



## **Mission Statement**

Transitions of PA is committed to ending all forms of violence and oppression by providing safe, survivor-centered resources, prevention, education and mobilization for social change within our communities.

## **Statement of Values**

We believe survivors and recognize the impacts of trauma. Our work is centered on empowering survivors to define their needs and to create their own safety and well-being.

We conduct our work with clients and co-workers with empathy, respect, and dignity.

We recognize the intersections of oppression and violence. We strive to eliminate all forms of oppression.

We work as a team. Together we can work to end domestic violence and sexual assault.

We are committed to learning constantly and evolving when necessary.

We value honesty, confidentiality, and accountability for our actions and words.

## **About Transitions, History, and Major Successes**

In 1975, a group of women in the Sunbury/Selinsgrove/Lewisburg area who were mostly single, separated or divorced got together to discuss shared problems and concerns. The meetings were held in a private home and the conversations focused on issues of divorce, childcare, custody and visitation, careers, finances and relationships. The support group met regularly for several months, but eventually the meetings became more sporadic.

Some of the core women in this group were staff at Susquehanna Legal Services (SLS) in Sunbury. They recognized the importance of this support network for women in transition and for the increasing number of women clients who were physically battered. It became clear that battered women needed not only emotional support and legal advice, but physical safety as well. This core group (including SLS staff and some of the original support group members) persisted in their vision of a comprehensive support network for victims of domestic violence.

A small grant made it possible to open an office on the Selinsgrove State Hospital grounds in 1976 and a network of volunteers and safe homes were established. The group was legally incorporated at that time under the name Susquehanna Valley Women in Transition (SVWIT). When the grant ran out, the office closed but the informal network of support continued, mostly through the efforts of SLS staff and a small core of SVWIT Volunteers.

In February 1979, the SLS/SVWIT group hosted a public meeting in Sunbury to reenergize SVWIT. An unexpectedly large turnout from social service agencies and the general community testified to the prevalence of domestic violence and the need for services for battered women. From that meeting a new Board of Directors was formed with the mission to secure non-profit corporate status and secure funding for a staff, office and shelter.

During 1979 and 1980, the Board met monthly and was the working core of the organization. Members regularly attended training and workshops offered by the PA Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV), networked with other women's organizations and provided some community education and outreach. The corporation also secured non-profit status, an essential step in grant applications.

In December 1980, The JPM Company made a \$500 donation to SVWIT. In January 1981, the Board leased an office on the second floor of the Donehower Building, Market Street, Lewisburg; established a telephone Hotline and began training the first group of Hotline volunteers. From January to June 1981, Julie Nazar staffed the office on a volunteer basis and worked with other Board members to prepare a proposal for Title XX funding through the PCADV. The group of volunteers handled overnight and weekend Hotline calls.

The grant proposal was funded, effective July 1, 1981 to June 30, 1982. This secured the office space and Hotline and provided funding for paid staff. Julie Nazar was named Executive Director.

Over the next several years, SVWIT continued regular day and evening support groups, crisis intervention services, transportation, advocacy, community education and training for local police, hospital staffs, schools and social service agencies. Classes of new volunteers were trained twice a year and a safe home network was established. The board, staff and volunteers regularly met for retreats that provided ongoing training and support.

Emily Higgins joined the staff in 1982 and when a PA Coalition Against Rape (PCAR) grant proposal was successfully funded in 1983, Emily became the coordinator of services for victims of sexual assault.

In 1983, SVWIT leased half of a double house on North Seventh Street, Lewisburg that became the first shelter. Eventually the offices were moved there from the Donehower Building. With centralized staffing, office and shelter facilities, the program continued to build and grow. A satellite office was opened in Selinsgrove and support groups moved into community settings.

1986 was a year of transitions. In the spring Julie Nazar announced plans to resign and Cheryl Hoover was named as SVWIT's second Executive Director. In August, SVWIT entered into a lease-purchase agreement and moved into a new shelter. The new shelter provided greater housing capacity and needed space for training and groups.

Throughout its Herstory, SVWIT pursued a consistent mission to end violence against women, knowing that women are the real experts on their own survival, simply needing the support and collective wisdom of other women to touch their own power.

Programs and staff continued to grow, with increasingly specialized services. SVWIT offered individual and group support for victims of sexual assault, their families, and significant others; shelter, support and advocacy for DV and SA survivors and their children; D & A and co-dependency groups; empowerment workshops; trainings for volunteers and support group facilitators; and intensive trainings on DV and SA issues for police, social services agencies,

health care workers, industries, students and educators. In 1997 Northumberland County was added to our geographic service area with the subsequent opening of our Northumberland County shelter and offices.

SVWIT's programs were recognized for their excellence in 2004 when, under the leadership of Executive Director Margaret Gates, SVWIT received the Governor's Victim Services Pathfinder Award for Agency Excellence in Victims Services. Recognizing a need for growth in a direction that would maintain grassroots efforts yet grow the agency with a more community collaborative focus, in 2008 the Board of Directors led the agency in a reorganization. As part of this reorganization, they moved from an Executive Director leadership model to that of a Chief Executive Officer. DiAnn Baxley was hired as the new CEO in April of 2008.

In 2009, the agency changed its name change to better reflect diversity in the populations of women, men, and children that we serve. After much deliberation SVWIT officially started doing business as Transitions. Under the name of Transitions, the agency began a comprehensive campaign that, combined with local municipal and federal grants, saw the complete renovation of our Union County shelter making it the only fully handicapped accessible shelter in the state of Pennsylvania. This campaign continues to ensure funding for ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the shelter as well as continued growth of the agency's education and outreach programs and crime victims services. Transitions' prevention education outreach programs have more than doubled and several programs developed internally have been recognized at a national and international level. One program that includes a video on Internet Safety was the 2008 recipient of the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Communicator Award of Excellence, 1<sup>st</sup> place, in the category of Youth Social Issues. This prestigious award is given out by the International Academy of Arts and Transitions video was chosen out of 8,000 entrants. Transitions' Education Director, Heather Shnyder was chosen as the recipient of the 2009 Governor's Victim Services Pathfinders Award for leadership in prevention education. From 2008 to 2012, DiAnn Baxley served as the CEO of Transitions.

In June of 2013, Susan Mathias was named the CEO at Transitions, having come from the Director position at Wise Options, a sister agency in Lycoming County. After several years of restrictions on funding, the cap on funds made available through the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) to victim services has been raised dramatically.

In 2015, Transitions held another comprehensive campaign, purchased a safe house, and renovated it in Shamokin, PA. The house opened in 2016 and provides safe housing, counseling, and legal advocacy support from the facility.

In 2017, Transitions opened its Legal Center offering no cost legal services to domestic violence clients for PFA representation, custody and divorce. Transitions Legal Center (TLC) expanded in 2018 to include service to sexual assault and stalking victims. In 2018, Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) funding was received from HUD and for the first time, Transitions offered housing assistance beyond emergency housing. In 2019, it also began offering therapeutic services in addition to crisis and supportive counseling and was able to expand our staffing capacity by adding 12 additional full-time employees and three part-time employees.



2020 marked expansion of our RRH services to allow survivors to access safe and affordable housing in Columbia and Montour counties. Additionally, Transitions successfully opened of the Fairl Family Justice Center located on Chestnut Street in Sunbury. Modeled after the Child Access Center in Centre County, this Center is primarily a center for safe custody exchanges and visitations monitored by trained Transitions Advocates. In addition, there are offices in the Center used by staff from the Transitions Legal Center and Counseling.

Leadership in the CEO role changed hands in January 2021, with Mae-Ling Kranz, previously Transitions COO stepping into the role with seventeen years of experience working in victim services.

Since that time, the demand for services continues to grow and Transitions has expanded to improve safety and increase empowerment and support clients to become more self-sufficient. We continue to be a major resource for individuals, public, and private agencies and businesses; schools, colleges and universities; and community organizations within our three-county core service area of Snyder, Union, and Northumberland counties.

Sadly, there are no signs of decreasing demand for Transitions' services. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought with its own set of challenges to victims and survivors and a unique perspective for Transitions on how to successfully, creatively, and safely, continue to provide services both remote and in-person. Despite those challenges, in 2021, Transitions successfully grew the housing department by adding two additional full-time positions for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) allowing for additional long-term housing support for survivors who have significant mental health or addiction diagnoses. These services allow for an even further reach for housing support and advocacy to provide services in Schuylkill, Lycoming, and Clinton counties.

With the support of community groups and individuals, corporate and government grants, and a network of dedicated volunteers, a fantastic Board of Directors, and an amazingly talented and dedicated team of employees, Transitions will continue to offer crime victims support, educational and outreach programs, individual and community resources, and emergency shelter for years to come.