





## DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Art. According to the Oxford Dictionary, it is the “expression or application of human creative skill and imagination...producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power.”

Over the last several months I have seen the beauty of art, and its ability to tell powerful stories about domestic and sexual violence. As you might expect, these are stories of fear and tragedy, but there are also stories of strength, hope, and courage.

Last fall, students from Spring Lake High School wrote essays focused on the theme “Words Have Power.” Other students participated in research projects and created stunning collages for the question, “Why Should I Care?” Survivors in our domestic and sexual violence support groups took pictures representing what healing means to them, what inspires them - expressing feelings which have been kept silent for so long.

You can see some of these beautiful visual and written works of art in our Holland program offices and in this newsletter.

These artists have taken intensely personal experiences and thoughts and turned them into art that encourage us all to think, feel, and make our own contribution toward ending domestic and sexual violence. For all the artists who offer up their experiences for public viewing – thank you. You help us recognize the many faces of domestic and sexual violence. As art transcends our most painful experiences, I believe that together we can rise above abuse to build a stronger, more beautiful community. Today, art is leading the way.

*Charisse Mitchell*

Charisse Mitchell  
Executive Director

## Welcome back

The Center welcomes back Shyla Bryan as the new Council Director for Girls on the Run Ottawa/Allegan Counties. Shyla previously worked with Girls on the Run as both an intern and later as a Program Assistant. She tells us, “I quickly grew to love the Girls on the Run program, and developed a passion for working with girls in the community. I am thrilled to come back as the Program Coordinator, and to continue our work inspiring young women in Ottawa and Allegan counties to be healthy and confident.”

Outside of work, Shyla enjoys spending time with her Yorkie, Toby, as well as various hobbies such as crafting, sewing, and scrapbooking.



CENTER FOR  
WOMEN IN  
TRANSITION

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@cwitmi.org](mailto:mail@cwitmi.org)  
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## SAVE THE DATE

Girls on the Run celebration 5k will take place **Friday, May 30** at the Grand Valley State University Allendale campus.

## BUILDING STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Girls on the Run of Ottawa and Allegan counties (GOTR), which serves girls in 3rd-8th grades, is exploring a new partnership. Realizing the opportunity they have to reach out to young women at a crucial point in their development, Girls on the Run will be integrating the Center’s violence prevention and healthy relationships training into their curriculum.

A little background on the Girls on the Run program for those who might not know – the Center oversees the local Girls on the Run program, and GOTR operates from a space in the Holland Program Center. However, they remain independent in that each chapter also subscribes to a charter developed by national headquarters. The Center’s partnership with Girls on the Run began in 2001, after the realization that our two missions intersect in important ways.

As the Center continues its commitment to violence prevention by integrating healthy

relationships language into several services, Girls on the Run was a natural fit. Lesley Coghill, the Center’s Prevention Coordinator, explains, “Girls on the Run gives us the opportunity to prevent future victims of violence by empowering participants to make healthy choices in all areas of life.”

In the future, Lesley and Shyla Bryan, Girls on the Run Council Director, would like to explore a more focused approach to our prevention work with area youth. One of the methods they are considering is educating Girls on the Run coaches to talk meaningfully about healthy relationships and respect, and adding those topics to the curriculum.

Data from the Ottawa County Youth Assessment Survey (YAS), which surveys young men and women in 8th, 10th, and 12th grades, brings powerful background information about the need for early intervention and healthy relationships curriculum. Results from the survey show the percentage of young women that have

experienced bullying (29.2%), had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13 (26.9%), and been hit, slapped, or physically hurt by a girlfriend or boyfriend in the past 12 months (6.9%).

Lesley tells us, “Many of the GOTR coaches are active, healthy people who can talk about body image and nutrition easily. However, it can be more difficult to approach the topic of respect and healthy relationships in an age-appropriate, meaningful way. Center training gives them the tools to accomplish this.”

Learning about healthy relationships benefits not only the young girls participating in the program, but also the coaches, volunteers, and community members who facilitate Girls on the Run. Educating and empowering our young women strengthens our local community.



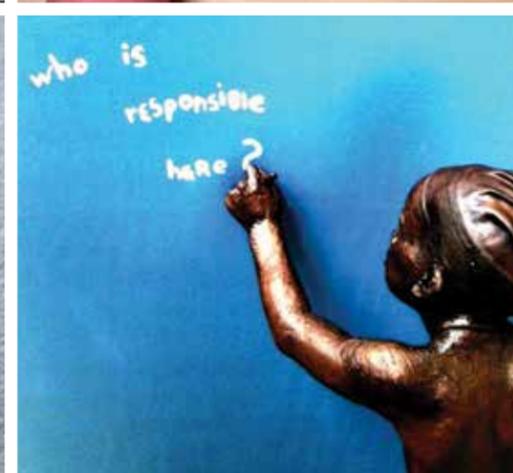
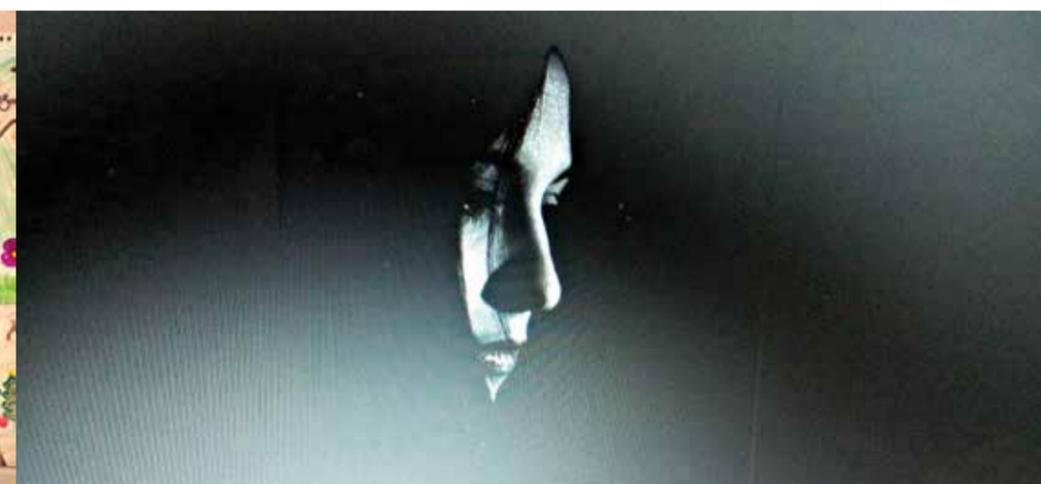
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**FINDING HER VOICE**

The images you see here were part of a project known as “photo voice.” What is photo voice? It’s a tool commonly used during therapeutic sessions designed to empower the participant(s). Group members are asked to take photos which represent their individual story and healing process. It provides a structured way to express ideas and emotions by asking the participants to answer a question(s) without using verbal expression. Holly Wilson, Clinical Director at the Center explains, “When survivors are coping with internal chaos and a sense of powerlessness, photography offers a way to take control of the emotion. It also asks them to focus in a different way, to examine their feelings differently.”

The photos on this page were taken by clients in a sexual assault survivor therapy group this past summer. Clients used either a phone camera or a camera provided through donations, and spent time exploring and answering the questions posed to them.

- Some of these questions were:
- What in my life represents healing?
  - What helps you feel safe?
  - What is your motivation? What fuels you?
  - What is something you dream of?
  - Something that relaxes you?

As they worked on the project, participants built friendships, created support networks, and engaged in dialogue about what the project meant to them. Holly explains, “Telling and sharing stories with pictures enabled the women to explore meanings, memories, significance, and helped the women explore their identity and self view.” At the close of the group session, client photos were placed into books and given to them to keep.



## TRI-CITIES CELEBRATION

On October 10, 2013 the agency hosted our second annual Beacon of Hope event in the Tri-Cities. Beginning with an extended cocktail hour and silent auction, the evening's jovial mood followed into the later portion of the program. Several students who participated in the summer intensive learning program iChallengeU, spoke about their realizations after partnering with the Center for two weeks in July, and what action they were taking to help prevent domestic and sexual violence in their communities.

Local teachers Jennifer Knittel (Spring Lake High School) and Tom Foley (Grand Haven High School) gave a more in-depth look at the Center's violence prevention partnership with Spring Lake Schools, and the importance of educating students and staff about respect. Board member Jeff McMartin offered a moving call-to-action about why, as the father of three young girls, he values our agency and its many services.

Beacon of Hope was an excellent point of outreach and education in the Tri-Cities, and it also raised much-needed funds. Silent and live auctions, sponsorship, and donations at the event, raised over \$34,000 for the agency.



Photographer, Michael Overbeek

*Thank you*  
to our generous  
sponsors and  
supporters for  
the Beacon of  
Hope event!

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Sweet Temptations

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Thanks to a generous donor, our children's therapy room is about to undergo a facelift. We've got big plans for the space, and we'll keep you updated via our Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/cwit.mi](http://www.facebook.com/cwit.mi)

Doing some spring cleaning and wondering what our agency needs? Check out our website [cwitmi.org/get-involved/wish-list/](http://cwitmi.org/get-involved/wish-list/) to see our current wish list. As always, we'll appreciate your donation.

We're continuing our commemorative brick program this year. Is someone you know celebrating a special 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 this program.

## Thank you

2013 was a challenging year for our agency as we received cuts in grant funding totaling over \$100,000. We're pleased to report that after sharing this news with you, we were overwhelmed by an outpouring of support. Thanks to your efforts, our recent December appeal surpassed our goal by \$20,000! To all who made a contribution of time, talent, or treasure, to support our agency in the past year – thank you.

**i** If you haven't yet made a gift to support our programs and services, visit [cwitmi.org/donate](http://cwitmi.org/donate) today!

Adopt a Family 2013 was a huge success! Our local community came together to support our clients, providing over 85 families with items from their holiday wish list. Thank you to everyone who participated.

We send our thanks to Back to Health Chiropractic Wellness Center for selecting us as their nonprofit partner of the year in 2013. Their efforts raised \$21,966.00 in combined monetary and in-kind donations for local victims of abuse.

We're grateful for a grant of \$20,000 towards the agency's violence prevention initiatives. This grant was made possible by the Elmer "Lou" Dense and Marion A. & Ruth K. Sherwood Family Fund of the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation.

Thank you to Bodhi Tree Yoga and Wellness Studio for their support of the Center during the month of January. We appreciate the chance to partner with local community members in achieving wellness for all.

We are thankful for an award from The Community Share – A Gentex Charitable Fund of the Community Foundation of the Holland/Zeeland Area to support Emergency Shelter. This compassionate gift helps provide brighter futures to survivors of domestic violence.

## IN THE COMMUNITY

### RUN LARRY RUN!

On January 25, Larry Erlandson ran 65 miles in celebration of his 65th birthday. But that's not all...he also raised funds for Girls on the Run and Total Trek Quest (operated by Pathways, MI). On behalf of all of us here at the Center, thank you, Larry, and Happy Birthday!

### RISE WITH US!

On February 14, West Michigan will join communities around the world, performing a choreographed dance calling for an end to violence against women. This event will take place at the Grand Valley State University Allendale campus. For more information, visit [cwitmi.org/get-involved/events/](http://cwitmi.org/get-involved/events/).

### GIRLFRIENDS WEEKEND RAFFLE

The Haworth Inn & Conference Center in downtown Holland is donating proceeds from their Girlfriends Weekend raffle to the Center for Women in Transition. Tickets are \$10 each, and each ticket provides a chance to win a stay at the Inn during the 2015 Girlfriend's Weekend. Purchase your ticket at the Inn on Saturday, March 8 and join us for high tea to see if you are the lucky winner.



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**Reach for the Stars 2014**

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Violence Prevention**