



# THE LOOP

A COLLECTION OF STORIES FROM AROUND NEVADA

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October is a month dedicated to bringing awareness to some very important issues that we face in society today. Some of those issues are **Domestic Violence**, **Mental Illness**, and **Breast Cancer**. Domestic violence remains a serious and widespread problem and recent data suggests that cases continue to rise. What we also need to pay attention to is how children are impacted by domestic violence. When it comes to mental illness, there is no better time than now to continue to raise awareness, fight stigma and discrimination, and provide treatment and support.

Other observances like **Indigenous People's Day**, a day in which we should in many ways rethink our history and recognize the important contributions of Indigenous people in the State of Nevada and abroad, cannot be fully celebrated without bringing awareness to the violence against Indigenous women, which has reached unprecedented levels. Some reports identify that Indigenous women are murdered at a rate 10 times higher than the national average, and native children that have been exposed to violence suffer from PTSD at a rate of three times higher than non-native children.

Since WestCare Nevada is at the forefront of bringing awareness to, treating, and advocating for individuals who have experienced trauma on many levels - typically resulting in behavioral health related issues, we are highlighting our **Women and Children's Campus (WCC)** in this month's issue. This is based on the importance of the observances associated with this month, the women and children that we serve, and to whom we provide an environment of safety, support, growth, and healing.

This issue will allow you the opportunity to read about different accounts of some of these pressing issues and the amazing work that is done at the WCC. You will hear from the Director of Residential Treatment, Ms. Irma Magrdichian; a survivor of domestic violence who found her way to WestCare

as a client and who now works as a counselor, Ms. Dawn Tudor; one of our therapists, Ms. Heather Cirimo, who will discuss mental illness, and from several other WCC staff whom provided quotes as to their reason(s) for working with and providing treatment and rehabilitation services to this population.

This issue also includes pieces on our recently renovated Laundry Room at the WCC, our participation in National Night Out, and the Las Vegas Raiders vs Miami Dolphins game attended by WestCare in the Las Vegas Stadium Authority's Community Suite at Allegiant Stadium.

October is also **National Clergy Month** and included with that is **Clergy Appreciation Day**. As a result, we are reminded to recognize the work of ministers, pastors, and spiritual leaders for their compassion, stewardship, faith, and service. WestCare Nevada's Spiritual Care Chaplain Program (SCCP), under the guidance and direction of Sr. Chaplain Ryan Creelman, Spiritual Director, has grown since its inception in 2015, and the overall positive impact on our clients, employees, and the community at large must be acknowledged. Based on the work done here in WestCare Nevada, the SCCP has now expanded to WestCare Florida and Kentucky. I hope and pray that you enjoy this issue.



**Leo Magrdichian, LCSW, LCADC**  
Vice President, Operations



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## Working Together to Put an End to Domestic Violence

By Irma Magrdichian, BA, CADC, *Director of Residential Treatment Services, Women and Children's Campus and Harris Springs Ranch*

The month of October is dedicated to raising awareness of the cases of domestic violence that often live in silence within many of our homes. Although men fall victim to all types of abuse, women are at the highest risk for victimization by someone that they trust and know intimately. Persons in same-gender relationships are more likely to endure their suffering in silence due to the fear of hostile treatment, rejection from their own communities, or limited resources for the LGBTQIA+ population.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, a spike in domestic violence police calls has been reported to have increased by 152% as a direct result of the stressors associated with the shelter-in-place restrictions, loss of employment, and remaining in close proximity with household members. According to data collected over the past several years, Nevada has maintained its position among the top highest crime rates in the United States at one point, ranked first in domestic violence fatalities, but dropped to third in 2014. Despite this decline, our state remains in the top ten cities with reported cases in the United States. The decline in domestic violence-related homicides is partially due to the endless hours of hard work and commitment from community agencies, volunteers, and social work practicum students working together to end domestic violence in the state of Nevada.

**Project Safe (PS417)** is a collaborative program between **Safe Nest** and the **Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD)** that began in 2017 as a pilot project and has since expanded to surrounding areas. Trained first-responder advocates are dispatched to domestic violence calls (Police Code 417) to provide emergency services, safety resources, and hotline information at the scene of domestic disputes.

Several WestCare employees currently volunteer their time to raise awareness, support and educate victims to better care for themselves and their families. WestCare works closely with community partners in securing a safe environment for pregnant, single, and women with children as they receive advocacy services, gain independence, and address substance abuse and co-occurring disorders in a 24-hour supervised therapeutic environment. As a survivor of many types of abuse myself, I will continue to use my voice to increase awareness and stand alongside those who instill hope for change, and remain diligent in breaking the chains of intimate partner violence and generational abuse. Please join us in breaking the pattern of abusive behaviors used to maintain power and control over others.



## Creating an Open Dialogue on Mental Health & Domestic Violence

By Heather Cirimo, CSW-1, MHP, *Women and Children's Campus*

October encompasses **Mental Health Awareness Week, World Mental Health Day** and is also Domestic Violence Awareness Month. As a mental health practitioner, I'm grateful for this increased awareness as it helps to reduce the stigma that society often ascribes to mental illness and violence in familial and romantic relationships. As a Qualified Mental Health Professional, (QMHP) it's my job to build rapport with clients and create a safe and nurturing environment so that individuals suffering from mental and emotional concerns as well as both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence, have a space where their lives, actions, and thoughts can be discussed freely without fear of judgment. The more that these seemingly difficult topics are discussed, the less difficult they become to live with. While awareness alone can't erase the pain of mental illness and domestic violence, it creates an environment in which those who are suffering no longer have to suffer alone and are free to get the therapeutic help that they require.

Awareness is also the first step towards prevention. Trauma and trauma-related disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can stem from being a victim of domestic violence, witnessing domestic violence as a child, and growing up with a parent with an untreated mental illness. Unfortunately, some of these traumas can become cyclical, meaning that the trauma continues through generations. This is why, yes, it's important to also be sympathetic towards perpetrators of domestic violence. As hard as this can be, it's crucial to remember that violent and antisocial behaviors have a root in something, and once we're able to identify the symptom, it can help us find the cause. Once we do this, we can work towards breaking the cycle. As we work to break the cycle, let's work to break the stigma, and in doing so, let's bring awareness and compassion to mental health and domestic violence issues with our clients. Together, we can create that safe space.



## The Nevada CTC Spreads Awareness at the National Night Out!

By Frank Reagan, *Director of Crisis Services, WestCare Nevada Community Triage Center*

In October, **Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department's (LVMPD) Downtown Area Command** organized and presented their annual **National Night Out** event on the corner of Fremont and 8th Street! This was just one of the thousands of National Night Out events that are held nationwide to strengthen the bond between communities and members of local law enforcement.

We were joined by numerous other community-based providers and are happy to report that the event turned out to be a great success! We were represented by Michael Howard, Lead Behavioral Health Tech (BHT) and Caren Lopez, BHT from the WestCare Nevada Community Triage Center (CTC). They handed out flyers and candy while speaking with attendees and getting the word out about WestCare. We try to attend as many community events as possible as the Public Relations (PR) Committee. The WestCare PR Committee in Southern Nevada is comprised of Tina Morton who provides oversight along with Caren Lopez, Andrea Raney, Sashia Whitmire, Rhonda Davisson-Rhames, and myself. Thank you to our CTC staff for representing and to the LVMPD for organizing this important event!

# My Story of Survival

By Dawn Tudor, Counselor, Women and Children's Campus



Hi, my name is Dawn and I am a survivor. Not only am I a survivor of addiction, but I am a survivor of domestic violence. October is **Domestic Violence Awareness Month** and I am here to let others know that there is a way out. This is my story.

Shortly after my second son was born, I fell deep into addiction. As my addiction progressed, I lost more until we eventually lost everything and were homeless, jobless, and desperate. It started with arguing, insults, and threats. It escalated to tit-for-tat, "You slap me, I slap you." I ignored the red flags and of all the warning signs. I was scared and scared to be alone. I didn't think that I could make it on my own, so I stayed. He had a narcissistic personality and made me feel inferior and that his needs were greater than mine and my children's. I would be accused of things that I did not do. I was called names in front of my children and anyone that may be around. Then, the day came when the flood gates opened and I took a punch to the face. I was knocked down and struggling to get to my feet as I heard screaming. I realized it was my oldest son who was screaming and got to my feet in time to place my children behind me to protect them until he left. That was the last time that my son saw him hit me, but it was not the last time that he'd hear my screams as they'd now be behind locked doors where I would be held captive for hours at a time. Why didn't I just leave? That's a popular question people may ask. I wanted to and decided that was it and that I was going to take my boys and leave. Boys who witness domestic violence in the home are twice as likely to abuse their partners when they grow up and I didn't want that for my boys. What people don't know is that I was allowed to

send my oldest son to his father. I was even allowed to leave, but I was not allowed to take my youngest son with me. Anytime that there was talk of me leaving, he would hold my youngest hostage - at times, even leaving the house with him so I wouldn't leave. I made the decision to send my oldest to his father where I knew he would be safe and I stayed with my youngest to protect him and remain in my addiction.

The abuse continued to escalate. I was financially, socially, sexually, mentally, and physically abused. I couldn't hold down a job and would have bruises from being thrown across the bathroom, and tossed faced down on the bed and suffocated while my clothing would be torn off. He kept me with psychological warfare telling me when I did have a job that if I left him he, would call my job and have me fired. I was told he planted drugs in my car and if I tried to leave with my son, he would call the cops and I would never see my baby again. He stopped hitting me in the face where people could see and turned to punching me in my head and back and began choking and kicking me. "Keep the door open," was a common thing I would tell myself when he would choke me. My eyes would go black and the stars would set in, but I remained focused on not losing consciousness so that I could continue kicking the door open when he would try to kick it shut. I knew that if he got the door shut, I might not make it out alive.

He held a gun to my head and pulled the trigger. When it didn't go off, he walked away laughing. He knew that there were no bullets, but I didn't. Knives were held to my throat and razor blades to my face so that I wouldn't be attractive anymore and no one

would want me. I laid on the floor of my deflated air mattress pretending to sleep so that he would stop beating me. The bed would be deflated from the knife punctures of him trying to stab me.

He gaslighted me so often that I believed that I was going crazy and my sense of reality was twisted. He would accuse me of having sexual relations with people that I knew I didn't; telling me that if I admitted it, he would stop beating me. I knew that wasn't true, so I stayed true to myself and took the beatings. I reached the point that I couldn't take it anymore. I thought I was going crazy and swallowed 60 - 70 sleeping pills. I didn't want to kill myself. I just wanted someone to hurt as much as I was hurting. I woke up in the hospital on a suicide hold. When I returned home, I was so confused and didn't recognize where I was. I didn't see any of my belongings. I later found them shoved and broken in a closet as if they weren't expecting me to come back. So, this was my life. No one cared, so I might as well continue getting high. There became a certain comfort in the high. The pain wasn't so bad and I believed it gave me strength. It became routine. We would rob me, beat me, and I would get a break. When he returned days later, he would get me high. Nearly 80% of domestic violence crimes are related to drug use. Women who are abused are 15 times more likely to abuse alcohol and nine times more likely to abuse drugs.

My higher power then did for me what I couldn't do for myself. My son was removed from my custody. I only had to worry about myself, now. So, with the help of a friend, I was able to leave my home. I stayed in

shelters and bounced from couch to couch. The streets were safer for me than my own home. I was referred by the courts to WestCare, where I met my future counselor who believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. I stayed in residential treatment for nine months. I suffered from nightmares, depression, and PTSD. I learned to love myself, was reunified with my children, learned to forgive, and to forgive myself so that I no longer would be held prisoner. I entered WestCare on October 14, 2013 with \$7.00 and two duffel bags. I didn't run a perfect program. On October 26th of this year, I celebrated seven years clean and free from violence. I knew that if I could make it out, everyone could make it out.

I knew that my story wasn't for me alone, but to be shared with others so that they will know that there is hope and that there is a way out. I put myself back into school, received my Bachelors in psychology, became a counselor at the WestCare Women and Children's facility, and trained in Krav Maga so that no one could ever put hands on me again. I am getting married to the man of my dreams next month, have just been accepted to the MSW program at Capella University, and continue to grow everyday thanks to the foundation that WestCare gave me. My fellow WestCare Alumni have become my family, surrounded me, and stood me up until I was strong enough to stand on my own.

If you are a victim of domestic violence or know someone who is, please speak up. Your life depends on it. **For every fight lost, every battle won, and for those who are still fighting - I stand with you.**



More than three women are killed everyday at the hands of their partners and 1,300 deaths and 2 million injuries are reported every year due to intimate partner violence.



*Kristy Edwards*  
Program Supervisor, WCC

"I love watching the clients come in the building broken and walking out of these doors a brand-new person - filled with confidence, self-worth, and a desire to achieve any goal that they have planned for their future. It's inspiring to see them going from crying and living in fear to learning, laughing, and walking in faith. There are miracles that happen here and the best part is that we all get to be a part of them."



*Jacqueline Valencia*  
Counselor, WCC

"Working for WestCare is very rewarding. Every day is different, but at the end of the day, I can go home and feel that I have made a slight difference in at least one woman. WestCare - WCC is a big family that cares about everyone regardless of their race, age, language, religious preference, sexual orientation, or health/mental health status. WestCare is a great place to work."



*Rhonda Davisson*  
Transitional Counselor, WCC

"At the beginning of each day, I have every reason to greet the day. As a staff member at WestCare -WCC, I have the opportunity to learn, grow, and be a part of a meaningful profession - all while positively impacting and supporting our clients' recovery and their new lives. I am humbled and honored in my responsibilities. I know that I am right where I am supposed to be."



## Proudly Presenting the WCC's New and Oh-So-Improved Laundry Room!

By Rhonda Davisson, *Transitional Coordinator*, Women and Children's Campus

In September, eight new and heavy-duty commercial washers and dryers were generously donated to our facility by longtime supporters of the **Women and Children's Campus**, our **WestCare Nevada Community Action Council (CAC)** thanks to a generous donation of \$15,000 by the Tobman family! The delivery of this much-needed equipment was delayed due to the conditions of the current pandemic, but was well worth the wait!

We are excited that the clients at our campus can now utilize a fully equipped laundry room. Additionally, walls were painted, new utility tables were purchased, and inspirational quotes were added to give the room a fresh and uplifting atmosphere. We are excited and grateful to be blessed with this essential resource for our clients' daily lives as they focus on bettering themselves for a brighter future! On behalf of our staff and the wonderful ladies and children that we serve, thank you to all of our amazing CAC members for their continued generosity and support!

## Proudly Recognizing Indigenous Peoples' Day

By Andrea Lopez, *Records & Quality Assurance Specialist*, Las Vegas Community Involvement Center

This month, our team in Nevada was proud to recognize **Indigenous Peoples' Day**. Please take a moment to recognize, educate yourself on, and appreciate the presence, contributions, and plight of our nation's Indigenous communities.

In commemoration, we'd like to share an excerpt from the White House's proclamation for this year's observance. The full proclamation can be found at [whitehouse.gov/briefing-room](https://whitehouse.gov/briefing-room).



*"Today, we recognize Indigenous peoples' resilience and strength as well as the immeasurable positive impact that they have made on every aspect of American society. We also recommit to supporting a new, brighter future of promise and equity for Tribal Nations — a future grounded in Tribal sovereignty and respect for the human rights of Indigenous people in the Americas and around the world."*

— President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.



## WestCare Nevada is Thanked for Their Services with Special Seats in the Home of The Raiders!

By Andrew Moran, *Development Director*, WestCare Foundation

The **Las Vegas Stadium Authority (LVSA)** located at the **Allegiant Stadium**, the new home of the Las Vegas Raiders, sure knows how to show love for their community! WestCare Nevada applied for and was recently chosen to attend a regular-season game on September 26, 2021, between the Raiders and the Miami Dolphins from the LVSA's Community Suite!

Eighteen members and guests of the WestCare Nevada family enjoyed the day's game from the suite along with its included amenities. Looking over the railing at a sold-out stadium of 68,000 fans was nothing short of a construction marvel. Allegiant Stadium, or as it's affectionately referred to as the "Death Star" by Raiders' fans, is located in the middle of the Las Vegas Strip with amazing views from above! With many lifelong Raiders fans on our team, this was truly an amazing experience that we will never forget! The Raiders did not disappoint either, overcoming a 14-point deficit and eventually winning the game in overtime with a final score of 31 to 28!

On behalf of our WestCare Nevada family of programs, we would like to send our most heartfelt thanks to the Las Vegas Stadium Authority for selecting our organization and placing us among the other amazing community-based providers that were selected for this honor! We'd also like to give special thanks to Allegiant Stadium's catering and suites teams for their stellar service and hospitality throughout the game! Thank you all for joining us in helping fulfill our mission of Uplifting the Human Spirit!

Connect with us in Nevada

Get in touch with our Marketing Department to learn more about what is happening in WestCare Nevada at [marketing@westcare.com](mailto:marketing@westcare.com)