Safe Berks . . .
New Name, New Look

After 40 years, it is time for a new name and a new look. Those of us who have been working at BWIC have long engaged in discussions about the name “Berks Women in Crisis”. Agency minutes reflect these discussions as early as the mid-1990s when the agency added the provision of sexual assault services. These services include shelter, counseling, legal support; by holding perpetrators accountable — advocating for systems change; and by educating the community to confront the root causes of this violence and proactively engage in creating an environment where this violence is not tolerated. In addition, throughout BWIC’s history we have created numerous new programs which were “branded” under various names; i.e., “PeaceWorks”, “PeaceTrust”, “the Emma Lazarus Place”, “Emma’s Place”, and the “Safe Healing Center”. These brands were utilized
to market programs and services to a broader demographic, particularly to youth. These brands, however, were never integrated with the “BWIC” identity and did not serve to educate the community on the breadth of services provided.

Our 40th Anniversary Healthy Village Project allowed us the opportunity to hear from the community. In order to fully integrate this feedback into the agency, we engaged CrossRoads Studios (Crossroads) to assist us. Crossroads interviewed more than 40 stakeholders, including staff, Board, donors, clients, systems partners, etc. They completed an extensive background review of the agency, significant industry research and trade publication review, did some competitive review of our name and brand, and then made recommendations. Among the findings in the research was that people identified overwhelmingly that BWIC served women and children, rarely discussed sexual assault services, found the name outdated and not descriptive of the services offered, and that we had two distinct identities, that of “Berks Women in Crisis” and “BWIC”. The central theme was that for a younger generation of women, for male victims, for victims who identify as other than female, or for those who did not identify as “in crisis”, BWIC was not readily seen as a resource and place to access support and help.

Crossroads Studios made a number of recommendations to improve the messaging so that all victims of domestic violence and sexual assault would view BWIC as a welcoming place to access services. From the comments provided in the focus groups, the most commonly used word to describe BWIC and our unique value proposition was
A Message From Our CEO

This has been a busy and exciting year for all of us at Safe Berks. To commemorate our 40th Anniversary, we embarked on an ambitious campaign to educate community members throughout Berks County. First we began with assemblies in our high schools focused on understanding dating violence and sexual assault and the role of peer groups to ensure safety and respect. Next we worked with Women2Women to tell the story of Elizabeth Smart and her resilience after her traumatic abduction. To offer some context of the role of women and girls in the world, we then partnered with Alvernia University to bring New York Times columnist and writer Nicholas Kristof to address the experiences of women in developing countries. We also highlighted the stories of survivors and how our services have supported them on their road to safety and healing featuring our Voices for Change honorees, Gwen Gage and Kelly Gage Moecky.

At our 40th Anniversary Celebration of Peace, we reflected on the growth of BWIC and the evolution of our programs and services over the years. The most notable of this evolution is our new Center located on Chestnut Street in Reading. The impact that this safe, accessible and attractive facility has had on those we serve is illustrated in the tribute to our Voices for Change honorees, the Kindness Coalition.

Finally, our Healthy Village project provided us with the forum to hear from those we serve and those who may need us. They have described what they know of us and what they need from us. As a result, we have decided it was time for a new name and a new look. Safe Berks was launched at the conclusion of our 40th Anniversary Celebration of Peace.

What will not change is our commitment to providing services to ALL victims of domestic violence and sexual assault and to providing prevention programs proven to end this violence. As always, we rely on your support to ensure that those impacted by domestic violence and sexual assault find the safe space and resources they need to heal from the trauma of this violence. Thank you for all you have done to support us over the years. We could not do it without you!

Mary Kay Lemons

A Great Success

The Healthy Village Project and the 40th Anniversary Celebration of Peace

The Healthy Village Project was a series of educational initiatives presented to a variety of Berks County audiences interested in promoting the healthy, peaceful and supportive coexistence of the people of the community of Berks. The educational messages included:

Katie Koestner and Gordon Braxton — presented programming to four Berks County School classes ranging from Grades 8-12. Participating Schools included Wilson High School, Reading Intermediate School, Kutztown High School and Governor Mifflin. More than 1000 students heard the message of what is and is not acceptable dating behavior and how we all play a role in ensuring the standard of conduct.

Elizabeth Smart — spoke to an audience of 450 to share her story, the reality of sexual violence and who perpetrates this violence and how she has been supported to move on from the trauma she experienced. Elizabeth’s presentation was made possible with the support of Women2Women.

Nicholas Kristof — presented to an audience of 1000 people what he has learned from speaking with women and girls in developing countries the connection between the safety and education of women and girls and the success of the community. His books Half the Sky and A Path Appears illustrate the challenges but also the triumphs of these incredibly brave women.

Chief of Trials, Jonathan Kurland, and Campus Representative Autumn Marie Fritz spoke to an audience of 50 about the realities of sexual assault and dating violence on campus, the processes available to support survivors and the consequences for this conduct.

Victor Rivas Rivers — at our 40th Anniversary Celebration of Peace, Victor spoke to more than 400 people about his experience of unspeakable violence and abuse at the hands of his father and how he was saved from the trauma and rage he felt by teachers, coaches and other caring adults.

His moving story, “I Am the Child that the Village Raised: How Teacher, Coaches and Schools Saved and Transformed my Life” meted our audience and inspired us all to ensure no one in our Berks Community suffers this violence. Victor’s book, A Private Family Matter, shows why domestic violence and sexual assault are community problems requiring community solutions.

We could not have accomplished all we did during our 40th Anniversary Celebration without the tremendous support of the following companies, groups and individuals...
40th Anniversary Celebration of Peace: A Tribute to the Past and a Look to the Future

The 40th Anniversary Celebration of Peace held at the DoubleTree Hilton was a wonderful opportunity to honor BWIC’s founding and evolution to an important community resource. A retrospective of the events of the Healthy Village Project produced by Turning Point Video began the evening on high note. Host, Julia Klein thanked the audience of more than 400 including those that sponsored, supported and worked not only on the 40th Anniversary but for decades in support of the work of BWIC.

The evolution of the agency was movingly portrayed in a TimeLine Video produced by VA Productions. Voices for Change Award Recipients Kelly Gage Mocey and Gwen Gage and the Kindness Coalition had their contributions illustrated and provided inspiring words of why they support the work to eliminate domestic violence and sexual assault.

The 40th Anniversary street fair-themed event concluded with the announcement that Berks Women in Crisis will now be known as Safe Berks. The new name and look reflects the agencies commitment to serving all victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault.

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Victor Rivas Rivers: Author, Actor, Activist

Victor Rivas Rivers, guest speaker, shared his emotional story of physical and emotional abuse at the hands of his father. Rivers holds the audience in suspense as he relates: “A 14 year old boy walks into a police station and strips naked to show the bruises, broken bones and burns all over his body. That boy was me and I was told ‘it is a private family matter’”. Forced to leave home and rely on the kindness of friends’ families, coaches and teachers, Rivers succeeds in getting to college, playing professional football, and in creating a successful acting career. His finest accomplishment, he says, his son, who had just graduated Harvard University. Rivers book “A Private Family Matter” is required reading for anyone who believes the violence that happens in our homes, relationships, on our campuses and in our communities is all of our business and requires us all to do our part.

Internship Opportunities

We work with interns from several local and regional colleges and universities, offering hands-on experience at Safe Berks. It is our goal to make this a mutually beneficial experience for both our interns, the individuals that we serve, and Safe Berks. The majority of colleges and universities have specific requirements that allow interns to receive appropriate credits for an internship experience.

We provide many different internships and placements within Safe Berks. Some examples of
The vision of Safe Berks is to eliminate domestic violence and sexual assault in Berks County.

- Crisis Services
- Residential Services
- Education and Outreach
- Counseling
- Legal Services
- Systems Advocacy

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Saturday, April 29, 2017-3PM
Please Join Us at the First Energy Stadium
All walk participants will receive a general admission to:
Reading Fightins vs. Portland Sea Dogs at 6:05PM
Participants will raise funds to support Safe Berks’ core services and programs.

To join a fundraising team, or form your own, visit: www.crowdrise.com/2017WalkForNoMore

Donate Now
The DONATE NOW button, found on our website, is a convenient way to designate donations for use as needed or for specific appeals or campaigns. Training or program registrations can also be processed using electronic funds transfer, and donor receipts are generated immediately via email. The official registration and financial information of Safe Berks may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1.800.732.0999 Registration does imply endorsement.

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