



## **Wednesday Workshop: Supporting Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence**

### **Podcast Transcript**

### **Season 2 Episode 6: October 14, 2020**

### **History of Domestic Violence Awareness Month**

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MARISSA: Hello and welcome to The Women's Center's Wednesday Workshop podcast, intended for survivors of domestic and sexual violence as a time to learn and grow in order to move beyond their trauma. Each session will feature instruction on a healing topic. This week, our topic is the History of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, also known as DVAM. We are your hosts; My name is Marissa and I'm the Adult Domestic Violence Advocate here with The Women's Center.

ANGELA: And I'm Angela, and I'm the executive director of the Women's Center.

MARISSA: So with this podcast, we will be discussing the history and impact of domestic violence, the history of the awareness month in itself, the ways in which we support survivors here at The Women's Center, and ways to get involved in this year's virtual DVAM programming. With that, we should first define what domestic violence is, right? If you've tuned in to our other podcasts, you likely either identify as a survivor, a direct support to a survivor, or community member who is invested in raising awareness of domestic violence. For the record, we define domestic violence as a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one individual to gain or maintain power and control over another. Domestic violence can be emotional, verbal, sexual or physical within a significant or intimate relationship. This can be defined as spouses, folks within a family unit, dating relationships, roommates, so on and so forth. Our mission here at The Women's Center is to provide safety, shelter, and support to empower all impacted by domestic abuse, sexual violence, child abuse, and trafficking.

ANGELA: So, the history of domestic violence, I mean, literally goes back to the dawn of humanity. But there are some notable moments in time such as in early Roman society. Women were deemed property of the husband and therefore subjected to their control,

and the law stated that a man could beat, divorce, or murder his wife for offenses committed by her that disgraced his honor or threatened his property. In the 15th century—the “rules of marriage”—the husband was considered the “judge” of his wife and this gave the man the power to beat his wife to save her soul and maintain family discipline. And then, you know, carried on through the centuries—18th century France—if a male was found to be a victim of domestic violence, they were forced to wear outlandish, outlandish costumes and ride backwards around the village on a donkey. It really gives you some insight into perspectives and value of human beings in our earlier days.

And then, you know, the history of domestic violence, really in the United States: in the mid-1800s, most legal systems accepted wife beating as a valid exercise of the husband's authority. 1850, Tennessee became the first state to explicitly outlaw wife beating, which is interesting and good for Tennessee. In the 1870s, most courts were opposed to the right of husbands to physically discipline their wives. So now we're starting to get somewhere. And then in the earliest 20th century, it was common for police to intervene in cases of domestic violence, but arrests remained pretty rare.

So now, you know, fast forward really to when the movement (so to speak) started, that's the 60s and 70s. So, the 1960s and 70s, that's when laws against family violence were more strictly enforced, and also really created. And in the 70s, that is also when a lot of organizations like The Women's Center started. We were founded in 1977, by five women who were very involved in the National Organization for Women local chapter, and they were social workers, counselors, therapists. And a lot of their patients are, basically were survivors of domestic violence or sexual assault in Waukesha County. They realized there was no place for people to go, and not a lot of formalized support structures for victims of domestic violence. So, they founded The Women's Center. Around Wisconsin, that's also when a lot of organizations started was in the 70s, early 80s.

And then in the 90s, is the Violence Against Women Act (or what we call VAWA), and that Act provides \$1.6 billion towards investigation and prosecution of violent crimes against women, and also provides significant funding for domestic violence and sexual assault service providers such as The Women's Center. And also the Violence Against Women Act is where a lot of the laws and legislation stem from and where the protections for survivors, so really the federal and state statutes of confidentiality so that we can protect victims that all stems from the Violence Against Women Act.

In 1994, President Clinton signed VAWA into law with added provisions. And in 1996, the National Domestic Violence Hotline receives its first call, so they had about 4,800 calls made in that first month. And then of course, it grew exponentially from there. 2003, the CDC reports annual health related costs of rape, physical assault, stalking, and homicide committed by intimate partners. You know, the cost exceeds about \$5.8 billion, which would be mental health, lost productivity at work, health costs, things like that. And that still continues today. Domestic violence has an astronomical impact on our economy when you think about it.

In 2012, federal law prohibited the purchase and possession of firearms and ammunition by persons who have been convicted of any court of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence or who are subject to certain domestic violence protective orders. We had survivors that were very active in pursuing this legislation, and The Women's Center was present when the then-governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker, signed this into law. In 2016, the OVW, which is the Office on Violence Against Women, awarded \$8.5 million to enhance victim services. So that was really to fund prevention and also intervention programming, which was obviously very needed and very necessary.

There's a lot of there's a lot of things that we didn't talk about, right, in the history of domestic violence, and a lot we could go into, but we just wanted to provide a little bit of the background. And again, it is said the movement really started in the 70s; that's when organizations like ours popped up. When organizations like The Women's Center started back in the early days, there were not healthy relationships with law enforcement or the criminal justice system. You know, advocates really had to have an un-ending perseverance in order to get domestic violence recognized as a significant crime and as having a significant impact on a community.

MARISSA: Absolutely, and as this history demonstrates too, domestic violence is unfortunately a tale as old as, you know, time itself. Since the dawn of humanity, we've dealt with the effects of domestic violence in our community. And so, with Domestic Violence Awareness Month, we observe this the entire month of October. That's evolved from the Day of Unity in 1981, by the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (again, right in the in the midst of that movement beginning). It was intended to connect advocates across the nation who were working tirelessly to end this violence, and eventually, it became a week devoted to activities conducted at the local, state, and national levels.

By October of 1987, the first Domestic Violence Awareness Month was observed. And in 1989, Congress passed a public law designating October as National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. And so, what do we do during DVAM? We will go on later to talk about some of the things we specifically do at The Women's Center, but generally, all of the activities include and center first and foremost mourning those who have been lost to domestic violence, celebrating survivors and their strength and resiliency, as well as connecting those who work to end domestic violence in our community.

ANGELA: Even though October has been designated as the National Domestic Violence Awareness Month, we do like to always qualify that by saying, you know, really all year long should be Domestic Violence Awareness Month, right? We don't want people to just focus on the month because it's happening. It's happening right now in our communities as we speak, but we'll take it; we'll take any sort of awareness and involvement and federal and national acknowledgement of the domestic violence movement. We'll take it.

MARISSA: Absolutely, we really need more of this awareness and the understanding of the impact that domestic abuse causes. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the rate of domestic violence in the US, has declined in the past two decades. But it is important to note that these stats are based on reported data only. The reality is that domestic violence has not declined, just based on our own data and what we know about other domestic violence programs. We also know that many survivors don't feel safe or comfortable reporting.

As far as our statistics in Wisconsin, 83 organizations here in Wisconsin provide DV services at some level. And that's all organized by our state coalition, End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin.

The Women's Center here in Waukesha is the only domestic violence shelter in our county. In 2019, we provided services to 17,566 individuals, through our advocacy services, our 24-hour hotline, and our violence prevention presentations. We really pride ourselves on the reach that we have in this community to continue to raise awareness and continue to support survivors. Specifically looking at our domestic abuse programming, which is within my role here, we served 555 adults in the past year. Our 24-hour hotline as well received a little over 7,000 calls requesting emergency shelter and crisis counseling, reports of domestic violence incidents from area police departments, or folks seeking referrals in information. And especially this year, during the Safer at Home order, we've seen an increase in hotline calls by about 12%.

ANGELA: In March and April we saw a pretty significant spike in calls from law enforcement to refer victims to our services compared to the same time last year; we know we were getting calls with high lethality, or near fatality concerns. During the Safer at Home order, of course, as everyone was hunkering down, staying home, that was not necessarily the best solution for individuals who are already living either in an abusive environment or a highly strained environment. So, we were very concerned. I mean, of course, we acknowledge and recognize the need for prevention efforts to stop the spread of a global pandemic; we also acknowledge and recognize that the very measures that as a society we were putting in place was also potentially hurting and harming victims of violence.

MARISSA: And this year too, as we're continuing to try as a community to control the spread of the pandemic, we still want to honor this awareness month. So, our ways to get involved may look a little bit different here, but there are still so many ways to show your support for survivors of domestic violence. For instance, the National Week of Action is between October 19<sup>th</sup> through October 23<sup>rd</sup>. And on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, that is a day called Purple Thursday, where individuals are encouraged to wear purple, share photos of themselves, or family members, your quarantine pod, wearing purple and supporting

survivors. On that same night, we have what's called A Noteworthy Evening, and that's an event that we have that we hold annually. This year it's going virtual, and I know you're speaking at the event.

ANGELA: [Laughs] I am. It's our first virtual event, but we just felt that, you know, again, it's Domestic Violence Awareness Month, it's too important of an issue. And aside from myself, we have the new Chief of Police for the City of Waukesha speaking. So, we're excited about that event. And if anybody's interested in learning more about that event, you can find information on our website, [www.twcwaukesha.org](http://www.twcwaukesha.org).

MARISSA: [Affirms] And, if you are listening to our podcasts through our website already, we will link information more information about A Noteworthy Evening, Purple Thursday, and all the events that we're working on for October. Something that we've done for quite a long time to is called the "Light the Way" campaign. You can display a purple lightbulb in the front window of your home or business. It's just, you know, that extra bit of awareness. For folks who know, purple is the awareness color, the color of the awareness ribbon for domestic violence, so displaying that purple is also a sign of support. If you are in the Waukesha area, TNT Ace Hardware in Waukesha is selling purple lightbulbs and a portion of each sale will be donated to The Women's Center as well.

Something particularly fun that we that we created this year for some virtual DVAM programming is a curated playlist. We picked some songs centered around empowerment, and we have this playlist on Spotify. Again, that will be linked below this podcast. And feel free to share it within your community as well. You can share the podcast, any episodes, particularly Safety Planning or Self-Care if you know any survivors; you can share the playlist as well and, you know, jam with some friends. Right?

ANGELA: Right, it really is a nice playlist. It gets you going. We also have media toolkits that people can sign up for. Because again, everything is virtual, so we have a lot of information that we can provide people virtually, that they can display and share. Again, to raise awareness about domestic violence, the issue and crime of domestic violence, and also The Women's Center. So if anybody's interested again, that information can be found on our website, you can sign up to get the virtual toolkit and receive customized information and graphics that can be shared on social media, materials that can be printed, templates, template text to share with friends and family and so on. It's really, it's pretty cool.

MARISSA: And one of our major campaigns that we are pushing out for this awareness month as well is the concept “learn, listen, share”. So first and foremost, it's super important to learn more about the issue. Domestic Violence has long been a topic avoided in society. It's one of those things that we've, for whatever reason, deemed not part of polite conversation, and by learning more about the root causes, myths, and realities of domestic violence, we can build awareness that leads to prevention and long-term societal change. We break that silence, we break that cycle, right? And we can also listen to survivors too. Disclosing this very personal aspect of a survivor's life is really scary step in their healing journey, and the key is to listen without judgment, to believe them, and offer support to survivors as well. We talk about that a lot here, our next podcast is going to be going into how everyone can support survivors. And lastly, share information, starting with our 24-hour hotline. Our 24-hour hotline is an important resource for those without a safe place to turn, or for folks who need someone to talk to. Each year through our hotline, thousands of survivors are connected with our services, and by raising awareness, you help ensure more people know of this critical lifeline and that's essential.

ANGELA: You know, we feel that these three action steps—learn, listen, share—sort of summarize what people can do, of course, during October, but then also ongoing. And I mean, when you think about it, Domestic Violence Awareness Month starts on January 1<sup>st</sup>, and never ends, right? So, we just want it to keep going. These are things that we hope people will consider. And also, the right ways to support a survivor, recognizing signs of healthy or unhealthy relationship; I mean, really, this work is rooted in intervention and prevention. Of course, ideally, we would like to close our doors and not be needed or necessary anymore, and we hope that one day that would be the case, in that domestic violence has been completely eradicated from our community. Until then, we're going to keep chipping away at it, and we will just need everyone's help.

MARISSA: Thank you so much for joining us to learn more about the History of Domestic Violence Awareness Month. We hope that you do continue learning about the issue, and speaking on it, and again, sharing that information with folks in your circles. Our next session will be titled Supporting Survivors is for Everyone, and that will be with one of our Youth Advocates, Jon. if you would like to talk with an advocate about your own experience, please call our 24-hour hotline at 262.542.3828. Learn more about The Women's Center at [www.twcwaukesha.org](http://www.twcwaukesha.org). Thank you and be well.