



WOMEN'S
RESOURCE
CENTER

IMPACT100 TRAVERSE CITY

2025 Family : Women's Resource Center

www.womensresourcecenter.org

INITIATIVE: Safe Housing for Survivors of Domestic Violence

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Women's Resource Center mission is to protect, shelter and empower people impacted by domestic and sexual violence. Since 1999, we have operated our transitional house, offering stability for survivors rebuilding their lives. With support from Impact100 Traverse City, we will advance a transformational initiative: creating a survivor-centered studio apartment within the Women's Resource Center's transitional home. Residing in an apartment where the environmental stressors of communal living have been removed gives survivors the foundation to build emotional and financial security free from the fears of homelessness or returning to a violent home.

This initiative is designed to meet survivors' immediate housing needs while supporting long-term healing and independence. Residents have access to the Women's Resource Center services including one-on-one advocacy and emotional support, court advocacy, safety planning and access to community resources that reduce barriers to recovery and foster resilience.

The Women's Resource Center owns its transitional housing outright, ensuring stability for decades to come. Operating costs for the new unit—utilities, maintenance, and services—will be absorbed into the existing housing budget. Sustainability is a cornerstone: more than 51% of Women's Resource Center's annual revenue comes from nonprofit thrift stores, creating rare independence from government or grant funding. In addition, over \$650,000 is raised annually through community giving, providing resilient, flexible support.

With an Impact100 Traverse City grant, the Women's Resource Center will expand housing capacity, strengthen pathways to independence, and ensure survivors can build safe, thriving futures. Together, we can break cycles of violence and create lasting transformation for survivors and their families.

The following sections contain information from the application, as written by the applicant. While detailed financial information has not been provided here due to its confidential nature, each applicant submitted an initiative budget and supporting financial documents as part of their application. Each proposed initiative and the supporting financial documentation has undergone a thorough review and the initiatives proposed by our finalists have met our eligibility requirements.

ORGANIZATION'S VISION STATEMENT

Our vision is to foster a culture of inclusion and belonging through the enhancement of advocacy and empowerment of survivors, which a diverse and sustainable funding model supports.

ORGANIZATION'S MISSION STATEMENT

To protect, shelter, and empower people impacted by domestic and sexual violence.

DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATION AND ITS HISTORY

The Women's Resource Center for the Grand Traverse Area (WRC) has been walking beside survivors of domestic and sexual violence since 1975. Founded by local women and community leaders, the WRC began as a modest information center, a safe place where women could gather, share, and seek resources. A turning point came in 1979 when that same group of women rallied to support Jeanette Smith, who was accused of killing her abusive husband, by providing Smith with money for her defense. Smith was tried in Kalkaska County and was the second woman in the nation to be acquitted using Battered Woman Syndrome as a defense. Jeanette's story and trial sparked a turning point for the WRC and marked the moment we solidified the focus of our mission: to protect, shelter, and empower people impacted by domestic and sexual violence. In 1984, we opened our first emergency shelter, and today we remain the sole provider of free and confidential emergency shelter, transitional housing, and advocacy services for survivors across four rural counties: Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Benzie, and Kalkaska. Nearly 58% of the survivors we helped last year were between 19 and 54 years old, and 13% were children living in Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau counties.

The people we serve are survivors, most often women and children, escaping situations of intense abuse. Some are young mothers striving to protect and stabilize their children. Others are older women who have endured decades of coercive control and are only now able to seek safety. Our clients often arrive at our emergency shelter in crisis, without transportation, employment, or access to childcare. Some have never lived independently. Many have experienced financial abuse, being denied access to bank accounts, housing, or employment by their abuser. A growing percentage of our clients also face housing instability, and nearly all report a profound fear of becoming homeless if they leave their abusive relationship.

Compared to the general population in our service area, survivors accessing WRC services are significantly more likely to live in poverty, face housing insecurity, and lack access to

transportation or support systems. While just under 30% of area households meet ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) criteria, over 90% of WRC clients fall into this category or below the federal poverty line. This stark contrast underscores the severity of systemic and interpersonal barriers our clients face—and the urgent need for survivor-centered services in rural Northern Michigan.

The WRC exists to bridge a critical gap in our community regarding survivor services. Our programs are free, confidential, and survivor-centered. They include:

- 24/7 emergency shelter for survivors and their children, including safe housing, daily meals, transportation assistance, emotional support, and help with personalized safety plans. Last year, we provided 3,981 nights of safe shelter to 119 survivors, including 48 children.
- Transitional housing provides up to two years of stable, affordable housing. Rent is based on income, ranging from as low as \$1 per month to a maximum of \$400. This allows survivors to build savings, regain financial control, and restore housing security.
- 24-Hour Crisis Hotline connects callers to trained advocates for immediate safety planning, emotional support, and help navigating social and legal systems. In 2023, we answered 5,082 calls; over 1,000 were from survivors in life-threatening situations.
- Court Advocacy supports survivors through the legal process. Last year, we assisted 83 individuals with personal protection orders, preparing them for court, accompanying them to hearings, and offering emotional support throughout.
- Empowerment Services include one-on-one advocacy and peer-based support groups. Last year, we provided nearly 1,324 hours of personalized support and peer engagement, focusing on healing, resilience, and long-term goals, to approximately 425 survivors.
- WRC Thrift Shops provide free clothing and household essentials to survivors and low-income community members, which are critical for survivors as they restart their lives.

Each of these programs is anchored in empowerment and dignity. Our staff and volunteers work to remove the barriers that keep survivors trapped in cycles of abuse, whether those barriers are fear, financial dependence, housing insecurity, or lack of transportation. Our core objectives are to provide immediate safety and shelter for survivors in crisis; to support physical and emotional healing through comprehensive services like advocacy and peer support; to foster long-term stability through transitional housing, financial empowerment, and connections to community resources; and to ensure that no survivor in Northern Michigan ever faces violence alone.

SUMMARY OF INITIATIVE

Escaping abuse is often just the beginning. Survivors who leave violent homes usually face a new crisis: homelessness.

In response to this growing crisis, the WRC is transforming our transitional house in Traverse City from a communal living model into nine independent apartments for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. This shift addresses a critical regional gap in safe, affordable housing for

those who cannot heal or stabilize in shared shelter environments. It offers survivors and their children autonomy and the opportunity to pursue long-term independence.

The renovation of our transitional house will be led by the WRC of the Grand Traverse Area, a nonprofit organization with over 45 years of experience supporting survivors of domestic and sexual violence. WRC's Executive Director, Program Director, and Facilities Manager will oversee the project in collaboration with a licensed local contractor and architect experienced in trauma-informed design.

With funding from Impact100 Traverse City, the WRC will fully renovate one self-contained studio apartment within our transitional house. This unit will replace part of the current communal living space and be designed to promote safety, privacy, and healing for a survivor. The studio will include a secure entrance, kitchenette, private bathroom, and a combined sleeping/living area. Finishes and layout will follow trauma-informed design principles such as calming color palettes and natural lighting to support recovery and reduce stress.

This shift from shared space to individualized housing responds to a well-documented need. A 2019 report by the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health found that survivors in communal shelters often experience heightened stress and retraumatization due to a lack of privacy, noise, and interpersonal conflict, factors that independent units help prevent. By building out this one studio apartment, WRC will create a long-term housing solution that is both evidence-based and survivor-informed.

This unit will be located on-site at our transitional housing facility, which is fully owned and operated by WRC. For over 20 years, this property has served as a safe haven for women and children escaping violence. The renovation will be managed by WRC's Executive Director, Juliette Schultz, alongside our Program Director and Facilities Manager. A licensed local contractor and architect experienced in trauma-informed residential design will lead construction. Current and former residents will also have a voice in shaping the space to ensure it meets real needs for safety and stability.

This initiative is more than a building project - it's a transformational shift in how survivors experience transitional housing. Communal living, while once a standard model, often exacerbates trauma and can prolong recovery. Survivors may feel unsafe sharing kitchens, bathrooms, or bedrooms with strangers. The studio apartment model changes that. It empowers residents to lock their own door, cook a meal, tuck their child into bed, and rebuild their lives with privacy, autonomy, and dignity.

One survivor's story illustrates this transformation. "Jane" (a pseudonym) came into our emergency shelter after fleeing domestic violence. She had lost custody of her children and was struggling with addiction. While in shelter, she accessed support for her substance use disorder, achieved sobriety, and applied to live at Madeleine's House. While there, she worked with a WRC advocate and Child Protective Services to slowly regain custody of her children. She secured stable employment, was promoted multiple times, and saved enough money to purchase a home of her own. Today, Jane and her children live independently. Her journey from crisis to homeownership began with the safety and support of transitional housing.

The project is also fundamentally sustainable. The transitional house was deeded to the WRC by the City of Traverse City, with the condition that it remains transitional housing in perpetuity. The property is owned outright, eliminating the burden of mortgage costs or lease fees. The

WRC has operated successful housing programs for over 40 years. Our financial model is unique; we operate two thrift shops that generate over 51% of our annual operating revenue. Additional funding comes from donors and community partners. All operational costs associated with the apartment after renovation will be absorbed into the WRC's existing housing budget, with no new staff required. Additionally, residents contribute income-based rent, up to a maximum of \$400 per month, for up to 2 years, and WRC provides all advocacy and support services at no cost.

COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED

The proposed initiative will serve survivors of domestic and sexual violence across the rural service region of Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau counties. Together, these counties span more than 2,000 square miles, encompassing small towns, agricultural land, and growing tourism economies.

The population across this service region is just over 150,000 people. It is predominantly white, with growing Latino populations, seasonal migrant workers, and a significant presence of Indigenous community members. WRC proudly serves members of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, a sovereign tribal nation whose ancestral lands lie within the counties we serve.

Single parents or older adults head many households in the region, and median household incomes fall below the state average in three of the four counties. According to the United Way's ALICE data, 29% of households in Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Benzie, and Kalkaska counties are classified as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), earning above the poverty line but struggling to meet basic needs. National research shows a strong correlation between economic insecurity and domestic violence. According to our internal data, 90% of the survivors seeking our services last year were classified as ALICE.

The WRC serves a wide range of underserved populations, including LGBTQ+ survivors, Indigenous clients, rural residents, people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals involved with child protective services or the criminal justice system. Of clients who disclosed, 2.99% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native (compared to 4.9% regionally), and 0.88% identified as Black (compared to 1.45%). 1.66% identified as multiracial, and 1% as another race, with 39% choosing not to disclose. White clients accounted for 53.87%, lower than the regional average of 88.38%, suggesting a broader reach across racial lines. Additionally, 4.31% of clients identified as LGBTQ+, and 3.65% were chronically homeless. These figures reflect WRC's role in reaching survivors who often face the most significant systemic barriers to safety, housing, and recovery.

An estimated 19,125 women in the communities we serve are likely to experience domestic violence at some point in their lives. This estimate is based on current population figures and the nationally recognized statistic that one in four women will face domestic violence. In Grand Traverse County alone, that equates to nearly 11,900 women, with an additional 2,250 in both Benzie and Kalkaska counties, and approximately 2,750 in Leelanau.

NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED AND GAPS IN EXISTING SERVICES

We often treat housing as a resource for survivors after the danger has passed, something they need once the crisis is over. But in northern Michigan, housing isn't a follow-up to safety; it's an essential part of it. Without it, survivors don't get to start over. They remain stuck between survival and collapse.

In our region, there are no other transitional housing programs explicitly designed for survivors of domestic violence. The WRC fills that gap. We are the only agency in the region offering 24/7/365 emergency shelter and comprehensive, confidential services to survivors. Our transitional house provides the next step beyond emergency shelter, offering time, stability, and support as survivors rebuild their lives.

Based on national data, more than 19,000 women in this four-county region are likely to experience domestic violence in their lifetimes. One in three survivors becomes homeless after leaving an abuser, and in Michigan, 70% of survivors exiting emergency shelters report being unable to secure housing.

Locally, the housing crisis exacerbates the situation. The median home price in Grand Traverse County now exceeds \$437,000, and the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment is over \$1,100, far out of reach for survivors who often leave with no income, job history, or credit. Vacancy rates remain below 2%, and housing voucher waitlists stretch for months or years.

Underserved populations face the most significant barriers: single mothers, survivors of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and those involved with child protective services or the justice system. Under CPS rules, a parent living in a communal shelter often cannot regain custody of their children without a private space, delaying reunification not because of parenting ability, but due to a lack of appropriate housing.

Since assuming operations of the transitional house in 2002, WRC has provided transitional housing to more than 40 survivors and their children. Many went on to secure permanent housing, regain custody, and build financial independence. But the current communal design, once acceptable, has become a barrier. Survivors with complex trauma, safety concerns, or children may find it retraumatizing or inaccessible. According to the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma and Mental Health, survivors in communal shelters often report heightened stress and retraumatization due to a lack of privacy and shared spaces.

This project will convert our transitional house from a shared environment into private, affordable apartments. It is a strategic upgrade to our housing model, informed by survivor feedback and national best practices. Independent units improve safety, promote reunification, and reduce barriers to employment and healing. According to HUD, 86% of families exiting transitional housing move directly into their own housing, proving its long-term impact.

Each unit will serve 1–2 families annually, offering life-changing housing over the next decade. Residents may stay up to two years, paying between \$1 and \$400 per month based on income. This initiative enhances WRC's continuum of care, bridging the gap between emergency shelter and full independence, and giving survivors not just a way out, but a path forward.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROPOSED INITIATIVE

The renovation of our transitional house, specifically the construction of one survivor-centered studio apartment, funded by Impact100, is part of a broader strategic. The WRC has a proven track record of providing safe shelter for survivors fleeing violence since 1984, and we have successfully operated our transitional house for over 20 years.

The WRC owns our transition house property, with no mortgage, lease, or shared-use agreement that could threaten future access or operational control. This long-term asset stability is a foundational pillar of sustainability. The new studio apartment will be located on this site, integrated seamlessly into a program that already has staffing, services, and community infrastructure in place.

We are not building something we can't maintain. Instead, we are enhancing a program that already works and aligning it with best practices that support long-term impact. All operating costs associated with the studio apartment, utilities, maintenance, supplies, and client support will be absorbed into WRC's existing housing program budget.

The WRC has developed a uniquely sustainable funding model over the past 35 years. Our two nonprofit thrift stores generate over 51% of our gross operating revenue, giving us a rare level of financial independence in the nonprofit sector. This earned income covers core costs, funds program expansion, and buffers us from fluctuations in government or grant-based funding. We also maintain a strong culture of individual giving and philanthropic engagement. Our fund development team raises over \$650,000 annually through individual contributions and community partnerships. These funds are flexible and resilient, enabling us to adapt as needs evolve.

The WRC budgets program maintenance and facility upkeep on a rolling basis, with designated reserves for capital repairs and client emergency needs. Our Board reviews and updates these plans annually to ensure long-term financial readiness and program continuity.

We also have deep experience in managing growth. When we opened our second thrift store in 2020, we used feasibility planning and a focused fundraising plan to ensure that operations would remain stable during the expansion. The WRC did not incur any debt during this expansion; therefore, not one dollar was redirected from the mission. The second thrift shop is now entering its fifth year in operation. We took a similar approach with the development of our court advocacy programs, conducting a needs assessment and launching services only when we had the funding, infrastructure, and staffing to provide this essential service. The court advocacy program is now entering its third year in operation. We have applied the same discipline to our transitional housing project beginning with a community stakeholder and survivor survey, a financial feasibility study to determine the readiness of the community to support a project and obtaining funding from Rotary Charities which allowed us to hire Burdco Incorporated to begin Phase One of the renovation project. We apply the same discipline to capital projects, including this one.

The new studio apartment is expected to serve 1–2 survivors per year, providing up to 2 years of safe, affordable, independent housing with access to support services.