



BlackburnCenter  
Standing together to end violence.

Spring 2022

# STANDING STRONG

Blackburn Center News

Walk a **MILE** in  
**Their**  
**HER**  
**His**  
**Our**  
**SHOES**



**WHEN:** Saturday April 23, 2022

**WHERE:** St. Clair Park in Greensburg

**REGISTRATION:** 9:00am – 10:00am

**WALK BEGINS:** 10:00am

Registration is \$5 for each participant.

Children 12 and under are free.

Family-friendly event.

Pets on a leash are welcome.

**Take a STAND...  
While taking a WALK!**

Westmoreland County's  
11th Annual March to Stop Rape,  
Sexual Assault, & Domestic Violence

In Westmoreland County, a project of



BlackburnCenter  
Standing together to end violence.

*Underwriting Sponsor*

**Tuscano**  
A G E N C Y

*Finish Line Sponsor*

**620 KHB**  
102.1 94.1 92.3  
Westmoreland County's 1<sup>st</sup> Radio Station!



**103.1 KVE**  
**103.9 KHB**

*Big Stride Sponsor*

JANICE GARLOCK

**REGISTER ONLINE:**

[www.blackburncenter.org](http://www.blackburncenter.org) or

<https://blackburncenter.akaraisin.com/Walk2022>

Form groups at work or school,  
or in your neighborhood!  
Free sunglasses for St. Clair Park  
participants, while supplies last.

Scan here to access  
the 2022 Walk website



# BUILDING BRIDGES TO BREAK BARRIERS:

## *New Video Series Highlights Issues Facing People with Disabilities*

We know that domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of violence and crime can happen to anyone, regardless of race, age, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. Yet some groups of people are particularly vulnerable to abuse. A recent collaboration between Blackburn Center, Eastern Suburban Citizen Advocacy (ESCA), and Evolve Coaching aims to highlight the critical issue of abuse of people with disabilities.

People with disabilities make up approximately 26% of the population of the United States, but they are much more likely to experience abuse than people without disabilities. According to data from the U.S. Department of Justice, people with disabilities are 3 times more likely to experience a violent crime and 7 times more likely to experience sexual violence than people without disabilities. People with disabilities may also face significant barriers to seeking help.

The increased rate of abuse against people with disabilities is often described as a hidden epidemic. To raise awareness about this problem, Blackburn Center joined forces with ESCA and Evolve Coaching to create a series of videos on the topic. The first video in the series, ***There Is Support: Coming to Together to Recognize Abuse and Support People with Disabilities***, was released in early March. This short film was made by people who make up and support our disability community, with an intended audience of people with disabilities, their families, and professionals who support them.

This partnership brings together three Western Pennsylvania non-profit organizations that are deeply committed to educating the public about abuse and people with disabilities. Through its outreach programs, Blackburn Center connects to people with disabilities throughout Westmoreland County who may be experiencing abuse. A small non-profit located in Murrysville, ESCA advocates for the best interests of people with disabilities across a broad

range of situations. Finally, Pittsburgh-based non-profit Evolve Coaching offers individualized support for neurodiverse college students and job seekers in the Pittsburgh region.

The idea for this video series arose during the pandemic, when Blackburn Center wanted to find a way to expand our outreach to people with disabilities. After reaching out to ESCA, the two agencies decided to create a series of videos that could be widely distributed and shared throughout the region. Evolve Coaching joined the collaboration to help bring the project's ideas to fruition.

The first film, which broadly addresses the topic of abuse of people with disabilities, was released with an online watch party. Future films will focus on more specific issues, such as financial exploitation, emotional abuse, sexual assault, and healthy relationships.

Our goal with this series is to open up conversations in the community about abuse and people with disabilities. These videos will also be provided to community partners, such as Achieva and Westmoreland Casemanagement and Supports (WCSI), so that they can be used in trainings and shared with individuals, group homes, professionals, and others in the community. You can view this video and all upcoming videos on our YouTube channel (<https://bit.ly/BlackburnYouTube>).

If you would like to learn more about this topic, we offer a training and educational program on abuse and people with disabilities. We can tailor this program to meet the needs of community organizations, businesses, and groups. We can also work with you to host a screening of one or more of these short films.

***As always, we are here for you if you need us. All of our services are provided at no charge to clients, and are or can be accessible. Call anytime: 1-888-832-2272 (TDD available).***

### **United Way Campaign**

All Southwestern PA United Way agencies need your help, now more than ever. The stronger they are, the stronger we are. Please consider directing your contribution to the

Community Impact Fund or to Blackburn Center. Blackburn Center's donordesignation number is 382.



### **Volunteer Opportunities**

Blackburn Center has volunteer positions available. To learn about these opportunities, call our office: 724-837-9540, x114.

# Blackburn Center Transitions

Blackburn Center is pleased to announce the promotion of Renee Reitz to Executive Director of our agency. Renee is currently the Program Director, and will take on the role of Executive Director starting in June 2022. Renee's outstanding work in our direct service programs makes her the ideal candidate to shepherd Blackburn Center through the coming years, as we make strides towards fulfilling our mission.

After graduating from Indiana University of Pennsylvania with a degree in sports management and a minor in business, Renee quickly realized that her true passion lay in the human services field. She returned to school to study sociology, where she was encouraged by her academic advisor to start volunteering at a nonprofit agency. By 2015, Renee was working as a counselor for our emergency shelter. In 2016, Renee took on the position of Assistant Advocacy Program Manager. She was later promoted to Advocacy Program Manager, before advancing to her current role in 2021. For nearly seven years, Renee has demonstrated her dedication to Blackburn Center's work.

According to Renee, the opportunity to guide Blackburn Center as it continues to grow and support those who need our services is incredibly important: "Since I joined Blackburn Center, I have been impressed by the agency's passion and commitment to providing high quality services to both clients and the community. I am eager to see where the agency will go in the future, as we continue to navigate challenges and discover innovative ways to meet the needs of people throughout Westmoreland County."

As Renee steps into the role of Executive Director, we congratulate Ann Emmerling on her retirement. After 37 years at Blackburn Center, Ann will be greatly missed. While Blackburn Center remains true to its mission of providing services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and other crimes, Ann's vision and talent has expanded the agency to become a leader in social transformation. Under her leadership, the agency has grown significantly in size and scope of services. We wish her all the best and thank her for tireless service.

## 2022 ALL OCCASION CARD

For more than 20 years, Blackburn Center has offered a meaningful way for you to mark important occasions and celebrate special people in your life through our Special Occasion Cards.

This year's beautiful card, designed by a friend of Blackburn Center, features the verse: "**Be present in all things and thankful for all things.**"

*-Maya Angelou*

For each \$25 gift to Blackburn Center, we will send a card to the person you specify and will include a message specific to the occasion inside the card. For any level of giving, your name and the name of the person you honor will be included in the fall edition of our newsletter, and your name will appear in Blackburn Center's Annual Report. (If you prefer, we will list you as "anonymous.")

You can make a donation and choose a card (or cards) via our website: [www.blackburncenter.org/greetingcards](http://www.blackburncenter.org/greetingcards).

**Please consider this a way to touch the lives of thousands of people in our community as you touch the lives of those you honor. On behalf of those we serve, thank you for sharing in our mission.**



### Board of Directors

Dr. Julie Ankrum, President  
Dr. Terrence E. DePasquale, Vice President  
Melissa Lehman, Secretary/Treasurer  
Leonard R. Caric  
Elmer Knopf  
Lyzona Marshall  
Dr. David Von Schlichten  
Hilary Bacha Senerius  
  
Ann Emmerling, Executive Director  
  
Quatrini Law Group, Solicitor



## Help Us Help Others!

Your donations throughout the year enhance Blackburn Center's services. Items from the needs list help to make the stay for shelter residents more homelike; they can provide a victim of domestic violence with basic household items as they start to establish a home that is safe for themselves and their children; they can fill a grocery bag for clients who need an extra helping hand.



Scan here to  
access the needs list

## Blackburn Center 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.

### Blackburn Center

is a private, not-for-profit organization that provides 24-hour hotline services, counseling, advocacy and support groups to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, incest, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment and other forms of violence; and emergency shelter available to survivors of domestic violence and their dependent children. Blackburn Center also provides community education, school student awareness programs, and in-service professional trainings throughout Westmoreland County.



Follow us on Twitter and Instagram @blackburncenter  
Like us on Facebook: [facebook.com/blackburncenterpa](https://www.facebook.com/blackburncenterpa)