

## A WOMAN'S PLACE

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### AWP HISTORY

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**1974** The First Battered Women's Shelter in USA opens in St. Paul Minnesota.

**1976** Four founding mothers (Doris Payne, Beverly Frantz, Mary Jane Kirkpatrick and Pat Groff Garrett) pool their resources and open A Woman's Place (AWP) at 108 N. Main Street, Sellersville, Pa. Five minutes after opening, the first donation is received – unsolicited!

Carole Alexy takes the first phone call on a cold, wet December afternoon at the storefront location. The Women's Movement is at its height, and AWP provides walk-in information, referral and support for women. The center is open 3 days/week.

Funds are raised by selling T-shirts, craft items on consignment, paintings, and photographic works done by women. Private donations are given. There is no County or State funding.

Calls from battered women in Bucks County come in; the closest shelter is in Germantown.

Proceeds from the Center fund an apartment above the store front, which opened in November. AWP shelters its first battered woman and her two children on Christmas at the Sellersville location. Within the first year 25 women and families are housed.

From the Sellersville location, the "shelter" moved to an apartment in Doylestown. The exact year is not known.

Women's Centers and women's groups from across Pennsylvania gather in Harrisburg to testify for the need for the Protection from Abuse Act (PFAA).

They meet each other, organize and form the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence. A Woman's Place is a founding member.

November, 1976, Pennsylvania Governor Milton J. Shapp signs Senate Bill 1243, the Protection From Abuse Act into law.

**1977** PFAA is enacted throughout Pennsylvania early in 1977.

AWP incorporates as a non-profit tax exempt corporation.

AWP receives its first funding from the Grundy Foundation.

Founders turn operations over to the first Board of Directors and a volunteer staff:

Board President – Doris Payne  
Vice President – Carole Alexy  
Treasurer – Mary Jane Kirkpatrick  
Secretary – Karen Moss

“The only real preventative panacea available is a societal change, but that will take so very long.” – Doris Payne.

Mid December 1977 to March 1978, the shelter apartment closes due to a defective heating system.

**1978** A Harris poll states that “1/5 of all Americans approve of slapping one’s spouse on appropriate occasions ...approval of this practice increases with income and education.”

Women’s groups advocate with the Commissioners for support.

Commissioners approve a larger shelter for AWP, which they lease to AWP for 2 years, at the rate of \$1 per year. The shelter itself is a 19<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse (in which James Michener spent part of his childhood) in Central Bucks County. Included are maintenance and security guard protection. The County Commissioners are very supportive of AWP and provide most of the funds for a building expansion project.

George Metzger, County Commissioner during 1978, states,

*“One of the things I did when I was county commissioner of Which I am extremely proud was to locate a permanent home for A Woman’s Place.*

*The organization to shelter abused women and their children had been using a home in Perkasio owned by Attorney Richard Groff, but it became flooded, ruining the furnace, and they didn’t know what to do. Groff approached me and asked if I had any ideas. I did.*

*When I came into office, there were a few county employees who not only received a salary, but were given a county-owned home in which to live. I did not think it made much sense. So I these people to find their own homes.*

*So, when Groff approached me I immediately thought of the county homes that were about to become empty. I told A Woman’s Place they could use one of the buildings. It was a twin house, and we later let them expand into the other half of the building. They are still there.*

*I know at the time we could not reveal where the sanctuary is located so the males that put the women there couldn’t come around and bother them some more. So, I’m not going to tell you where the house is located.*

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*But there is a touch of irony I don't know if even the people running A Woman's Place are aware of. A wife was killed in that house. She was married to the county employee who lived there who I later told to move out.*

*No one was ever arrested for the crime. I always thought that turning that house into a home for abused women was poetic justice."*

- *The Metzger Report*  
Feb. – March 2001

- 1979** Toll-free hotline for Lower Bucks and Phone Diverter System installed.
- The executive director of Bucks County Legal Aid states that they average 240 domestic violence cases per yr.
- 1980** The first support group meets in Doylestown.
- 1982** A support group begins at Pebble Hill Church in Doylestown.
- 1983** October 10-16 – the first Domestic Violence Awareness Week is declared in Bucks County.
- AWP receives a grant from Bucks County Commissioners to renovate the shelter.
- 1984** Shelter renovations are completed.
- The Butterfly logo is adopted.
- 1985** The Children's Counseling Program begins.
- A support group in Warminster begins.
- AWP receives 2 grants plus \$50,000 from the Bucks County Commissioners to expand the shelter to two additional bedrooms, bathroom, playroom, and to increase office space.
- 1986** A new reform to the PFAA - H.B.350 occurs, which allows for:
- on-the-spot arrests;
  - "stay away" orders;
  - removal of the alleged assailant from the house;
  - confiscation of weapons that may have been used in the attack;
  - police notification to victims of their legal rights;
  - police mandate to provide victims with local domestic violence (DV) shelter information.

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The Bucks County Commissioners Advisory Council for Women establishes the Women's Domestic Violence Task Force.

Groundbreaking occurs for the shelter expansion.

**1987** The shelter expansion is completed.

"A Walk for Women" on "National Day of Unity" kicks off Domestic Violence Awareness Month takes place.

**1988** Amendments to the PFAA are approved, which expands parameters for those filing and allows for Pro Se filing (without an attorney). This greatly increases access to those seeking relief.

**1989** The Legal Aid Domestic Abuse (LADA) Project and office are established. This is a joint project between AWP and Legal Aid to provide services to those seeking protection from abuse orders (PFA's).

The Administration Office moves to Rodman House.

AWP begins Drug and Alcohol education.

**1990** The first community based Children's Support Group meets.

**1991** The Violence Against Women Act is introduced in Congress.

The Toll-free hotline number is established: 1-800-220-8116.

AWP receives the 1991 Robert F. Kennedy Public Service Organization Award from the Democratic Party of Bucks County.

The Shelter gets air conditioning and a new fire alarm system.

The PA Rule of Civil Procedure 1901.1 passes, which allows easier filing of PFA's.

**1992** The Full Circle Thrift Store opens at Town Center Shopping Center in New Britain.

The S.T.E.P.S. (Sisters Together Experiencing Powerful Strides) support group begins. This is group for women not in immediate crisis.

AWP adopts the Purple Ribbon Campaign for Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

The 20-hour counseling training for volunteers begins.

**1993** The LADA project moves to 100 Union Street, Doylestown.

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The first annual children's poster contest takes place.

A support group for teen women who have experienced dating violence begins.

**1994** The "Special Needs" room is created at Full Circle Thrift Store.

AWP receives the Alma and Harold Abel Peace Award from Pebble Hill Church.

The Violence Against Women Act becomes law.

Additional amendments to the PFAA are enacted.

**1995** The Bucks County Violence Prevention Task Force is established.

Renovations to the shelter make it wheelchair accessible.

The Lower County Outreach Office in Bristol opens December 1.

**1996** The School Prevention Program begins.

First Annual Chocolate Lovers' Fantasy and Silent Auction is held.

The Mission Statement is adopted May 20, 1996.

**1998** The Central Bucks East and West Key Clubs hold 1st Dance Marathon to benefit AWP.

The Medical Advocacy Project begins counseling victims and staff training at Warminster Hospital.

The First Response Team pilot project begins with the Warminster Township Police Department.

Andrew's Room opens in shelter to provide a space for pre-teens and teens.

First Annual Community Awards Dinner is held.

The Domestic Violence Health Care Response Act HB 2268 is signed into law in Pennsylvania.

**1999** The Bucks County Legal Issues Work Group adopts the Domestic Violence Protocol for Bucks County police jurisdictions providing guidelines for responses to DV calls.

The Medical Advocacy Project in collaboration with Bucks County Health

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Improvement Project expands to serve all seven acute care hospitals in Bucks County.

The First Response Team expands to Bensalem Township Police Department.

“Health Cares about Domestic Violence Day” begins. Held on the second Wednesday in October, the day aims to reach members of the healthcare and domestic violence communities and educate them about the critical importance of routine screening for domestic violence, as well as the long term health implications of domestic violence and lifetime exposure to violence. This Day is sponsored by the Family Violence Prevention Fund.

**2000** The Violence Against Women Act is reauthorized in September.

House Bill (HB) 1717 extends the term of a PFA from one year to 18 Months.

The Bucks County Adult Probation and Parole Department begins the Batterers' Intervention Project to address the violence of offenders.

The shelter receives a new playground.

The Placard Project is initiated. This project places DV information in selected county office buildings and the courthouse.

**2001** The Medical Advocacy Project expands to include nine healthcare clinic sites. This initiative provides county-wide coverage at all health care facilities. Bucks County is the first nationwide to accomplish this coverage.

"A Celebration of Voices" - AWP Celebrates 25 Years - Dedicated To Women - Committed To Change occurs.

The Bristol Outreach Office celebrates its five year anniversary.

Placards with information about domestic violence services are placed in all county office buildings. This occurs as a result of a partnership between the Bucks County Commissioners, the Bucks County Health Improvement Project and A Woman's Place.

The Bucks County Civil Legal Assistance Program (funded by PCADV) is created to provide civil legal representation for victims of domestic violence in matters such as divorce, support, custody, welfare, eviction, unemployment, immigration issues, and bankruptcy.

**2002** “Voices in Art”- an art exhibit at Michener Museum about domestic violence takes place. Local artists create art related to the theme of

domestic violence. This event was a huge success and a first for the Michener.

Full Circle celebrates its 10-year anniversary.

**2003** AWP launches its organizational website at [www.awomansplace.org](http://www.awomansplace.org).

**2004** The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) announces partnership with country recording artists Big and Rich. Their song, "Holy Water," focuses on impact of domestic violence.

In October, national and local domestic violence groups begin protesting new rules set in place by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The rules, which went into effect October 1, require detailed personal information about battered women to be collected from all domestic violence shelters that receive HUD funding. Shelters for abused women are careful to protect the identities of the women and families they house, as abusers often hunt their victims down after they have escaped a violent situation.

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the original mandate in July 2003 included an exemption for domestic violence programs. When the final mandate was released in July 2004, this exemption had been removed. Later in October, HUD issues clarifying statement that shelters may encrypt their data.

In November, the Supreme Court agrees to consider whether local governments can be sued for failing to enforce restraining orders – a case that could spur thousands of suits. At issue is whether the Constitution's 14th Amendment obligates police to protect residents from violence after a local government issues a restraining order and promises to enforce it.

The plaintiff is Jessica Gonzales of Castle Rock, Colo. She had an order to keep her estranged husband away from her daughters, ages 10, 9 and 7. She contends that police ignored phone calls for help one night in 1999, when Simon Gonzales took the daughters from the front yard of her home. Eight hours later, Simon Gonzales showed up at the Castle Rock police station and started a gunfight. He was killed; the girls were found dead in his pickup. Jessica Gonzales sued the city for \$30 million, alleging a due process violation because Castle Rock had failed to enforce the restraining order. The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals agreed, saying Castle Rock had a duty under state law to respond to her calls but instead had routinely ignored her.

**2005** During a 6 month period (April 22, 2005 to October 7, 2005), there is a series of domestic abuse related homicides resulting in the deaths of twelve people in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. The sheer volume of deaths in such a short period, as well as the fact that they occurred in

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areas and among families that are not perceived as high risk by the general community, are catalysts for action.

In response to the shock and concern felt by representatives of county systems, and the public, in October 2005, District Attorney Diane Gibbons convenes the Bucks County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission (BCDVFRFC).

The Commission chooses to review four murder suicides that resulted in the deaths of eight people. It is the hope of the Commission that trends common to all the deaths would emerge, that could inform future domestic violence prevention / intervention efforts.

The mission of the Bucks County Fatality Review Commission is to *“prevent deaths from intimate relationship violence by utilizing a systematic confidential, multi-agency review process, and to identify system gaps in order to expand effective violence prevention and coordination strategies. This multi-agency review shall make recommendations for systems change, in order to prevent future deaths from intimate relationship violence.”*

The 10th annual Chocolate Lovers' Fantasy and Silent Auction takes place.

The President's proposed budget for 2006 eliminated a key source of funding, the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) monies. Government Funding represents 55% of AWP's revenue. Several programs (Patricia Kind Family Foundation, Philadelphia Foundation, Village Improvement Association, and Willow Grove Foundation) provided money to help with the lack of funding. AWP along with domestic violence organizations across the country successfully advocated to keep this funding in the federal budget.

AWP was awarded a 2 year grant totaling in \$407,000 from the Department of Justice in order to expand its Civil Legal Assistance Project to Lower County.

In June, the Supreme Court rules that the police did not have a constitutional duty to protect a person from harm, even a woman who had obtained a court-issued protective order against a violent husband making a mandatory arrest for a violation. The decision, with an opinion by Justice Antonin Scalia and dissents from Justices John Paul Stevens and Ruth Bader Ginsburg, overturned a ruling by a federal appeals court in Colorado. The appeals court had permitted a lawsuit to proceed against a Colorado town, Castle Rock, for the failure of the police to respond to a woman's pleas for help after her estranged husband violated a protective

order by kidnapping their three young daughters, whom he eventually killed.

In October, the Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence (CAEPV) released the results of the first-ever national survey of employees on the impact of domestic violence in the workplace. The benchmark survey was commissioned in honor of CAEPV's 10th anniversary and was designed to discover how the general U.S. employee population perceives domestic violence as a workplace issue. Not surprisingly, it revealed that intimate partner violence has a wide and far-reaching effect on Americans' working lives—in terms of economic productivity, personal safety and office culture. At the same time, most employers have failed to anticipate or respond to the impact by offering much-needed workplace policies and programs.

The Violence Against Women Act reauthorized in December

2006

The Bucks County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission (BCDVFRC) continues to meet regularly throughout the year.

In January, the Supreme Court announces it will hear the case of a Dallas woman who contends that pressure from her violent boyfriend caused her to purchase guns illegally. Keshia Cherie Ashford Dixon alleges that, in 2003, she bought seven guns at two Dallas gun shows because she feared that her boyfriend would kill her and her two daughters if she did not. A felon, her boyfriend could not purchase the guns himself. Dixon was able to buy the guns only after providing an incorrect address and falsely claiming that she was not facing criminal charges; this was untrue, as she had been arrested and was under indictment for a check-cashing "scheme" at the time. Dixon was convicted of lying to buy a firearm and receiving guns while under indictment, and sent to prison. She appealed, claiming that she was a victim of battered women's syndrome whose rights were violated when the judge in the case would not allow jurors to consider expert testimony on the effects of domestic violence.

In February, The Department of Defense, in partnership with the National Domestic Violence Hotline (NDVH), launches a national public awareness campaign to "Take A Stand Against Domestic Violence." The campaign is designed as an intervention message to educate Service men and women and their families about domestic violence and provide a vital link to life-saving services by connecting people to the national hotline. Educational materials will be distributed at military installations, as well as in key public places in surrounding civilian communities. In addition, this campaign will include public service announcements in military media outlets.

AWP celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the "Philanthropy on the Farm" event in October. All four Founding Mothers return for the event.

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Governor Ed Rendell signed Act 78 of 2006 which establishes additional insurance protections for victims of domestic violence.

2007 The Bucks County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission continues to meet and interview the families of the women killed.

New CORE volunteer training is launched in January.

Full Circle celebrates 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary in October.

2008 The District Attorney's office publishes the Bucks County Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission Final Report and Recommendations on March 6, 2008.

Of particular concern is the fact that of the cases studied, only one of the women killed had called AWP's hotline and only one time. For the most part, systems traditionally accessed (police, victims services, etc.) were not used by these families.

AWP completes its Strategic Plan for 2008 – 2011. The group decides to put resources towards community education, prevention and trainings, while not decreasing direct services already provided. This priority is a direct result of the BCDVFRC Final Report and Recommendations. AWP had always known that most victims of domestic abuse do not contact AWP for assistance, but talk to their families, churches and friends, if at all. The strategic planning committee realized that good information about interventions and safety planning need to be in place wherever victims turn in the community.

AWP receives a 2-year renewal grant (450,000) from the Department of Justice to further expand the civil legal project.

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*\* This timeline is not all inclusive of the history of AWP itself or of the events/laws passed since 1976. It is a general overview of AWP's history and impact, and provides the context within which AWP's programs/services developed.*

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#### Board Presidents\*

Doris Payne, 1977 – 1978  
Carole Alexy, 1978 – 1979  
Beverly Frantz, 1979 – 1984  
Kathy Duckett, 1984 – 1985  
Chris Shannon, 1985 – 1986  
Alice Williams, 1986 – 1988  
Odette Rossi, 1989 – 1992  
Sheila Singer, 1992 – 1993 (*confirmed*)  
Margaret Mohr, 1993? – 19??  
Carol Shelly, 1993? – 19??  
Christina Paugh-Greenwood, 1994 – 1998?  
Lynn Hefele, 1998? – 2000?  
Terri Rivera, 2000 - 2004  
Tam St. Claire, 2004 - present

#### Executive Directors

Colene George, 1978 (3 months)  
Carole Alexy, 1978 – 1983  
Beth Taylor, 1983 – 1988\*\*  
Esther Kirschenbaum, 1988 – 1989\* (6 mos)  
Barbara Webber, 1989 – 1993  
Cathy Callahan, 1993 – 1994  
Susan E. Hauser, 1995 – 2004  
Donna J. Byrne, 2005 - present

\*\*Records are unclear as to the exact dates

**\*All names are listed, but the years are estimated, more archival research needs to be done.**