

FALL 2023

STANDING STRONG

Blackburn Center News

OUR WORK

Gender-based violence - such as domestic abuse and sexual assault - is far more common than many would like to believe. As the only non-profit organization dedicated to serving victims and survivors of gender-based violence in Westmoreland County, Blackburn Center is devoted to ensuring that our clients get the services that they need to heal. Through our community programs, we also strive to eliminate the root causes of this type of violence.

We work with clients who have experienced any type of violence, abuse, and crime, including domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, stalking, elder abuse, and human trafficking. Our services are or can be accessible. They are available to anyone in Westmoreland County who has experienced this type of violence or crime. We strive to provide an inclusive, affirming environment.

We offer a range of direct client services, all of which are provided at no cost to clients. All of our services are trauma-informed, which means that we incorporate an understanding of how trauma affects the life of a victim or survivor to help them rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. Our client services include:

- A 24-hour hotline that provides crisis counseling to victims, survivors, and their loved ones. Calls to the hotline can be anonymous. 1-888-832-2272 (TDD Available)
- An emergency shelter for victims of intimate partner violence and their children, where they can stay in a safe, comfortable haven and plan for their future.
- Counseling and therapy, which are available in-person, over the phone and virtually.
- Support groups, facilitated by Blackburn Center staff, where participants can explore their strengths, resources, and options.
- Medical advocacy/accompaniment where we provide support and information at hospitals and medical facilities, including meeting victims of domestic and sexual violence at emergency rooms at any time of the day or night.

Please join us in thanking these sponsors for their generous support of our 2023 Walk a Mile in Her Shoes event. For a full list of sponsors, visit our website at www.blackburncenter.org.

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 **BlackburnCenter**
Standing together to end violence.

OUR SERVICES CONTINUED

- Legal systems support, where we accompany victims of violence or crime to hearings, trials and other significant court dates and provide support, encouragement, and information.
- Blackburn Center Legal, which provides civil legal services for victims and survivors of crime. These services may include matters such as divorce, child custody, public benefits, Protection from Abuse petitions, bankruptcy, or other issues related to victimization.

Each year, we provide direct client services to thousands of people throughout Westmoreland County. For example, in 2022-2023, Blackburn Center answered 1,732 hotline calls, provided shelter to 120 adults and children. We also had 1,814 legal advocacy contacts and 103 medical advocacies during this time.

Beyond direct client services, Blackburn Center also works in the community to achieve our ultimate goal of ending this type of violence. This work is known as primary prevention: instead of simply responding to violence, abuse, and crime, we hope to address the root causes by raising awareness and educating the public. We offer free educational programs to schools, community organizations, and other entities, and work directly with local universities on special projects. We also provide free educational materials for parents and educators (available on our website), attend fairs and community events, and host our own annual event: Walk a Mile in Her Shoes®. In 2021-2022 alone, 14,859 students and teachers across Westmoreland County participated in awareness programs put on by our education team. We cannot do this work alone. We are grateful for your support, as well as the hard work of our staff and volunteers. If you would like to help us continue to provide these critical, life-saving services in Westmoreland County, you can learn more about donating or volunteering through our website.

Meet Bella! Introducing Blackburn Center's Therapy Dog

After a traumatic experience, the decision to get help can be a difficult one. You may be scared about talking about what happened, reluctant to open up to someone else, or just stressed about the idea of reliving it all. At Blackburn Center, we understand how challenging going to therapy or counseling can be. Our latest addition to the team, therapy dog Bella, may make sessions slightly easier as she offers comfort, support, and hugs to clients. Bella began her work at Blackburn Center in January 2023. At our offices, she offers comfort to clients during counseling or therapy sessions. She works with both children and adults.



ANNUAL APPEAL 2023

Every day, survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and other violent acts face insurmountable challenges. They may have lost everything – from their homes and loved ones to their jobs and sense of security. But here's why your generosity is so important. By donating to Blackburn Center, you help us provide survivors with the tools and resources they need to recover and rebuild their lives.

*This newsletter highlights the extensive services we offer at Blackburn Center. Our team works tirelessly to provide survivors with the resources they need to heal and move forward. But we can't do this work alone. **We rely on the support of generous donors like YOU** to continue providing these vital services. Your donation can help us provide safe shelter, counseling, and advocacy for survivors of violence in our community.*

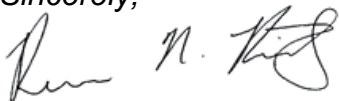
At Blackburn Center, we understand the challenges that survivors of violence face in rebuilding their lives. We know that it takes more than just physical safety to truly recover from the trauma of violence. That's why our services extend beyond just providing a safe place to stay.

Our team of counselors, advocates, and therapists work with each survivor to develop a personalized plan for healing and recovery. We offer individual and group counseling, support groups, legal advocacy, and more. Our goal is to empower survivors to take control of their lives and move forward on their own terms.

*Please consider sending a contribution to Blackburn Center today. Your donation can make a significant difference in the life of a survivor of violence. **You can make a donation by mailing the enclosed envelope or by visiting blackburncenter.org/donate.***

*Together, we can create a world where survivors of violence are supported and empowered to rebuild their lives. **Thank you** for your kindness and generosity in supporting Blackburn Center's mission.*

Sincerely,



Renee N. Reitz
Executive Director

Blackburn Center's All Occasion Greeting Cards

For over two decades, Blackburn Center has provided a meaningful way to honor important events and special people in our lives through the purchase of an All Occasion Greeting Card. Visit our website to choose from a variety of cards to send, and to view a list of those purchased in 2023.



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2023 Annual Appeal Enclosed

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LOOK AT OUR LIST, AND CHECK IT TWICE

As the holiday season approaches, please make our Needs List, located on our website, part of your gift giving. Making a gift of items from the Needs List, or donating the financial resources to purchase those items, helps us provide for the basic needs of our clients. Your donations throughout the year enhance Blackburn Center's services and make the stay more comfortable for shelter residents. You can also provide a victim of violence with basic household items and groceries as they establish a safe home for themselves and their children. A donation is also a unique and wonderful way to honor someone special on your holiday list. You make your donation in their honor and we will send a card acknowledging your gift on their behalf.

Please put the items listed in **BOLD** at the top of your shopping list, and help Blackburn Center manage donations by bringing **ONLY NEW ITEMS - NO CLOTHING PLEASE**. *If you have used items to donate, the agency can provide a list of thrift shops in the area that make goods available to Blackburn Center shelter residents at no charge.*

Blackburn Center's Mission Statement

Blackburn Center advocates for the rights of all individuals to live free from domestic and sexual violence and other forms of violence by eliminating root causes and providing for the well-being and safety of survivors/victims.

If you'd like to learn more about Blackburn Center's services, volunteer opportunities, or make a donation, please contact us at 724.837.9540 or our hotline at 724.836.1122 or 1.888.832.2272.