



# CENTER FOR WOMEN IN TRANSITION

## Q&A with MARY KARR



Mary Karr, our special guest speaker at Reach for the Stars 2013, is the author of New York Times bestselling memoirs “The Liars’ Club” and “Lit.” A survivor of sexual assault and dating violence, and a recovering alcoholic, Karr is a former Guggenheim Fellow in poetry and has received a Pushcart Prize for her writing.

**Q** In recent years you’ve become very open about your experiences with sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and alcoholism. What that openness always there?

**A** No, I think like most survivors I was ashamed... When I was first in therapy I was only able to talk about the experience in this glib, jokey way, and I didn’t have that much empathy for myself. That’s the problem. When I finally got sober, and finally spoke with other drunks, I saw the candor of people talking about some of the same things that had happened to me – and it gave me such strength.

**Q** What was it like when you first started to share your story?

**A** Initially I sort of hated everyone... they all sounded like “I’m so happy to be grateful to be thankful to be sober.” And I didn’t feel that way. So my spiritual director said, “Why don’t you go in and tell everyone how stupid they sound?” And so I did – and then all these people came over and said “I used to feel that way” and “This is what I did.”

Suddenly I realized that if you don’t tell people how you feel... when people tell you that they care about you or they love you, it never sinks in because they don’t really know who you are.

**Q** You just write them off?

**A** Yeah. You say to yourself “They don’t know how dark I am.” So I was like a starved flower who had lived in this really isolated, really cut-off way. So for me to say what was going on with me and have them respond to me was like pouring water on a plant. It felt so good! I thought “so this is why people aren’t really depressed all the time—because they’re connected to other people.”

**Q** Telling the story is one thing; hearing it is another. How can we respond well to people who are survivors of this kind of abuse?

**A** I think the problem is that people feel so strange and feel so “other” – they’re going to think it’s their fault, especially those who were assaulted as children. One of the simplest things that I always try to say is “I’m really sorry that happened to you... You shouldn’t have had to go through that. That’s not fair.”

Also, people need stuff to do. For me, I try to help women with little kids, because my son was a toddler when I stopped drinking. Doing things that are nurturing actually makes you feel nurtured. Or teach people to take a hot bath, or write in a journal, call someone else. That’s self-nurturing.

The other thing is prayer and meditation and, obviously, therapy—someone to help you on the journey. I don’t think I’d be alive without these things.



## DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Spring awakens our senses to sights, sounds, and scents of a new season. Longer sunny days, chirping birds, and blooming flowers mark the beginning of a new time for us. In April we had an opportunity to awaken our minds and our sense of connection in the world. Two major awareness campaigns, Child Abuse Prevention and Sexual Assault Awareness, happen in the month of April. Throughout the community we wore teal ribbons, planted pinwheel gardens, and wore denim to speak out against such acts of violence. Although commemorated across

different agencies such as the Center for Women in Transition and Children's Advocacy Center, these campaigns have a shared purpose – to stop the exploitation and physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of children and adults. These awareness campaigns bring organizations and people together because we recognize that such abuse doesn't just harm individuals. It erodes the fabric of our relationships with one another and damages our families and communities.

As we open our eyes and ears to the newness of Spring, I thank you also for opening your minds and hearts to victims and survivors of abuse. As the sun shines a little bit longer every day, I invite you to join us as we provide hope and healing to survivors and strengthen the fabric of our community.

Charisse Mitchell  
Executive Director



Katie Kilmartin  
Trauma therapist

## Welcome

We welcome Katie Kilmartin as our new trauma therapist. Katie previously worked with Pathways and with LACASA, an agency in Livingston County providing services to victims of domestic and sexual abuse. A graduate of Olivet College and Oakland University, Katie has worked primarily with women and children in counseling for sexual assault and domestic violence, support groups, case management, on crisis lines, and in emergency shelter. Katie tells us, "I'm thrilled to be in a position (at the Center) where I can help women and children. I'm thankful for the positive, uplifting energy of other staff and volunteers." Outside of work, Katie enjoys kayaking, hiking, cooking and spending time with her dog Larry.



The Center for Women in Transition's mission is to respond to, reduce, and prevent domestic and sexual violence against women. This mission will be achieved through education, collaboration, and advocacy with crisis and supportive services to victims and survivors.

Email: [mail@aplaceforwomen.org](mailto:mail@aplaceforwomen.org)  
Website: [www.aplaceforwomen.org](http://www.aplaceforwomen.org)

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The Center for Women in Transition is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.



# VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION

Each week volunteers give 223 hours of their time and talents to the Center

Last year our volunteers donated 11,559 hours of their time. This translates to at least \$96,469 worth of time and talents.

“We simply could not function as an agency without the support of our community, especially the individuals who form our core volunteer group,” says Sherry Martens, the Center’s volunteer coordinator. Since beginning her role 5 years ago, Sherry has helped bring hundreds of individuals into contact with the agency. After a two-week introduction and training, volunteers chose from jobs like crisis line support, sexual assault advocacy, reception coverage, Wardrobe to Work, fundraising/event planning, and Girls on the Run.

Karen Pieper is a long-term volunteer, “I chose to volunteer at Center for Women in Transition to give back to my community and specifically to help women. The focus is on empowering clients and I’m proud to be part of that process. I feel that I get back much more than I give.”

Thank you to all our volunteers for your support of our work. We couldn’t do it without you!



This year the Center chose to honor our volunteers by hosting a “Denim and Diamonds” open house on April 24. This event also happened to fall on Denim Day, an international movement recognized each year on April 24. For more information visit: <http://denimdayusa.org/>

## THANK YOU!



The annual Girls on the Run/Girls on Track 5k celebration run was May 17 at Grand Valley State University. The celebration run is a culmination of a 10 week after school program that builds self esteem, confidence, and promotes healthy lifestyles. Congratulations to everyone who participated, and thank you to our event sponsors and volunteers!

- » The Center recently received donations from a local food drive. Food from this drive will stock pantries at our emergency shelter and the Holland Program Office for the upcoming year. Thank you **Nelis’ Dutch Village** for coordinating this incredible gift for us!
- » Thank you to the Allegan County Community Foundation for their generous support of the Center’s programs and services and to the Foundation’s Teens Aiding Growth for supporting our Girls on the Run program. We appreciate and value their thoughtful gifts.
- » **MAY BASKETS**  
Each May, the Center collects donations for May baskets. Gifts of household and personal care items are arranged in laundry hampers and given to Center clients. Thank you to everyone who supports our May Basket program!

# Reach for the Stars



Robyn Hofmeyer



Greg McCoy



Doug and Sandy DeKock,  
Justin Genzink and  
Andrea DeKock



Dave and Jane Armstrong



Janel and Mike Hagerty





Jeff and Tracy McMartin and guests



Sarah Lilly, Annie and Charlie Sterken



Ruben and Naiyana Juarez



Mary Karr and Charisse Mitchell



Aaron DeWitt



Matt and Jodie Haverdink and guests

THANK YOU

The Center would like to extend our appreciation to the following sponsors:

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# SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICES

According to the 2010 National Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence Survey, more than 1 in 3 women and more than 1 in 4 men in the United States have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime. The Center offers several services to victims of rape, including therapy, legal services, and our sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) program.

We offer free sexual assault therapy to male and female victims age 13 and older, giving survivors a safe and supportive environment to process their thoughts. Katie Kilmartin, trauma therapist, explains:

“Victims often need a safe, confidential, and most importantly judgment-free space in which to work through their feelings. Therapy offers all of these, as well as providing tools for the client to begin the healing process.”

Legal advocacy assists victims of sexual assault as they navigate the legal system. A trained advocate advises clients on filling Personal Protection Orders (PPO), informs victims of their rights, and on occasion provides courtroom support.

Our SANE program addresses medical and emotional needs of recent victims of sexual assault. Together, Center services for victims of sexual assault embrace a holistic view of healing.



If you, or someone you know, needs sexual assault services please contact the Center via our 24-hours crisis line: 616.392.1970.

## SANE exam step-by-step



We receive many questions about our Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) program. To provide answers, we sat down with Tara Blandford-Mayberry, the SANE program coordinator and a registered forensic nurse.

### What is a SANE nurse?

IAFN (International Association of Forensic Nurses) defines a SANE nurse as a “registered Nurse who has advanced education in forensic examination of sexual assault victims.” There are currently 10 nurses who participate in the SANE program at the Center.

### Who can receive a SANE exam?

Any individual age 13 and older, male or female, who has survived a sexual assault within the last 96 hours. Sometimes that time frame can be extended if the individual just got away from the person who assaulted them and they have not showered or changed their clothes.

## THE FACTS

69

Sexual Assault Nurse Examinations (SANE) performed in 2012

146

personal protection orders were issued in the last fiscal year

59

people sought out specialized sexual assault therapy services in the last fiscal year

# IN THE COMMUNITY

## Could you take us through a typical SANE exam?

The client contacts the Center by calling the 24-hour crisis line or coming to our Holland office. Once we are notified there is a patient in need of an exam, a sexual assault advocate explains the exam process and obtains consent from the patient. The advocate also contacts the SANE nurse on call who speaks with the patient directly, obtains verbal consent, screens the patient for any possible medical needs and sets a time to meet. Upon the patient's arrival to the office written consent is obtained and the exam begins.

The first part of the exam covers basic information - name, date of birth, allergies, medications, surgeries, health problems. Next we cover the history of the patient's assault. The history provided by the patient guides all aspects of the physical exam. The patient is always asked if they know who assaulted them as a way of assessing safety. Since most persons are assaulted by someone they know, we may need to assist the patient in obtaining safe shelter.

With permission, the third step is a head-to-toe exam with documentation of any injuries and complaints of pain. Photos of injury and/or swabs of body areas will be taken with patient consent. The final step is a genital exam, performed only with patient consent and guided by the history of assault provided by the patient.

Before leaving, all patients are provided with referrals for follow-up services, including counseling, provided by the Center and/or other community resources.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**SEPTEMBER 7, 2013**  
Le Style de Vie



**For more information  
about these events, please  
call the Center at 616.494.1744.**

\*Annual Reports are now available! The Center's 2012 Annual Report, featuring statistics and program data from the past fiscal year can be picked up at our Holland Program Center, 411 Butternut Dr, Holland. Can't stop by? Give us a call at 616.494.1744 and we'll mail a copy to you.

## What is the difference between receiving an exam in the hospital and receiving an exam with the SANE program at the Center?

With the SANE program the patient meets with a specially-trained SANE nurse and a supportive advocate in a private setting. Police are called only with patient consent (provided the patient is over the age of 16). We can also hold evidence while the patient decides whether they want to involve the police or not, whereas in most

hospitals the police have to be called to secure the evidence. In short, the SANE program gives specialized attention to the patient in an atmosphere that is all about empowering the victim.

## Any other information you feel people ought to know about the SANE program?

All of our services are provided free of charge. We are on-call 24/7 and ready to help.



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CENTER FOR  
WOMEN IN  
TRANSITION

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## BUY A BRICK

Mark your commitment to ending domestic and sexual violence through a permanently installed commemorative brick.

For more information, call Ellie at (616) 494-1744 or email [ellied@aplaceforwomen.org](mailto:ellied@aplaceforwomen.org)

## WHAT'S INSIDE

### Interview with Mary Karr

New York Times bestselling author and survivor of domestic violence and sexual assault

### Reach for the Stars

Photo recap

### Sexual Assault Services at the Center