit report may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State.
Sara, a single woman in her mid-40’s, came to BWIC seeking counseling after facing an interpersonal crisis at work, which triggered memories of the time she was raped at age 14. In being retraumatized, she found herself sent back to that time of her life as a teen - feeling powerless, trapped, unheard, and unable to function for weeks or keep a job.

Through counseling over a 9-month period Sara was able to identify her triggers, manage or reduce them, and further understand her trauma and its biopsychosocial impact on her over time. She discovered that beyond the rape, her childhood years of emotional neglect, isolation, and exposure to violence impacted her in many ways. In learning about signs and types of abuse she was also able to identify a pattern of unhealthy or abusive relationships in her life and begin to build her self-esteem and set healthy boundaries. Counseling became a vehicle of self-discovery, true healing, and restoration of the pieces of her that were broken or stolen from her by abusers throughout her life.

Now Sara is truly fulfilled and describes herself as empowered and confident for the first time - no longer living in fear or suffering from PTSD. She has since found work in the Mental Health field, serving troubled children and youth who come from dysfunctional or violent homes. Sara is able to use her experience, passion, and knowledge of domestic and sexual violence to help her own clients heal and foster healthy relationships.
Thanks to the passion and commitment of Carolyn Holleran, the PeaceTrust was born in 2007. Originally designed to attract 100 women as members, the PeaceTrust provides essential unrestricted funding to ensure that BWIC services are available to all who need them.

Within days of its inception, this group surpassed the original membership goal by 50%. Over those original five years, this group became a source of support and advocacy, advice and activism. We see the devastating effect that violence against women has in our homes, our schools, our community and our world. We want to join our collective voices to ensure that this violence ends and that all women and girls are safe, respected and valued.

Thank you to the following women who have agreed to join our new PeaceTrust 300 group. We encourage all women in our communities to commit to support BWIC by becoming a partner or associate of PeaceTrust 300. You will be forever glad that you did.

PEACETRUST 300

Carolyn Holleran

Kelly Altland
Barbara Arner
Carolyn Auman
Christine Auman
Kathryn Banta
Paula Barrett
Cathy Beaver
Radene Gordon Beck
Natalie Bell Parisi
Jacquelyn Bollman
Cindy Boscov
Shirley Boscov
Elaine Bowersox
Nancy Boyer
Ann Broadbent
Maureen Brumbach
Nancy Campbell
Pam Campbell
Mary Canner
Dominique Caron
Shirley Caves
Anita Chaney

June Clougher
Lois Cohen
Jo Cohn
Anna Connors
Charlotte Cooper
Nanette Cutrona
Barbara Davis
Rhoda Dersh
Virginia Dodge
Diane Duff
Wendy Dunkelberger
Vicki Ebner
Susan Edelman
Judy Ehlerman
Boots Fehr
Cathy Feiler
Helen Flynn
Susan Frankowski
Susan Fraser
Susan Fromm
Anne Gage
Gwen Gage
Lisa Kline Gallen
Diane Gaul
Leigh Gentry
Pat Giles
Penny Golden
Sandy Graffius
Martha Hafer
Katie Hannon
Sue Hasker
Federicka Heller, MD
Angel Helm
Nancy Hemmerich
Eileen Hobbs
Carolyn Holleran
Barbara Homsher
Barbara Hughes
Ellen Huyett
Joanne Judge
Barbara Ketchum
Julia Klein
Mary Ellen Klein
Nancy Kozloff
Ann Krasas
Alma Lakin
Maralyn Lakin
Shelly Landau
Peggy Leoni
Nancy Magee
Marcia Martell
Heidi Masano
Ker Massengale
Elaine McDevitt
Bobbie (Barbara) McGlenn
Kristin McGlenn
Teresa Mercurio, MD
Regina Gouger Miller
Ann Moll
Anne Morahan
Janet Mosteller
Lori Muhlenberg
Helen Najarian
Jane Nase
Joni Naugle
Carole Neag
Annie Overly-Moll
Laurie Peer
Mary Pendleton
Carol Pinkasavage
Catherine Pressimone
Susie Probst
Connie Radwanski
Polly Reinhart
Sandra Rick
Karen Rightmire
Frances (Mary) Roedel
Susan Rohn
Elizabeth Rothermel
Jane Runyeon
Leigh Rye
Susan Schmehl
Pamela Schumacher
Vee Vee Scott
Nancy Sellers
Meg Shields
Sherry Sidhu
Carol Siegel
Helene Singer
Sandy Solmon
Louise Souders
Michelle Sowers
Theresa Stelmach
Martha Swartz
Barbara Thun
Frances Tieman
Colleen Ulrich
Darlyn Unger
Joanne van Roden
Marilyn Wademan
Sallie Weaver
Nadine Weidenhammer
Anna Weitz
Frances Whitehall
Jody Widing
Caryl Wilkinson
Brenda Winkler
Nancy Yocom
Sandra Zechman
Missy Zimmerman

Thanks to the passion and commitment of Carolyn Holleran, the PeaceTrust was born in 2007. Originally designed to attract 100 women as members, the PeaceTrust provides essential unrestricted funding to ensure that BWIC services are available to all who need them.
We are pleased to announce that Berks Women in Crisis is “Ready to Read!” As an approved Education Improvement Organization, BWIC qualified for Educational Improvement Tax Credits allowing your local business taxes to enhance services and opportunities for those most vulnerable in our community.

Working with our local school districts, BWIC has designed a program called, “Ready to Read.” Led by a qualified counselor/advocate and educator, this program offers both the immediate safety and emotional support that child victims of domestic and sexual violence need while giving them the Reading Skills necessary to help them be successful in school and life. Focused on young readers, this program is designed to help children ages 3-9. Designed to offer both emotional support and reading readiness, this program builds self-esteem and opens new windows for children in crisis.

Thanks to these generous donors, this program became a reality and is already making an impact on the lives of the youngest victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. We hope you will consider supporting this program in the future. Any questions concerning this program can be directed to Mary Kay at marykayb@berkswomenincrisis.org.

Your support makes a world of difference in Berks County.
Berks Women in Crisis has been providing support and advocacy in the criminal and civil courts from the beginning. Today, we have 3 bilingual (Spanish and English) legal advocates who accompany victims through the process of obtaining a civil protection order (commonly referred to as “PFA”) or through the criminal process when charges are filed.

In addition, BWIC has two attorneys who represent victims in final PFA hearings. As we know, testifying in Court is a daunting proposition for most of us. When coupled with the real fear that these victims have of their perpetrator, it may become an impossible task. Having our attorneys and advocates to guide them in this process alleviates this fear and provides the information and support necessary to allow victims to see that they have options and a right to live free of violence and abuse.

Although our legal representation is limited to the PFA process, our attorneys offer information, assistance, and referral for related issues such as custody, support, divorce, immigration and landlord/tenant or other housing issues.

Commencing in 2013, BWIC is partnering with the Berks County Bar Association to hold legal clinics and provide pro bono representation to clients with issues in family law, immigration, landlord/tenant and other areas.

In addition to the individual advocacy and representation, our attorneys and advocates work with the courts, prosecutors and law enforcement to ensure that these systems understand the dynamics of domestic and sexual violence, the trauma that the clients have experienced and to minimize the frustration that often occurs when dealing with these emotional and complex cases.

Our attorneys have more than 40 years of combined experience with helping victims and are well-respected by their legal peers. Our advocates have been working with the courts and law enforcement for more than 15 years and are regarded by them as a valuable resource when dealing with crimes of domestic violence and sexual assault.

"Staff from the agency supported me through the Legal System."
Berks Women in Crisis provides free, confidential counseling to victims, survivors and significant others impacted by domestic violence or sexual assault. BWIC’s counseling is informed by our understanding of the psychological, physiological and emotional toll of trauma.

Our first question to anyone seeking our help is, “are you safe now?” We know that immediate safety is paramount to all who come to us. Once we are able to secure that immediate safety, we stress that they are not alone and that the fears and anxiety they are experiencing is the normal reaction we all have to a traumatic experience. We focus on the dynamics of domestic violence and sexual assault and the reality that it impacts 1 in 4 women in their lifetime.

Each person who comes to us believes that they are alone in their experiences, and that they are somehow to blame for the violence being perpetrated against them. By speaking with a counselor or by participating in group sessions where other survivors share their experiences, our clients learn they are not alone and that they are not to blame for this violence.

Throughout the counseling sessions, the counselors provide tools that assist our clients to reframe their emotions and reactions, and to incorporate the necessary healthy coping skills to help them come to terms with the violence in their past. Further, they offer support and resources to empower clients to achieve their personal goals.

More than 80% of clients who continue in counseling for more than three sessions report that they feel that staff helped them believe that their life could change for the better, and that because of services they received, they learned coping skills to help them deal with trauma.

Since BWIC moved to its permanent home at 255 Chestnut Street in Reading, we have seen a marked increase in the number of individuals seeking counseling services. Our new location makes this process easier and safer for those traveling to our Center. Between August 2012 and January 2013, our counselors assisted more than 1,450 individuals. Of those we helped, nearly 20% were Spanish-speaking only, or Spanish was their language of choice.

BWIC strives to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services and a diverse staff that reflect the broad diversity of community members in Berks County. Our counselors are committed to providing the professional and compassionate support necessary to empower victims and survivors to heal from their trauma and realize their full potential.

“The counseling staff helped me believe that my life could change for the better.”

Natalie, Wendy, and Diossanta
Statistics

- 3,948 adult clients received 9,074 hours of supportive counseling for domestic violence.
- 795 adults and children were housed in the Safe House for 5,469 shelter days for adults and 5,304 shelter days for children.
- 150 adults and children were turned away from the Safe House prior to opening our new facility in May.
- Trained bilingual advocates answered 1,829 Hotline calls for incidents of domestic violence and sexual assault.
- Staff attorneys represented 674 clients to obtain final Protection from Abuse orders.
- 2,088 clients worked with legal advocates who accompanied them to Protection from Abuse order hearings, criminal court hearings and police interviews.
- In schools and throughout the community, 769 prevention-education programs on domestic violence and sexual assault reached an audience of over 18,118 people.
- 614 adult clients received 1,897 hours of service for sexual assault.
- 91 patients at both Reading area hospitals received advocacy, support, and options counseling 24/7 through the Medical Advocacy Program.
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Our Mission

Berks Women in Crisis provides supportive services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. We improve the quality and safety of their lives by providing an immediate safe haven and ongoing support system that empowers them to move forward. Our advocacy and education programs increase awareness and promote prevention of domestic violence and sexual assault.

We deliver this mission through a team of professionals with expertise in their individual fields of service and provide a flexible and supportive work environment.