



CENTER FOR WOMEN IN TRANSITION

INTERVIEW WITH 2014 Reach keynote speaker



**LESLIE
MORGAN
STEINER**

Was there a moment when you made the decision to speak publicly about your past? Or was your openness always there?

No, the openness wasn't always there—I couldn't really talk about what had happened to me for about five years. Ultimately I wrote [Crazy Love] to explain it to myself, and still the book took me 10 years to write. The night before my book was set to go to print, I got cold feet; my friends urged me not to do it. But I decided that I have an obligation to speak—I have to break the silence about what happened to me and why it's so hard to leave.

Telling a story is one thing, hearing it is another. What does it look like to respond well when survivors of abuse tell their stories?

I think you just have to listen and love; even if we look tough and strong we're often so fragile. At the time, my friends said to me "I love you, and I need to know—really—that you're okay." And that got through to me, because they were talking about themselves, not attacking him.

You come from a pretty stable economic background... How did your experience of domestic violence affect your financial situation?

Part of the trap was that I had left my job in New York and I only had one car. Conor's [my ex-husband] credit was bad, so I had taken out more than \$100K in student loans and other debt in my name. When we divorced, I also had to give him a lump sum settlement to make him go away. It was an awful part of the story, and I don't think people know enough about that. That was an important part of how hard it was to rebuild my life.

I know you have two daughters and one son. How do you talk with them about these issues?

I spoke with my kids about my divorce, framing it in a way they could understand, from a very young age. When they were five, and first asked about divorce, I explained that Mommy used to be married, but the man I was married to was mean and hit me, and you can't stay with someone who is mean to you, so I had to divorce him.

Any advice you'd give to other parents when it comes to talking about these issues?

Abuse thrives in silence, so I think it's so important to talk with daughters and sons about these issues. Relationship violence happens in every community. So educate yourself about the red flags and talk to your kids as openly as you possibly can. Talk to them today.

Sexual Assault Awareness Month ALONG THE LAKESHORE



In April, we commemorated Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM). Our agency set a goal to raise awareness about the prevalence of sexual assault and ask our community to get involved in preventing violence.

In the Tri-Cities, we set up our Clothesline Project in both the Ottawa County Courthouse and in Loutit Library. Clothesline Project is a national program that began in 1990 as a way to empower victims of domestic and sexual violence. Survivors decorate a t-shirt with a message or artwork. The activity is both emotionally healing and therapeutic for survivors and an incredible testimony for those who view the shirts. Visitors to the courthouse or the library saw some inspiring messages created by local victims of abuse.

In Holland, we recruited downtown merchants to "paint the town teal." The official color of SAAM, we asked vendors to find ways to use teal in their storefronts and windows. The response was overwhelming, with multiple local business owners joining us to take a

continued on page 3

DIRECTOR'S LETTER



The past year has been an exciting one for all of us at the Center for Women in Transition. We've been honored to work with community partners and supporters like you to respond to, reduce, and prevent domestic and sexual violence. Over the last year our Board of Directors has defined a vision for the Center that will take us into a new era of service and stewardship to end domestic and sexual violence. Looking forward, we see a whole community that is educated, engaged, and empowered to end domestic and sexual violence so that every person feels safe.

The Center sees itself not just as a responder, but as a convener, catalyst, and capacity-builder for communities, like ours, striving to end domestic and sexual violence.

With renewed energy and commitment this year, we've built capacity in the community education, engagement, and empowerment elements of our new vision.

Our vision for the agency and the community requires the Center to be a leader among many dedicated to ending domestic and sexual violence. Stronger partnerships with schools, collaborations with other service organizations, and growing financial support will allow us to make great progress toward our vision for increased community engagement in our mission.

Our goal is to provide people and organizations with the tools, resources, and skills necessary to contribute to a culture of safety and respect. Our vision is clear: we look forward to our whole community being educated, engaged, and empowered to end domestic and sexual violence. Together, we are becoming the change we want to see in the world.



Charisse Mitchell
Executive Director

Welcome

The Center welcomes Jenna Wind to the agency in her role as a domestic violence and sexual assault advocate working with clients in Ottawa and Allegan counties. She tells us,

“ I'm thrilled to be here. Empowering and validating survivors is very rewarding work and I feel honored to be a part of this great organization. ”

Jenna recently graduated from Grand Valley State University with a Master's degree in Social Work. When she's not working, Jenna spends time with her inquisitive preschooler Jasper, enjoys riding her bike, and searches for great deals while online shopping.



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.

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Charisse Mitchell

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



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A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

Survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault have complex needs. In order to best serve our clients, the Center uses a trauma-informed approach. What does that mean? When we interact with clients, we actively work to recognize and respond to the impact of trauma on the whole person – mentally, emotionally, physically, and even biologically. Emerging research confirms that certain types of trauma, particularly violent trauma, have a significant and profound impact on brain development. As the brain changes, so too do emotional responses. Victims of trauma often have a different way of relating to and functioning in the world around them as a result of the trauma they have experienced.

Our therapy practice incorporates many trauma-informed approaches. As our therapists meet with clients, they focus on the unique needs of each individual. Some things they might consider: where is the person in the healing process, what situations might trigger a trauma response, and what coping strategies will aid them in their healing process? Every therapy treatment plan has a common goal of healing, but our Center therapists customize plans to accommodate for individual differences in experiences and reactions to trauma.

Katie Kilmartin, trauma therapist here at the Center, likens the process to peeling an onion. “I know it seems an unlikely analogy, but actually it fits the work we do quite well. The client and I work together to peel back layers in his or her experience and history. We stop at any layers that seem tough, anything that causes difficulty.” Katie further explains that trauma therapy is not just talking about the singular experience. Instead, “we talk about all the senses involved, all the triggers. We pay attention to body language or gestures and what that might mean. Healing isn’t just about telling the story; it’s about sharing the story and processing it so the past doesn’t control you anymore.”

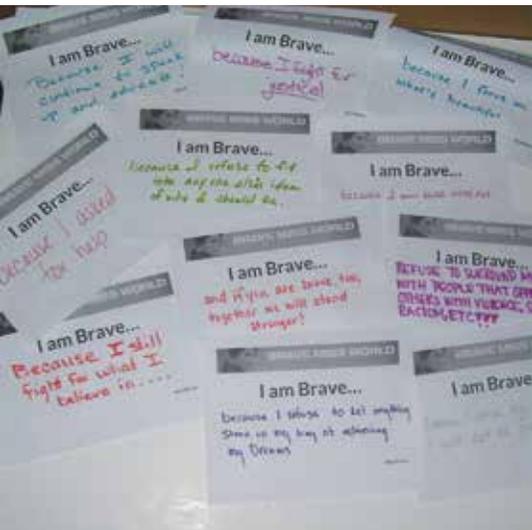


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stand against sexual violence. Canterbury Cottage and Kids, Chico’s, DesignWorks Interiors, Globe Design and Vision, jb & me, Michigan Pantry, Moynihan, Muriel’s, Sandcastle, Teerman’s, The Bag Lady, Threads on 8th and White House/Black Market all joined our efforts.



As part of our volunteer appreciation evening, we screened the movie, “Brave Miss World.” The film tells the story of “Miss Israel” Linor Abargil, who was abducted, stabbed and raped six weeks before winning the title of Miss World in 1998. Since her attack, Linor has been an outspoken advocate for women and survivors of sexual violence.





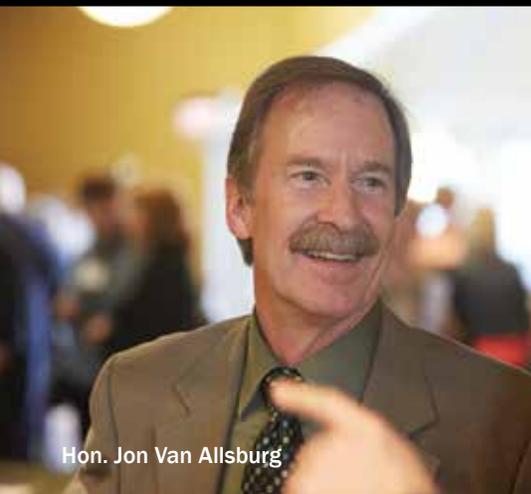
Adams Elementary Girls on the Run team greets guests



Carol Myers with Exec. Director Charisse Mitchell



Dave and Jane Armstrong with Phil Miller



Hon. Jon Van Allsburg

Reach for the Stars

gala & auction

Photographer, Michael Overbeek



Katy Nguyen with Amanda Brooks



Exec. Director Charisse Mitchell



Holland Mayor Kurt Dykstra



Auctioneer Chuck Ranney



Thank you to our Reach for the Stars sponsors for their generous support of the event and our agency. Our work would not be possible without you!

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A former client at Center for Women in Transition receives a standing ovation



Keynote speaker Leslie Morgan Steiner



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VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN SCHOOLS

Center for Women in Transition pilots new partnership

1 in 3

adolescents in the U.S. experiences physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner.

Source: LovelisRespect.org

As part of our mission to prevent domestic and sexual violence, the Center is working to create a culture of violence prevention in Allegan and Ottawa county schools. This past year the Center began offering a Violence Prevention Inventory assessment for local schools at no cost. Based on the results of this inventory, the Center works alongside schools to enhance or develop a violence prevention curriculum and provides resources to enhance staff training, programs or policies.

During the 2013-14 school year, our agency piloted this new assessment with Spring Lake High School. Mike Gilchrist, Spring Lake High School principal, describes the process from his perspective:



This year CWIT's survey and assessment has become the focal point for Spring Lake High School. When I first saw the survey results I was surprised how unaware kids were about sexting, stalking; a lot of kids weren't even aware that we have a bullying policy—and we do. The report we received from CWIT was concise and very well done. It has really made us better.

I would tell any school administrator who's considering a partnership with CWIT: This survey will absolutely improve the culture and climate of your building. It's useful, it's policy-changing, and it will change your culture. It would be an error not to do it.



For more info, call Lesley Coghill, prevention coordinator at 616-494-1741

CONNECTING, LEARNING, HEALING: The Power of Support Groups

Support groups have long been used as an effective format for women in unhealthy relationships to connect with one another, give and receive encouragement, and share coping mechanisms. One of the most powerful things a support group can do is reduce isolation. Unhealthy relationships by their nature are extremely isolating. Social ties can be cut forcibly by the abusive partner who restricts or discourages the person from interacting with family and friends. Also, feelings of shame and embarrassment about the problems in the relationship prevent people from reaching out to others. This is one of the most damaging aspects of emotional abuse.

Social support networks are essential to human well-being. They provide people with a sense of security, a source of strength, and feelings of belongingness. Without a strong social support network, a person's mental and physical health is likely to decline. They are at risk for suffering from depression, feelings of hopelessness and loneliness, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Support groups at Center for Women in Transition help members to re-establish important human connections. We provide education about the power and control dynamics in unhealthy and/or violent relationships, the effects those relationships have on the children who are exposed to them and how to plan for safety in a potentially violent situation.

While all of our groups are facilitated by professionally trained advocates, the real benefit comes from the participants connecting with one another. Newer members benefit from hearing success stories and getting reassurance from other members. Women who have been in the group longer feel empowered from the recognition of how far they have come. Many mistakenly think our support groups are only for women who have been physically abused; however, our groups are extremely helpful for anyone who has lived through or is currently living through a verbally or emotionally abusive relationship and wants to learn more about healthy relationships. We recognize that emotional wounds do not disappear overnight. The pain can persist for a long time, sometimes long after the relationship has ended. We are here to listen, support, and offer a safe space for women to connect with one another so they can heal and grow.



IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT CWIT SUPPORT GROUPS

All of our support groups are completely confidential and offered free of charge.

We offer childcare and a light meal for all of our evening groups.

There is no obligation to share your story; you are welcome to just listen if you would like.

Our summer group cycle meets each Thursday from July 10th through August 28th. This is an open group and new members are welcome at any time.

Please call our confidential 24 hour crisis line: 616-392-1970 for meeting times and additional information.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our [2013 Report to the Community](#) is now available. This short publication highlights some of our services and programs, provides agency financial info, and features a client story. If you would like a copy mailed to your home, please call 616.494.1744.

Is someone you know celebrating a birthday or anniversary? Would you like to cement your commitment to ending abuse? Give us a call at 616-494-1756 to learn more about our [commemorative brick program](#).

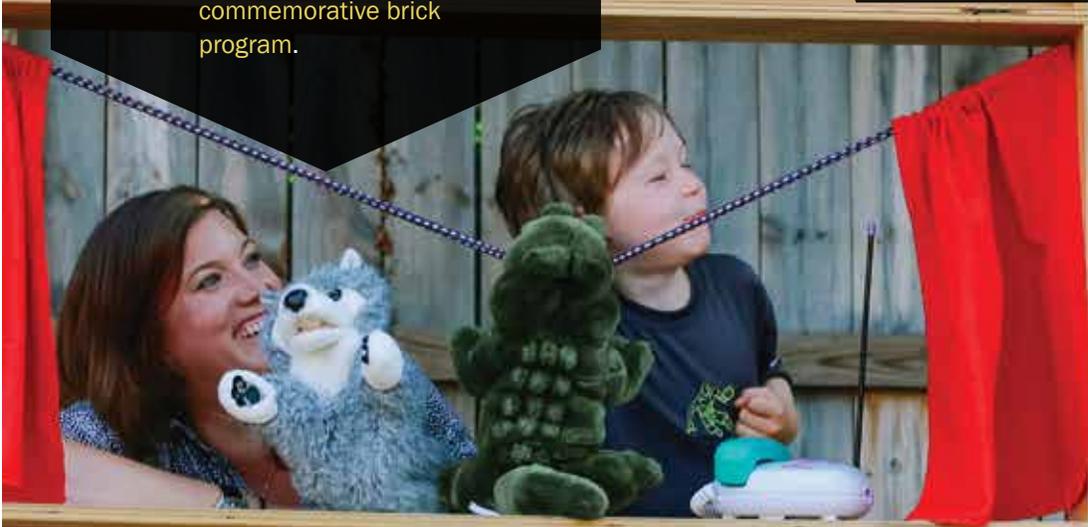
IN THE COMMUNITY

LE STYLE DE VIE - Sept. 6

Save the date! Hosts Butch's Dry Dock, Globe Design and Vision, and Studio K Clothing Company bring you a night of wine and design at the twelfth annual Le Style de Vie. Mark your calendars now – Saturday, September 13th with doors opening at 5pm.

BEACON OF HOPE: GIN AND JAZZ - Oct. 17

Tri-Cities residents – save the date! Beacon of Hope: Gin and Jazz will be swinging into the Spring Lake County Club on Friday, October 17. We'll see you there ready to party like it's 1929!



THANK YOU

Thank you to the [Holland Junior Welfare League](#)! Their generous gifts to our children's therapy room renovation and our Girls on the Run program will allow us to continue our outreach to local youth.

We're grateful for two grants made by the [Allegan County Community Foundation](#) supporting our Girls on the Run program and client assistance. Thank you!

The [American Association of University Women Holland](#) recently provided a grant towards our Girls on the Run program. We thank them for their ongoing support.

Our [May Basket campaign](#) was a success, with more than 50 women receiving baskets full of household products and self-care items. Thank you to the donors and volunteers who make this project possible for our agency.

Our agency was honored to participate once again in the [Holland Postal Food Drive](#). This annual food collection is a huge blessing for our agency, stocking the shelves of our emergency shelter with non-perishable food items and guaranteeing residents a warm meal. Thank you to everyone who participated!



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CENTER FOR
WOMEN IN
TRANSITION

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Congratulations

to more than 1,600 girls
who participated in Girls
on the Run this season!



Reach for the Stars 2014

Violence Prevention in Schools

Trauma-Informed Therapy