Recovery After Trauma: Every Survivor's Journey is Unique

As Waukesha County’s only agency of its kind in a county that spans 580 square miles, we provide programs that empower individuals with the space and safety needed to make decisions about their future, offering support and encouragement as survivors begin their healing journey.

Since our core philosophy is centered on client autonomy, we do not apply a one-size-fits-all programming model. Each individual is unique and comes to us with an equally unique set of circumstances. Customized care and support are provided based on their needs, all in a trauma-informed manner. This article highlights experiences survivors often have, written by Amanda Kippert for domesticshelters.org on January 30, 2019.

For those who have lived through the trauma of an abusive or violent partner, they may expect an instant sense of relief once they’ve escaped, a calming peace after they shut the door on that chapter of their lives.

Instead, what they can experience is sometimes completely different. Instead of tranquility, they may feel anxious. Instead of joy, they may feel guilt.

Or, they may feel nothing at all.

This, say therapists, is normal. They are emotions that come with the stages of recovery after trauma.

“Trauma recovery looks different for everyone,” says relationship therapist Amie Piekarz, LSW. “Sometimes, clients feel like there is something wrong with them, or that they are ‘failing’ at recovery because they read books and can’t relate to how others have coped.”

The Three Stages Might Look Like This

A French pioneering psychologist, Pierre Janet, outlined what many believe is the first framework for trauma recovery in the late 1800s. In 1992, psychologist Judith Herman transformed Janet’s initial ideas into a three-stage approach to understanding trauma.

**Phase One:** Safety and Stabilization.

Trauma survivors tend to feel unsafe in their bodies and in relationships with others. They may struggle with regulating... (continued inside)
Recovering After Trauma, continued

their everyday emotions, which they may not associate directly with the trauma. It may take months or even years to regain a sense of safety.

Phase Two: Remembrance and Mourning. This is when survivors may begin to process the trauma, assigning words and emotions to it to help make meaning of it. This process is best undertaken with a trained counselor or therapist. It’s important to mourn the losses associated with the trauma and give oneself space to grieve and express emotions.

Phase Three: Reconnection and Integration. Here, survivors recognize the impact of the victimization they experienced, yet begin to believe that trauma is no longer a defining principle in their life. They begin to redefine themselves in the context of meaningful relationships, create a new sense of self and create a new future. In some instances, they may find a mission through which they can heal and grow, such as mentoring or becoming an advocate for others.

If Self-Blame Is One of Your Stages
Piekarz says many domestic violence survivors she counsels come in “emotionally beaten down,” with overwhelming amounts of self-blame and confusion about who is “at fault” in the relationship.

“I think frustration more accurately describes what they are feeling,” she says. “In my most depressed clients, there is a deep sense of resignation—‘This is my life,’ ‘I don’t know how I ended up here but I did,’ etc.”

Survivors are often conditioned to be passive by their abusers—showing anger could literally put their life at risk. So to have anger over what happened isn’t a natural emotion for many survivors.

Piekarz says reclaiming their voice and learning how to not be afraid of their emotions is a significant part of her work with survivors.

Remember, Recovery Takes Time
Unfortunately, healing from trauma—no matter if the abuse lasted a few months or a few decades—is not an overnight process. Abuse can have a lifelong impact, but the severity of its effects can be lessened by getting help.

“If I have many, many clients tell me in our first session, ‘I just want to be over this and move on as fast as possible,’” says Piekarz. “While I understand, recovery just doesn’t work that way.”

If a survivor tries to rush the recovery process and not really “do the work” so to speak, they may end up continuing to deal with issues from the trauma—anxiety, depression and an increased risk of being a target for an abuser again, among them. Piekarz says there can be a lot of self-judgment about how long the process of recovery takes, so she works on validating every survivor’s unique experience.

“What’s amazing to witness is that ultimately, everyone truly does have what they need inside of them to recover, it just may take a bit of help to get there.”

If you or someone you know needs help, The Women’s Center is available around the clock -- you can reach us on our 24-Hour Hotline at 262.542.3828. or toll-free at 888.542.3828.

Advancing Advocates Council
Join the next generation of leaders committed to furthering our mission by serving as ambassadors in the community, developing service, advocacy, and outreach opportunities to benefit The Women’s Center.

Learn more and apply online by July 1 to become a member of our Advancing Advocates Council at twcwaikesha.org/advancing-advocates-council.
Nutrition & Wellness: **Nourishment For Body & Soul**

To help those we serve and those who work here make long-lasting nutrition and lifestyle choices that also enhance their well-being, The Women’s Center has established a variety of programs and initiatives related to health and wellness.

For our clients, we offer eight-week nutrition workshops several times a year through a partnership with the UW-Extension FoodWIse program. Provided in both English and Spanish, each session is taught by a trained Nutrition Educator and includes topics like “Plan, Shop, Save,” “Go Lean with Protein,” “Build Strong Bones,” and more, all focused on improving wellness and nutrition with music, movement, and fun activities.

At the start of the workshop, participants document their health trends relating to food and exercise, then track their progress over the eight weeks, completing a form at the end of the program to see the impact their changes have had. Nutritional gifts are given out each week, and participants who attend all eight sessions receive a grocery gift card.

Additionally, we’re adding raised bed gardens to our outdoor area as both a sensory therapy for adult and child clients, as well as for the healthy vegetables the gardens will produce. Easy to water, harvest, and care for, the beds allow for a large yield of vegetables in a small space. Clients are encouraged go out for fresh air and fresh produce!

For staff, wellness has become an important component of day-to-day work life. We have an active, staff-directed Wellness Committee, which plans on-site team building activities, coordinates off-site outings to help relieve stress, and identifies ways for the agency to support wellness, like providing healthy snacks and prizes for a Steps Challenge. Beyond the committee, our monthly all-staff meetings open with chair yoga or guided meditation, and each employee has a personal self-care plan, outlining ways to de-stress and stay healthy in body, mind and spirit.

How are you staying well this summer? Share your ideas and photos with us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter!

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**Summer Showcase Series**

**Presented by: Graphicolor Printing**

This summer, wake up with The Women’s Center at our NEW **Summer Showcase Series**! Designed to share more information about some of our community partnerships, these three morning events will feature guest presenters and comments from our own leadership team highlighting a different collaborative program each month.

Coffee and breakfast is provided (thanks to Graphicolor Printing) and will be available beginning at 7:30am, with the featured presentation at 7:45am followed by time for questions and optional tours of our facility.

Join us for one or all three sessions of this free and interesting morning series!

- **June 20, 7:30am – Lethality Assessment Protocol**, featuring Waukesha County Assistant District Attorney Michael Thurston Jessi Trauth, Director of Shelter & Transitional Living at The Women’s Center.

- **July 25, 7:30am – Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force**, featuring co-chairs Eric Calvino, Permanency Services Supervisor of Waukesha County Child & Family Services Division, and Diane Ripple, Director of Programs & Services at The Women’s Center.

- **August 15, 7:30am – Unprecedented Demand: Past, Present, & Future**, featuring Angela Mancuso, Executive Director at The Women’s Center.

**Sign up now** – each session is free to attend, but registration is required at twcwaukesha.org.
Today, and Always, Your Voice Has Power.

(em)Power Luncheon Success!

Each year, our (em)Power Luncheon is a time for all of us to come together and reaffirm our commitment to standing with survivors, to break down pervasive myths and misconceptions, and to learn how we can all join together to prevent sexual assault and abuse. Your support of The Women’s Center and this event – our largest fundraiser of the year – is what makes our work possible, and the proceeds directly benefit survivors by helping them find safety, shelter, and support when they enter our doors or call our 24-Hour Hotline.

We are overwhelmed by the immense support we received for our (em)Power Luncheon - thank you to all who helped to make this year another success! Bringing in a full house of nearly 900 guests, we raised more than $226,000 through sponsorships, ticket sales, silent auction, and donations, nice progress toward this year's fundraising goal of $1.3 million.

It was an honor to hear both Executive Director Angela Mancuso and Terry Crews share their message of courage and resilience, and the luncheon brought a powerful conclusion to our Sexual Assault Awareness Month campaign. As Crews said, “When you know what to do, you can do something about it.” We all have a role to play in ending abuse, and there are things we can all do. We invite you to keep the momentum going from here and build on the theme of Your Voice Has Power:

- Believe survivors. Doing so will pave the way for other survivors to share their story.
- Be an “upstander” instead of a bystander - correct someone who is using victim blaming language.
- Make sure children understand boundaries and consent early on.
- Talk to your teens about healthy relationships.

Change only happens when we come together, when we have honest conversations, when we listen actively, and when we challenge myths and misperceptions. Today, and always, remember that your voice has power. Thank you for standing with survivors and for being a valued friend and supporter of The Women’s Center.

Special Thanks to our (em)Power Luncheon Sponsors!

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Dear friends,

Throughout 2018, we responded to an increased, unprecedented demand for our programs and services. It was a particularly tough year for our staff because of the complexity and severity of issues and injuries our clients faced.

Domestic and sexual violence continue to be a sobering reality right here in our community. The severe levels of abuse experienced by our clients include rape, trafficking, and even death. We provide a continuum of care that is critical in helping thousands of survivors in our community break the cycle of violence. We never close our doors – we are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

How do we help? Through our life-saving and life-changing programs and services, all offered at no cost to clients. We have a 32-bed emergency shelter, a 24-Hour Hotline, transitional living, individual and group counseling, employment and life skills training, children’s programming, legal advocacy, rape crisis response, substance abuse and mental health support, community education and violence prevention, interpretation and translation in any language, and free childcare to anyone utilizing our services. The only agency providing this range of programming in a county that spans 580 square miles, each and every one of our services are customized to meet each individual set of needs.

We couldn’t do what we do without you. Your support allows us to address the unique and complex situations of our clients by responding to immediate basic needs, as well as providing long-term support to assist survivors on their path to build a future free from violence. Thank you for standing with survivors and for making our work possible.

Peacefully,

Angela Mancuso
Executive Director

Sarah Grooms
Board President

With an emphasis on the work we do each day, and with a clear eye on the agency’s commitment to meeting needs in the future, the Board of Directors adopted a vision statement and approved revisions to our mission statement in January 2018.

The mission of The Women’s Center is to provide safety, shelter and support to empower all impacted by domestic abuse, sexual violence, child abuse, and trafficking.

The word choices in this statement are intentional: Our programs focus on self-sufficiency, to empower our clients with the support, resources, and referrals needed to both define and achieve their goals on their own. All are welcome – women, men, children, non-binary individuals. And we serve all impacted: recent victims of trafficking, domestic violence or sexual assault, a child witness to violence at home, an adult survivor of childhood sexual abuse, or a non-offending parent struggling to support their child after an assault. No one is turned away and all are offered safety, shelter, and support.

The Women's Center’s vision is to create an engaged community that does not tolerate or accept interpersonal violence and provides abundant resources to ensure futures free from violence.

You can bring this vision to life by continuing to engage with us, refusing to accept violence, and providing time, treasure and talent in support of our mission. We know that change happens in small and in large ways, through little and big shifts, and those changes ripple through the community, creating a more peaceful future for all.
The free programs we provide at The Women’s Center have been consistent for most of our history, yet service delivery evolves based on the needs and requests of those we serve. Our holistic, wrap-around services provide trauma-informed care to support and empower survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and trafficking. These services include:

- Emergency Shelter
- 24-Hour Hotline
- Transitional Living
- Individual and Group Counseling
- Child Abuse Prevention
- Legal Advocacy
- Employment Readiness and Life Skills Development
- Community Education and Violence Prevention
- Rape Crisis Response
- AODA and Mental Health Support

We also provide translation and/or interpretation in any language and free on-site child care.

In 2018, we provided direct services to **1,160** unduplicated adults and children.

The true scope of our reach totals more than **18,000 individuals served**, which includes prevention programming, calls to our 24-Hour Hotline and referral calls, and community education presentations.

Here’s just a sampling of our 2018 programming successes:

**Emergency Shelter**
- **9,598** nights of care and **28,794** healthy meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) to **278** adults and their children.
- **97%** of shelter clients developed strategies to enhance their safety.

**24-Hour Hotline**
- **10,739** calls from individuals requesting emergency shelter and crisis counseling, seeking referrals and information, or from area police departments to report domestic violence incidents.

**Employment and Life Skills**
- **366** individuals participated.
- **94%** learned positive parenting skills.
- **91%** applied for paid employment.
- **80%** learned effective ways to work toward financial empowerment.

**Sexual Assault and Abuse Counseling**
- **296** adults and children participated.
- **76%** of sexual assault and abuse clients increased their coping skills.
- **71%** of child survivors learned that the abuse was not their fault.

**Community Education and Violence Prevention**
- **254** presentations to **6,367** individuals.

**Domestic Violence Counseling**
- **955** adults and children participated.
- **82%** learned non-violent conflict resolution skills.

This is the impact of your support - **THANK YOU!**
At The Women’s Center, we take our obligation to practice sound fiscal management very seriously. In conjunction with the Board, our Finance Committee carefully prepares the budget and reviews it monthly, working diligently to ensure our continued financial health. Each year, independent auditors validate our financial responsibility and transparency.

We are proud of our history of providing expert programming to all impacted by domestic abuse, sexual violence, child abuse, and trafficking, while being responsible stewards of the funds we receive.
Thank You to All Our Generous Donors!

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