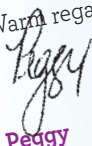


Dear Friends,

Creating and sustaining innovative approaches to supporting survivors and addressing domestic and sexual violence is an intentional and strategic priority. We are committed to being an organization that truly wants survivors to have what they need, what they want, and what they deserve. Over the last five years, we have doubled staff, created the groundbreaking Multidisciplinary Interview and Training Center, renovated and opened Jane's Place effectively doubling our housing shelter capacity, and expanded our legal services program to include family law. In this issue, we are pleased to highlight the newly expanded WISE Legal Services Program. We are thrilled to have two attorneys on staff and a mighty team of four, as well as formal collaborations with New Hampshire Legal Aid and community partners.

As a community, we are working together to create the changes needed to end gender-based violence before it happens. Your continued support and involvement is very important, and there are many ways to play a part. Join our critical WISE Volunteers and ensure 24-hour support by staffing our crisis line evenings, nights, weekends and holidays (wiseuv.org/how-to-join/volunteer). Invite WISE to one of the groups you belong and learn about gender-based violence and its prevention. Your financial support continues to keep WISE strong, stable and forward focused—thank you. As WISE addresses the needs and wants of survivors by creating solutions and expanding where we can, we continue to work with the community to address the bigger questions. We welcome your critical thinking and problem solving. Thank you for support, involvement, and working side-by-side with us.

Warm regards,



Peggy



Save the Dates

2024 Annual Meeting
Wednesday, May 8th
5:30-7:00 pm

WISE Connections
Tuesdays 5:30-7:00 pm
Starting May 14th

Covered Bridges Half Marathon
Sunday, June 2, 2024

Board Members

Martha Goodrich, Chair
Jenny Levy, Vice Chair
Margaret Rightmire, Treasurer
Kate Harrison, Secretary
Angela Zhang
Beth Ames
Gail Gentes
Jason Lichtenstein
Jenny Williams
Karen Colberg
Lauren Adams
Mindi Laine
Patricia Spellman
Sherice McCarthy-Hill
Peggy O'Neil, Executive Director
Susan Dewees, Board Emeritus

highlights

Issue 18



“Knowing someone is in your corner can sometimes be enough to move forward” *Lauren Adami, WISE Family Law Attorney*



We are excited to introduce the newly expanded WISE Legal Services Program team. From left to right: Lauren Adami, Family Law Attorney, Kate Semple Barta, Immigration Attorney and the new Legal Services Program Director, Sharon Mee, Family Law Legal Services Coordinator, and Kelly Pikus, Immigration Legal Services Coordinator.

“There are so many challenges survivors face navigating immigration systems and family courts. These systems are not survivor-centered and can be traumatizing. Having legal representation can dramatically affect outcomes.” Kate Semple Barta

Meeting with WISE Legal Services team

Building the Legal Services Program is an exciting milestone for WISE. We have long identified this critical need and we have expanded our capacity to support survivors and their children by offering highly specialized legal services. For decades, WISE Advocates have provided invaluable support for survivors navigating the courts and legal systems. All too often, however, survivors require legal representation in order to achieve positive outcomes for their children and families. Over the years, we have created an impressive patchwork of legal resources and close relationships. And yet the need for legal representation far exceeds capacity.

It has long been a WISE priority to establish a comprehensive legal services program. WISE Legal Services Program is unique and focused on legal support for domestic violence victims and for immigration cases involving domestic and/or sexual violence. Program staff now consists of four people, and together they are developing a survivor-led, survivor-centered law practice.

Family courts and immigration systems are complicated and challenging to navigate. The Program is tailored specifically to survivors and WISE. It is collaborative with WISE Advocacy and operates from a team approach to address the complex needs of survivors. From the first phone call until the final court order, we have created processes with intention and care to make it as less stressful as possible for survivors.

“Survivors are dealing with so much - not just housing, money, kids, but also heartbreak because the person they chose to create a life with has caused them harm. I recently received a letter from a survivor that said, ‘I can’t believe how well all of us are doing. The absence of tension and stress in our home has changed our lives.’ For us to play a small role in this is so rewarding.” Sharon Mee

Family law

WISE advocates have always supported survivors at court, accompanying them to hearings and referring them to pro-bono and low-bono attorneys. Creating a trauma-informed legal practice that is survivor-centered and survivor-lead is a very exciting step for us at WISE. Lauren Adami, our new in-house family law attorney, will represent survivors in court regarding family matters such as divorce, protective issues, and custody. Sharon Mee will coordinate interviews and help process paperwork for cases.

Access to legal resources are difficult and expensive. Cases can languish for years. It is well documented that abusers can manipulate the court system to continue causing harm. Being an available valuable legal resource can be very reassuring. Creating processes that are conducive to survivors can make it less stressful. Our goal is to make complicated situations as clear and easy as possible.

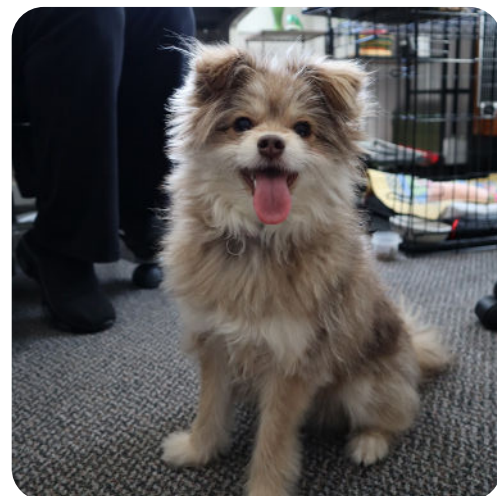
Immigration legal services

For over ten years, Immigration Attorney Kate Semple Barta has provided legal support to humanitarian immigrants, many of whom are survivors of gender-based violence. Kelly Pikus assists Kate in coordinating and filing cases.

With immigration legal services, we prioritize people who are migrant survivors of domestic violence and persecution with limited financial resources. WISE’s humanitarian immigrant clients are survivors of gender-based violence, often by the hands of a U.S. citizen spouse, and individuals who have suffered persecution in their home countries because of their sexual orientation, gender, and/or identity. Their lack of legal immigration status put them at additional risk of harm. Without proof of legal status, they may not have the ability to work or drive, or open a bank account. It makes it very difficult to leave an abusive relationship, and creates a barrier to seeking help.

We support people within various legal and social systems, carefully holding people’s needs within the context of trauma.

“We work with amazing people within the immigrant community - smart, brave people who just want to be a part of our shared community. I wish people understood the individual stories of the people who need help with their immigration status. If they did, more people would want to help.” Kelly Pikus



Tawnee, the honorary member of the legal team