

# 2015

## COMMUNITY REPORT

### CENTER FOR WOMEN IN TRANSITION

## LIFE-CHANGING SAFETY AND SUPPORT

*Lisa, one of our clients from the Grand Haven area, has participated in services at Center for Women in Transition for several years.*

*This fall, she offered to share her story publicly. Her name has been changed to protect her identity, but the words below are hers alone.*

He had his arms wrapped around her neck. He was choking her, until everything suddenly went black. Everything felt fuzzy when she came to, as though she was in a dream. Confused and trying to gain her bearings, she looked at him. He had a glazed-over look in his eyes but he was screaming at her. And then he picked up a knife. This was all because she had spilled Kool-Aid. She was only 15 years old. That girl was me.

I grew up in a two parent home in Grand Haven, Michigan. Both of my parents worked, were highly educated, and made six-figure salaries. We lived in a nice home and I got whatever I wanted.

But your wealth, education, even your race don't matter when it comes to domestic violence. Even the most fortunate amongst us can become victims. I fell prey to a man who abused me, and remained in the cycle of violence for a long time.

The physical abuse was the tip of the iceberg. The manipulation and emotional abuse were the hardest to handle. Those paved the way for the physical abuse and the downward spiral of my self-esteem. My abuser made me doubt the abuse was even happening and I wondered if I was going crazy.

We had been married seven years, with three young children, when I first considered leaving. My ex was working out of state and I saw an opportunity. Because of his control over me, I had no money, no car, and few contacts to help. A church friend who worked at Salvation Army found me emergency shelter. My husband, despite being out of state on work, quickly found out where I was and began threatening and stalking me.

My friend suggested I contact Center for Women in Transition. They immediately moved me into their secure emergency shelter. While there, they encouraged me to attend their group therapy sessions. I went once and didn't say a word.

The constant pressure of being stalked 24/7 began to get to me. My ex had a friend tail me all the way back to the shelter, forcing the facility into lockdown. He also went to my church, my friends, and even my family trying to convince them to help him. I caved in and went home.

As I was leaving, one of the Center employees became teary-eyed. She told me that the agency would always be there for me, no matter what. She warned me to prepare myself, saying that now my husband knew I was capable of leaving things were likely to get worse. She was 100 percent correct. My ex intimidated me all the time, following through on threats of physical abuse. One day it got so bad he held a gun to my head.

I snuck out one evening and attended another group therapy session. There was an older lady there, perhaps 55 or so, talking about how she had left her husband fifteen times before she was finally able to permanently leave him. At that moment I made up my mind. When I left my husband again, it would be for good. I had some hurdles to overcome such as finding a job (I had been a stay-at-home mom for the past 7 years), as well as a place to live and transportation. It wasn't easy, but CWIT put me in their transitional housing program which meant a portion of my rent was paid, I met often with a caseworker, and I was safe. I counseled with them weekly and continued attending the group therapy sessions.

Thanks to CWIT, and especially my counselor Holly, I went from being broken and abused, to going back to school and getting my business degree, to being a licensed personal banker. All of this while caring for three kids! I went from having no self-esteem at all to feeling confident even in a room of strangers. But that's not to say I'm fully healed. The devastating effects of domestic violence don't just disappear.

In the future, I would like to partner with CWIT in their work with youth. It's so important to spread the message to the young people in our community that they can and should expect respectful, healthy relationships. The fantastic work of the Center changed my life and my children's lives for the better. I want everyone to know what an amazing place it is, and how deeply I appreciate those who support their mission through financial gifts and advocacy. I cannot thank you enough.

“ It's so important to spread the message to the young people in our community that they can and should expect respectful, healthy relationships. ”

# SERVING

- Crisis intervention
- 24-hour crisis line
- Emergency shelter
- Sexual assault forensic exams
- Emergency walk-in services
- Supportive services
- Case management
- Transitional housing
- Legal advocacy
- Support groups for adults and children
- Trauma therapy for adults and children
- Wardrobe for work
- Prevention and community outreach
- Girls on the Run
- School violence prevention
- Educator training and curriculum lending
- Specialized workplace trainings
- Community presentations for churches, schools and community groups



# THE SCOPE OF OUR WORK

	2014	2015
Domestic Violence Shelter – Adults	55	61
Domestic Violence Shelter – Children	80	78
Domestic Violence Supportive Services	196	199
Transitional Housing – Adults	36	49
Transitional Housing – Children	91	102
Sexual Assault Trauma Therapy	67	62
Forensic Sexual Assault Exams	54	54
Referrals from Prosecutor's Office	292	201
Walk-ins	566	643

 Did you know that 95 volunteers donated time to our agency in 2015?



# EMPOWERMENT

Our agency's empowerment philosophy guides our service delivery. Individuals who have experienced domestic and sexual violence have had their power taken away. Our approach helps victims and survivors reclaim their power and find their voices. By building trust and rapport using empathy, encouragement, and supportive advocacy, we help individuals realize their potential and become the experts in their own lives. Staff and volunteers work hard to meet clients wherever they are in their journey; understanding that each individual has unique strengths and barriers. By honoring each person's cultural background and embracing a trauma-informed approach, we are able to best serve individuals and their families on their personal path to healing.



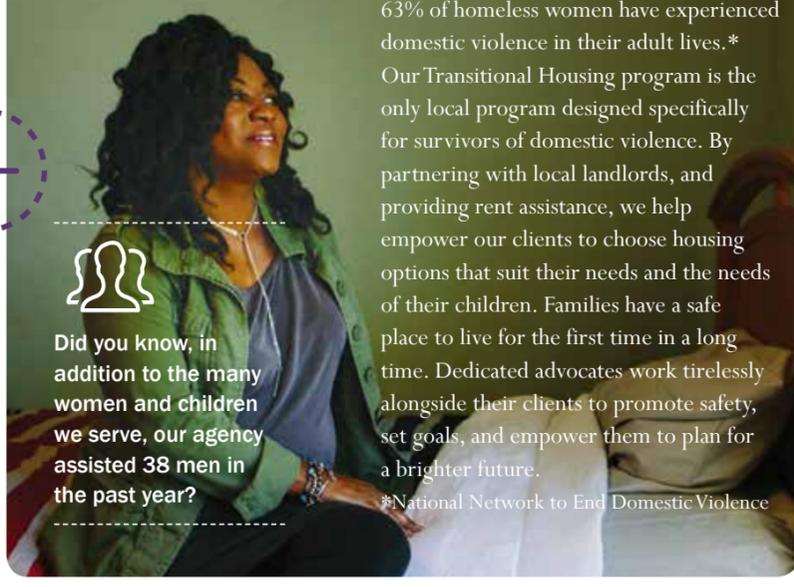
Working with victims of trauma can be stressful and emotional. Sometimes, employees and volunteers who have direct contact with clients can experience "vicarious trauma." Center for Women in Transition supports employees in practicing self-care, mindfulness, and work/life balance to reduce vicarious trauma.



# SAFETY

Domestic violence victims are often isolated from support networks and financial resources. A lack of steady income, employment, credit history, and landlord references all create obstacles to securing safe housing. Approximately 63% of homeless women have experienced domestic violence in their adult lives.\* Our Transitional Housing program is the only local program designed specifically for survivors of domestic violence. By partnering with local landlords, and providing rent assistance, we help empower our clients to choose housing options that suit their needs and the needs of their children. Families have a safe place to live for the first time in a long time. Dedicated advocates work tirelessly alongside their clients to promote safety, set goals, and empower them to plan for a brighter future.

\*National Network to End Domestic Violence



Did you know, in addition to the many women and children we serve, our agency assisted 38 men in the past year?



# PREVENTION

The Center is committed to reducing violence in our community, and much of that begins with early intervention programs and youth-centered services. Designed to end the cycle of violence, our services empower young men and women to establish healthy, respectful relationships with others. Girls on the Run (GOTR) provides lessons in healthy minds and healthy bodies for girls in 3rd-8th grades. Our partnership with local school districts gives them the tools to incorporate lessons about respect and dating violence into their curriculum. Our workplace trainings give businesses the necessary skills to take a stand against domestic violence and support employees during difficult times.



Did you know, our Girls on the Run program is the 7th largest in the nation?



Hope. That's the message we want you to take away from this annual report.

It's a fitting message for an organization which offers services to victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Each program, from our 24-hour crisis line, to legal advocacy, to children's therapy, offers hope for a better tomorrow and a brighter future.

My tenure here has made me keenly aware of three facts. One: the need in Ottawa and Allegan counties for Center services is still great. Two: cycles of violence can be interrupted. Three: there is hope.

We see hope everywhere we look. We see individuals and organizations who promote healthy relationships, believe in a safe and just environment for all people, and value community accountability.

We see incredible, passionate community members whose continuing investment in the Center's work allows families to begin lives of stability and success. As you speak up, stand up, and support agencies like the Center for Women in Transition you bring hope into many lives. Thank you.

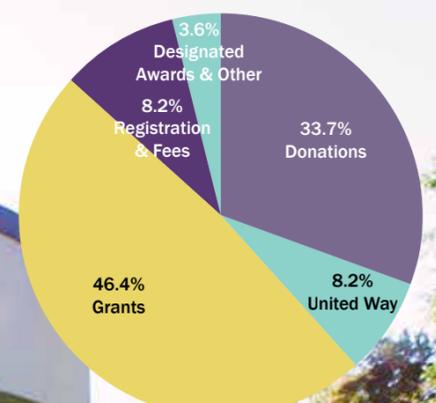
*Charisse Mitchell*

# YOUR INVESTMENT

Join us by making a gift anytime at [cwitmi.org/donate!](http://cwitmi.org/donate!)

“Our donors' generosity and support enables the Center to serve our growing client base and continue our critical violence prevention outreach.”  
—Diane Ybarra, Board President

## Revenue (Fiscal Year 2015)



## Expenses (Operating Fund)

