



# Winter 2019

## Marina's Story\*

**At the Shelter, my young sons said they felt good about being safe and surrounded by people who cared about them and who made sure they had a wonderful Christmas.**

Despite the abuse, I thought that I was being a good mom by staying in the relationship. Over our eight-year marriage, I had debated leaving many times, but I never did because I was scared of breaking apart our family.

The Holiday season was always a stressful time in our household. Each year, I put on a brave face for my sons and tried to make Christmas preparations as fun as possible. I brushed off my husband's insults and hid the bruises from my kids.

Christmas was only a few weeks away when the worst abusive episode happened. I was terrified and no longer sure that I could keep my sons safe. I thought they would never forgive me for separating our family during Christmas, and that they would carry that as a sad Holiday memory.

Nevertheless, a few days later I talked to a staff member on the Transition House Crisis Line and was told that there was room for me and my boys at the Shelter - and I knew we should leave.

When we first arrived at the Shelter, I was afraid of what my kids would think. Would they be scared and

confused? Would they be angry they couldn't go home? But the Shelter staff were welcoming and kind and the boys soon settled in.

I didn't have an income or any money as my husband controlled all the family finances and with Christmas Eve looming, I felt guilty about not having presents for the boys. I shouldn't

have worried. On Christmas morning, we walked downstairs to the living room and a wonderful surprise. There was an enormous Christmas Hamper bursting with gifts, given to us by Transition House donors and volunteers who also provided a beautiful and delicious Christmas dinner for all the residents. Such generosity!

Later, the boys and I made our favourite Holidays cookies in the Shelter kitchen and decorated them with sprinkles and little candies. We passed them out to other moms and their kids. My boys were so excited to be able to do something nice for the other residents. It felt great for all of us.

After almost a month, we left the Shelter and moved into a place of our own. This was a challenging transition. Thankfully, we had support from the Transition House Homelessness Prevention Program, helping us with two months of rent and the damage deposit. What a huge relief.

Now, my children are enrolled in the VWTH's boys counselling program and I know I can drop in for women's counselling if I need support.

I am so grateful to Victoria Women's Transition House for helping us at such a difficult time. Recently, I asked my sons what they thought of the Christmas we spent at the Shelter. I was worried they were going to tell me it was an upsetting and painful time. I was wrong! They smiled and looked at each other. "Mom," said my littlest one. "It was the best Christmas ever!"

*\*Name has been changed for confidentiality*

### Our Mission

Victoria Women's Transition House Society collaborates, advocates and educates to address and prevent intimate partner violence and abuse of women and children through supportive shelter, housing, counselling and other community-based services.

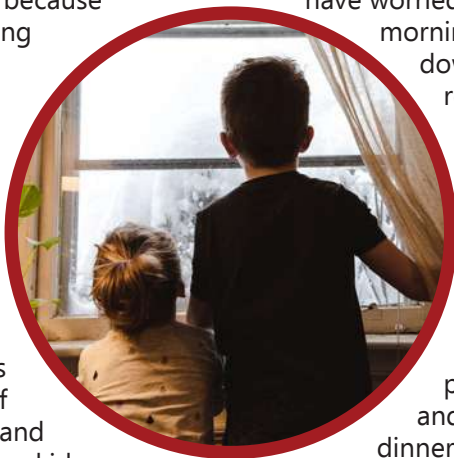
### How to Reach Us

**Crisis and Information Line**  
250.385.6611

**Community Office**  
Suite 100 3060 Cedar Hill Road  
Victoria, BC V8T 3J5

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W [transitionhouse.net](http://transitionhouse.net)

Charitable No. 10817 3501 RR0001





# What to do if you Witness Relationship Abuse

While most intimate partner violence happens behind closed doors, there are situations where the abuse occurs in a public space. When we see or hear abuse, it can be challenging to know how to react, especially if we don't know how to effectively intervene. Perhaps you're having dinner one evening and you hear suspicious sounds from the apartment above you. Or maybe you see a couple fighting in a public space, and the woman looks afraid. Here are some tips on how to be an active bystander if you witness relationship abuse, keeping in mind that it is critical to take care of your own safety as well as that of the survivor.



## 1. CALL FOR HELP

If you have reason to believe that the survivor is in immediate danger—such as hearing violence in the apartment next door or witnessing physical abuse—call the police. You can also

record the incident on your phone to pass along to law enforcement. If you are unsure about whether or not to call the police, you can call our **24-Hour Crisis and Information Line (250-385-6611)** to speak directly with trained volunteers and staff.

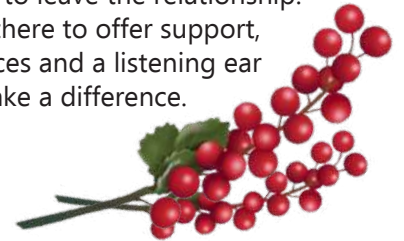
## 2. FIND A SAFE SPACE

If you discover that someone you know is in an abusive relationship, you could try speaking with the survivor in a safe space, away from the potential abuser. Listen and believe what they have to say. Let them know they deserve support and that what is happening isn't their fault. You can also direct them to a local crisis line. If the abuse is happening somewhere out in public, try gathering a group of people to stand nearby, as there is safety in numbers.

## 3. SHOW CONCERN WITHOUT JUDGMENT

When approaching a survivor with concerns of abuse, avoid outright confrontation and judgment. People who are being abused are often confused, embarrassed, and unsure of whom to trust. Be prepared for a survivor to deny or minimize the abuse that is happening. Let them know you are concerned, let them know you are there to talk and avoid asking blaming questions such as, "why don't you just break up with him?", as this could alienate the survivor. Instead, **reassure them that the abuse is not their fault**, and that they deserve support.

Remember that when supporting a survivor, it is important to offer help and support without taking away their autonomy. It is the survivor who must decide to leave the relationship. Being there to offer support, resources and a listening ear can make a difference.



## Family Law Advocate Announcement

We have some great news! VWTH recently received a generous grant from The Law Foundation, enabling us to hire a Family Law Advocate dedicated to supporting survivors through the legal system.

Women survivors of intimate partner abuse who go through the judicial system often find the process overwhelming and intimidating, and are not always aware of their rights. This can add significant stress to these women and their families. The role of the family advocate is to provide specialized, front-line family law support, advocacy and education for survivors of intimate partner violence and abuse and to assist in the resolution of their legal issues.

The Law Advocate will inform the survivor of her options and support her to move through the system, help her fill out legal forms, liaise with her lawyer and accompany her to important meetings. Clients will receive assistance in securing custody and child support, placing protection orders, and seeking the division of property, as well as access to their homes. The Family Law Advocate also provides emotional and moral support to survivors, and has specific training in the area of intimate partner violence.

Accessing legal aid is becoming increasingly difficult in Victoria, and this new program will help fill those gaps. The VWTH Family Law Advocate



will also provide workshops to VWTH staff, clients and community partners, spreading awareness of victims' rights and ensuring that abusers are held accountable.

Special thanks to **Brown Henderson Melbye** and **Trudi Brown, QC** who will provide oversight for our Family Law Advocate.





## New Beginnings with Homeless Prevention

*As the end of my thirty-day stay at VWTH's shelter approached, I began having terrible anxiety about how I was going to support my kids and find us a safe place to live. I didn't want my children to have to suffer because of my choice to keep us safe. When I first spoke with Jannah, who administers VWTH's **Homelessness Prevention Program**, I was so relieved. Jannah listened to my fears, and helped me develop a three-month plan for attaining and keeping housing.*

According to the 2018 Greater Victoria Point-In-Time Count, individuals staying in emergency shelters, including domestic violence shelters, represent nearly a quarter of those



experiencing homelessness. For survivors of domestic abuse exiting a shelter, the likelihood of returning to an abusive relationship or facing homelessness is high, especially if these women have children.

The VWTH Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) provides women fleeing family violence with necessary supports and community connections to allow one of Victoria's most marginalized groups to experience an enhanced quality of life. Most women who access HPP require subsidies for rent, but some funds are available to cover the costs of hydro bills, moving expenses, damage deposits, utility and phone bills. Our HPP

Coordinator meets with clients staying at our Shelter and helps them develop a plan to find stability and independence, while providing emotional support.

Jannah shares the critical impact of this program. **"It takes an incredible amount of courage to make that break and step across the threshold into the unknown. It's rewarding to see women who decide to start over and reinvent their lives."** The more ways that we can support women fleeing intimate partner violence, the greater the opportunity for them and their children to move forward into a healthy future.

Our thanks to the **City of Victoria** and individual donors for supporting this Program.



## Empowering Women through Financial Literacy

Residents with our Third Stage Transitional Housing program have the option of participating in **S.A.F.E., Self-sufficiency and Assets through Financial Education**. Participants are single women over 40 years of age who are survivors of intimate partner violence and abuse, and are financially vulnerable. Some participants experienced financial abuse in their relationships and never had the opportunity to manage their own money. Others left an abusive partner only to discover they had been left with high debt and they didn't know where to turn for help. S.A.F.E. empowers women to take charge of their finances, gain independence, and plan for their future.

S.A.F.E. is co-facilitated by a VWTH counsellor and representatives from Vancity who offer financial literacy workshops and education about banking, credit and savings options.

Workshop topics range from financial goal setting to debt reduction, budgeting and how to establish a healthy credit score. Participants engage in discussions and activities, such as reflecting on their relationship with money and examining messages they heard about money growing up. They also share their own expertise, creating an empowering dynamic where women learn from and support one another. Guest speakers provide job coaching workshops, and the Credit Counselling Society assists women in developing debt reduction plans. During this 18-month program, women track all of their spending, meet with a counsellor to go over their budgets, and participate in a matched savings program. Women complete the program with reduced debt, increased confidence in money management, and a secure foundation to help them rebuild their lives.





# New Boys Counselling Program

VWTH has recently launched **Cultivating Healthy Relationships in Boys and Male Youth**, a new program for male and male-identifying children ages 12 to 14 who have witnessed abuse in the home. For children who have been exposed to domestic violence, it can be difficult to process the experience of witnessing abuse. We also know that boys who witness violence at home are ten times more likely to become abusers as adults. The cycle of abuse and adoption of toxic belief patterns can affect generations within families. But with support, this cycle of violence can be prevented.



Initiated and co-created by VWTH's Education Coordinator, Carol, this new boys counselling program has been developed in partnership with UBC and UVic, and includes collaborators from the Men's Trauma Centre and Island Sexual Health's *Man Made* program. The eight-week program is facilitated by both a male and female VWTH Child and Youth counsellor, showing positive role models from both genders.

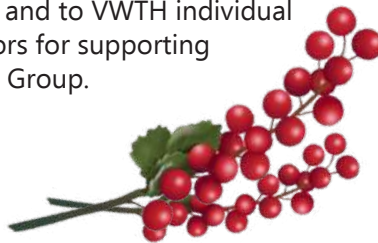
Initial discussions with participants focus on understanding social power and gender expectations. Boys reflect on society's definition of masculinity, and perceptions of how women and men are taught to act. Through the use

of comics and activities, participants begin to unpack these assumptions and discuss alternative ways of expressing their identity. Another unit focuses on consent, rejection and accountability. These topics are foundational in supporting boys to foster healthy relationships and learning to take responsibility for their actions, such as admitting a mistake and apologizing.

One activity explores how to 'ride the wave of rejection' and manage the emotions that rejection might bring in different circumstances.

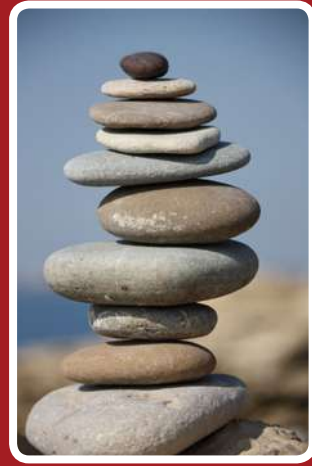
At the end of the program, boys explore the interplay between self-acceptance and healthy masculinity. They are empowered to define their own identity and find acceptance in their unique gender expression. Participants then get to create their own "masculinity superhero" from cutout superhero equipment and tools that reflect different traits they find important.

We are grateful to the **TLC Fund for Kids** and to VWTH individual donors for supporting Boys Group.



## Territory Acknowledgement

It is with much respect to the Lkwungen and SENĆOTEN speaking peoples of the WSÁNEĆ, Esquimalt, and Songhees Nations, on whose traditional territories the Victoria Women's Transition House Society is located, that we make this acknowledgment with the expressed shared hope to live in communities free of intimate partner violence.



## Trauma Informed Yoga

Victoria Women's Transition House offers trauma-informed yoga to Transition House clients in the Stopping the Violence women's counselling and older women's programs.

This gentle style of yoga is sensitive to a woman's trauma and its impact on the entire mind-body system. The trauma-informed yoga classes give women, some who may have anxieties around being controlled, more "agency" while accessing the physical and mental benefits yoga provides. As well, the classes take place in a secure location that's comfortable and familiar to participants, in an environment that is calm and peaceful.

Trauma-informed yoga simplifies the movement, providing a variety of modifications making yoga accessible to all women in the group. In doing so, trauma-informed yoga brings choice and power back to the woman and emphasizes a positive relationship with the body.

These yoga classes also give women a chance to do healthy physical activity at a time when their top priority is coping with their domestic situation. Yoga provides connection with the body and a greater sense of peace, calmness, relaxation and wellbeing.





# Volunteer Spotlight: Judy

Judy has been a volunteer at VWTH for the past two years, and in that time she has become a well-loved member of the VWTH team. In addition to volunteering at events and for the Christmas Hamper program, Judy comes to the Shelter every second week to cook delicious meals for women and their children. She also volunteers on the Crisis Line once a week and this year is co-facilitating a portion of the Crisis Line training.

### What inspired you to volunteer with VWTH?

After retirement, I was looking through the paper and I saw an ad for VWTH volunteers. My grandkids were all grown up, and I was looking for a meaningful way to spend my time and contribute to my community. The reason I chose to volunteer for VWTH was because I have three daughters, and thankfully, none of them have ever needed to stay at a transition house. I'm grateful that our family has been fortunate in this way, and I recognized that not everyone has family to support them through such challenging times. If I can provide some comfort to a woman or child who is struggling, then I've spent my time in a meaningful way.

### What is most rewarding about your volunteering experience thus far?

One of my most rewarding moments was when I helped a woman on the Crisis Line who was really struggling to leave her abusive relationship. Often times, volunteers don't meet the women they speak with on the phone, and we don't always know how things turned out for them. This particular woman was able to secure a room at the VWTH Shelter, and coincidentally, I was volunteering at the Shelter when she arrived, escorted by police. When she first came in, she was very scared and distressed. I was able to let her know that we had recently talked on the phone. Having a familiar voice seemed very comforting for her. She calmed right down and was grateful to know there was someone at the Shelter who already knew her story.

I also really enjoy spending time in the Shelter kitchen. The women are very appreciative of my cooking. I think

having home-cooked food reminds them of the comfort of their mother or grandmother, and the little ones always appreciate that as well.

### Would you recommend volunteering at VWTH to others?

Yes! Because of the size of the organization, there are so many different avenues for volunteering—events, wrapping Christmas presents, cooking, volunteering on the Crisis Line or around the Shelter, etc. The staff are incredibly supportive. After a busy day answering calls from the Crisis Line, a staff member will check in with me and ask how I'm doing. Debriefing the day really helps my own well-being, and

I know that I can reach out if I'm unsure of how to handle a situation, and a staff member will be right there to offer assistance.

**Thank you to Judy and to all of our amazing and dedicated VWTH volunteers!**



## Thank You!

Thank you to the **BC Arts Council** for support of the *Healing Through the Arts: Ceramics and Mixed Media for Older Women* project. Thank you also to the **BC Society of Transition Houses** for supporting our *Violence is Preventable (VIP)* program for youth.

Thank you to the **Eldon & Anne Foote Fund through the Edmonton Community Foundation**, the **Anonymous Fund through the Victoria Foundation** and the **Kirk and Marlyn Davis Family Fund** for generously supporting VWTH. As well,

thank you to the **Modern Real Estate Team** and **Fleuvog Shoes** for hosting the **7th Annual Raise the Roof for Shelter** fundraiser in support of the Royal LePage Shelter Foundation and the four Victoria-area women's shelters, including VWTH.

Thank you to **Bodacious Lifestyles Inc** for donating a new baby monitor, and to numerous community members for providing the Shelter with quilts, toys and toiletries. Thank you also to **Save-on-Foods** for providing diapers and toiletries, **Prior Castle Inn** for



donating slippers, and the **Shriners Variety Show Fund** for providing clients with variety show tickets.

And to the 100+ donors that supported our Fall Fund Drive—thank you!

# Why I Give: Sherrill

A few years ago, I became more aware of some of the challenges faced by women in abusive relationships. I read about women who experienced verbal or physical abuse by their partner and came to the Shelter or to women's counselling for help and support. I also learned about the children's programs.



Although I am fortunate to be married to a loving and thoughtful husband for many years, I know that there are others who have not had my experience and have been subjected to terrible abuse. It's with these women and children in mind that I make an on-going monthly donation to Victoria Women's Transition House. It was easy to arrange for the pre-authorized monthly donation. For me, this is the right thing to do. I feel good about doing my part in helping support an organization that is committed to helping women and their children leave violence and abuse.

*If you are interesting in monthly giving by Pre-Authorized Debit or Credit Card, please contact our office, 250-592-2927 ext 213. Thank you.*

# Gift Cards Needed!

Your donation of a grocery or pharmacy gift card is greatly appreciated!

When a woman leaves our Emergency Shelter, VWTH offers her a care package of essentials – including a grocery gift card to help her and her family purchase groceries, fresh produce and other essentials.



This season, when you are out grocery shopping or Holiday gift buying, please consider adding a gift card to your list as a gift for a Transition House resident.

Gift cards from Fairway Market, Walmart, Thrifty Foods, Shoppers Drug Mart, London Drugs, or other grocery stores and pharmacies, in increments of \$25 and \$50, are most practical and can be dropped off during regular office hours or mailed to our **Community Office, #100-3060 Cedar Hill Road, Victoria, BC V8T 3J5**. Please include your name, return address and value of the gift card so we can send you a note of appreciation.

*Thank you.*

## YES! I wish to support Victoria Women's Transition House

### I would like to give a gift of:

\$1000    \$500    \$100    \$50    Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_ A tax receipt will be issued for all donations over \$10



**Mail:** 100 - 3060 Cedar Hill Road Victoria, BC V8T 3J5

**Online:** Visit [transitionhouse.net](http://transitionhouse.net) and click on Donate

**Phone:** Call 250-592-2927 to make a credit card donation

Enclosed is my cheque payable to Victoria Women's Transition House

I prefer to use my  Visa    Mastercard    AmEx

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Cardholder Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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### HOW TO REACH US:

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