

Dear Friends,

WISE's tag line is *End Violence, Share Hope, Change Lives*. We support survivors of gender-based violence every day as they consider and decide what changes they want to make in their life—all kinds of change. It is in these moments that we lean into our roots, the core of our work. Our work is about listening with compassion and without judgment. It is about being a calm and constant presence for survivors, providing empathy, connection, information, and offering a safe space for survivors to catch their breath. This is quiet work, and often has the most important impact on the people we support. When people leave feeling heard, stronger, clearer, and knowing that they can move forward, we know we are making a difference and change is happening.

As an organization wholly committed to preventing violence, we maintain our curiosity and strive continually to evolve and change. We listen to what survivors want and need from WISE and we listen to what our community wants and needs as a community partner. In 2025, we will begin preparing a new five-year strategic plan as we sunset the current plan. Our new plan will be informed by these conversations.

We know change can be hard. When we experience positive change, we are energized and hopeful. When change feels slow, confusing and difficult, we might wonder if we are making a big enough difference. We remain courageous and undeterred in our mission. Thank you for all the ways you support our quiet work, partner with us, and for all the ways you inspire us to make the Upper Valley a more peaceful place.

Warmly,


Peggy



Save the dates

WISE Connections

creative expressions with
color, texture, writing and imagination
Wednesdays 5:30-7:00 pm
laura@wiseuv.org to sign up

Foundations of Gender-Based Violence

scheduled for March 2025
stacey@wiseuv.org for more details

33rd Covered Bridges Half Marathon

June 1, 2025
early registration opens mid-November
development@wiseuv.org for more information

Board Members

Jenny Levy, Chair
Lauren Adams, Vice-Chair
Margaret Rightmire, Treasurer
Gail Gentes, Secretary
Angela Zhang • Beth Ames
Claire Churchill • Jason Lichtenstein
Karen Colberg • Kate Harrison
Martha Goodrich • Sherice McCarthy-Hill
William Thomas
Peggy O'Neil, Executive Director
Susan Dewees, Board Emeritus
Natalya Subbotina, Tuck Board Fellow

We are pleased to welcome Claire Churchill and Bill Thomas to the WISE Board and Natalya Subbotina as this year's Tuck Board Fellow.

Claire is a Woodstock resident and has experience with grant-making, financial analysis, and impact investing.

Bill is a resident of Hanover and brings expertise in finance, governance, and management.

Natalyna comes to the Upper Valley from the Boston area, working in the nonprofit sector.

highlights

Issue 19

end violence
wise
share hope • change lives



“The true power of these values is in their interconnectedness – how they holistically shine and are felt through the care, service, and support each team member brings to WISE to every day.” -Karen Colberg, WISE Board

Living our values

Over the past five years, WISE has grown and evolved: staff has doubled in size, existing programs were expanded and we launched new programs. We knew we wanted to re-engage, as Board and Staff, with the values that hold up our work.

In 2022, the WISE Board of Directors planned a retreat to reconnect in person after two years of Zoom meetings. At the retreat, board members spent time exploring personal values and understanding the existing staff values. Earlier this year, staff gathered together as the next step to formalize a set of WISE Organizational Values. We were honored that Karen Tronsgard-Scott, Executive Director of the Vermont Network, facilitated the process with staff and then returned for the board discussion. At the October Board meeting, staff shared our work on the values, and board members reflected on what the values mean in their board service and as WISE more broadly.

What are organizational values? They are core values that are deeply ingrained principles that guide our actions. They serve as cornerstones of our organizational culture. During our time together, we looked at our individual and collective strengths. We articulated what drives our work at WISE, and with the benefit of facilitated feedback, we honed these motivations into values. From these expressed aspirations and established practices, we crafted four core values: Courage, Compassion, Connection, Curiosity. We are pleased to share our values with you and define what they mean to us.

WISE Organizational Values

We believe the way we do our work models the outcomes we seek. Our relationship with one another is integral to the success of the mission. To this end, we daily strive to embody the following organizational values.

Courage We make difficult decisions, step into discomfort, and are bold in service of a thriving community. Our determination is rooted in our togetherness and the belief that our efforts lead directly to positive change.

Compassion We strive for fairness and compassion in our personal and systemic relationships, because systems of oppression affect us all in different, intersecting ways.

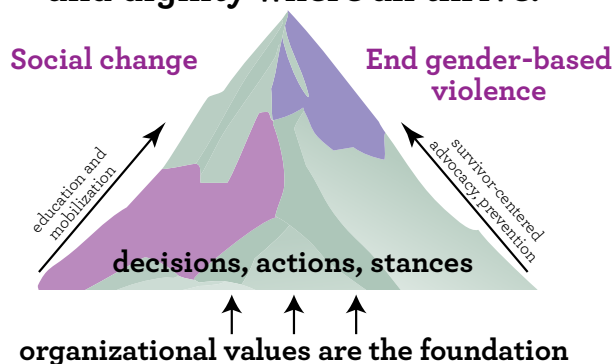
Connection We believe those who are closest to the problem are closest to the solution, and as gender-based violence is a social issue, we must all respond. We strive for mutuality, so you can no longer tell the difference between the ones served and the ones serving.

We build trust across communities by being collaborative and assuming best intentions. We see each other with openhearted generosity; we center everyone’s humanity. We are individuals in relationship with each other, our community, our systems, our society, our world.

Curiosity We encourage and cultivate a dynamic learning environment that requires us to be adaptive, flexible, and innovative. By being curious and listening to one another, we can better understand each other. We can learn and grow together as a community.

“The mission and the daily work of WISE is audacious and ceaseless. When I first heard Peggy tell me these Organizational Values it all clicked. So this is how WISE does it, this is how the talented staff work,

A world of freedom, justice, equality and dignity where all thrive.



this is how anyone who partners with WISE feels, and this is the model we all must seek to embody. WISE is leading our community forward with these inspiring values.”

Jenny Levy,
WISE Board Chair

Meeting with Abby, WISE Multidisciplinary Interview and Training Center (MITC) Director

This year marks Abby Tassel's 30th WISE anniversary! Abby has contributed so much to the organization, helping to evolve WISE into the organization of today. She has had many roles at WISE including crisis line volunteer, coordinator of the schools program, advocate, Assistant Director and Board member. As MITC Director, Abby has developed a groundbreaking approach to supporting survivors within the criminal legal system. In honor of this significant milestone, we sat down with her for a chat.



Abby joined WISE in 1994

What brought you to WISE? When I moved to the Upper Valley, one of the first things I did was contact WISE. I had been volunteering in a Boston crisis center before moving and knew it was important for me to connect to the local program. In Boston I was a project manager for architectural millwork companies and a construction clerk for architects so was on construction sites a lot. This was back in the 80's and early 90's. I was usually the only woman at jobs and I had lots and lots of uncomfortable experiences and did not know how to process them. I had great colleagues and friends but some of my interactions in the construction world were really hard to navigate and actually quite scary at times. When I did the crisis center training, it all started to make a bit more sense: there was a larger context in which this was playing out. It was so helpful to have that clarity and I became passionate about wanting other people to understand what I had begun to comprehend. I thought that when others understand, change can happen. I still believe that to a certain degree but I may have been a little naïve about what it takes to really shift societal norms! There are so many myths embedded in our culture. Ending gender-based violence is long-term work.

The biggest change I've seen in WISE is how we have grown and been able to work with other disciplines. So much of what we have accomplished is due to funding and working with existing systems. We have gone from not having a seat at the table, to working within systems, to creating new collaborations to help change those systems. Creating MITC has been a leap in working across disciplines to move the needle. In addition, doing the work with restorative justice for the past five years feels hopeful: it has the potential to make positive change for both survivors and people who have caused harm. I appreciate this about WISE - we are always innovating and as a staff person, I have the support to explore new ideas and be creative about what makes sense in terms of supporting individual survivors as well as doing the broader work to end gender-based violence.

What part of your job do you find most inspiring? I am so inspired by survivors who, despite the risks and cultural biases, come forward and share their experiences. It takes strength, courage and trust. It is such an honor to be trusted in that way - and to be able to connect and support someone through the process. I feel really lucky to be doing this work in a time where we have had an explosion of research in trauma studies. I love learning from the folks doing the science and applying that information to people's lived experiences. It is so gratifying to then be able to pass on what I have learned to people who are confused about, or being blamed for their responses to terrifying situations. It is normal to do things like shut down in order to survive but people don't generally know that. I can help them see that they are doing super-hero work. Getting through whatever they've gone through takes extraordinary strength, even though, unfortunately, it is quite common. There are so many structures in place that silence survivors. And still, they say, "Nope, I'm going to stand up." Who wouldn't be inspired by that?

If you could get rid of one thing from your daily routine, what would it be? I hate paperwork, and paying bills!

End of year planning

As you focus on your year-end giving and long-term financial planning, please consider including WISE in your plans. By making strategic decisions, you can maximize financial and tax benefits while making a bigger impact with your donations.

Gifts of stock, mutual funds, and retirement assets offer opportunities for you to make a difference as well as enjoy financial and tax benefits. You can also recommend a grant from your donor-advised fund.

By including WISE in your will, trust, or as a beneficiary designation, you can create an enduring legacy by helping to create a more peaceful Upper Valley.

Curious to learn more? Email us at development@wiseuv.org or visit our website at wiseuv.org/ways-to-give.





A decade on Dartmouth Campus

Ten years ago, we entered into a unique formal partnership with Dartmouth College, introducing an innovative model of integrated community advocacy to support survivors of relationship and sexual violence on campus. Since formalizing our partnership, we have navigated three U.S. presidential administrations, significant changes in federal policy regarding Title IX and state legislation, a global pandemic, and transitions in college leadership and initiatives. Throughout the decade, WISE has been a consistent and steady presence on campus, providing an easy and welcoming space for the Dartmouth Community to get information and support.

Our partnership is deep and meaningful, and goes beyond providing services. Student-led organizations, Greek Life, clubs, athletics, and affinity groups invite us to facilitate conversations around how to make their environments safer.



From left to right: Bri Parry, Jess Chayes, Bailey Ray, Kianny Antigua having a WISer conversation about Dartmouth for our podcast

“What I love about the conversations I have on campus is the curiosity and the willingness to explore our various roles and the spaces we move through. We explore how we might be giving rise to violence in ways that maybe we haven’t yet thought about. How might we reduce violence in our own communities? I so deeply believe that every day we have the opportunity to wake up curious, powerful, and ready to make choices, and believe that with the right support, we can navigate those choices well.” – Bailey Ray, Advocacy Manager and Campus Advocacy Coordinator



WISE at a Dartmouth basketball game

We collaborate with college professionals to provide training for the Sexual Assault Peer Ally program, the Student Presidential Committee on Sexual Assault, and Dartmouth Emergency Medical Services. We participate in Title IX trainings for faculty, staff, and students, offer professional development sessions for the Department of Safety and Security, and are included in the annual Intimate Partner Violence panel for the “On Doctoring” program at Geisel School of Medicine. This is just a sample of the ways in which WISE is woven into the fabric of the campus community.

Our work on campus is cooperative and interdependent. 18 members of the Dartmouth community volunteer on the 24-hour crisis line. The WISE Board of Directors includes many alumni, employees, and Tuck Board Fellows, all with a vested interest in the various ways that WISE and the college collaborate to create a healthy and thriving Upper Valley. Through our work with the Center for Social Impact, we have created internships and consulting projects for both undergraduate and graduate programs. From these projects, students have gained incredible learning opportunities while providing invaluable information and strategies for WISE.

WISE Program Center next phase on the horizon

The story begins 20 years ago when we created an architectural assessment of space needs and formed our first building committee. WISE had been renting office space that had outlived its purpose. We were ready for a home to call our own, a home that would be a warm, welcoming, and supportive environment. After 2 years of planning, a single-family residence came on the market. 38 Bank Street offered the much needed space in an ideal location, and had great bones. We did not have the cash, but we had dream, and our amazing community of supporters came together and helped us realize our vision.

Renovating the Program Center was broken into 3 phases, a reasonable approach that made our vision possible. During Phase I, we reconfigured some of the rooms, brought the building up to code, and put on a fresh coat of paint. For Phase II, we replaced the dilapidated screened-in porch with a two-story addition that added a meeting room, a children’s playroom, and three offices.



Architectural drawings for Program Center phase III renovations

Phase III, building out the “barn” has been on our horizon since 2006. Limited parking availability remained the final puzzle to solve. This final phase was put on hold when we had the serendipitous opportunity to purchase and renovate Jane’s Place. While we focused on Jane’s Place, we never lost sight of Phase III. We are so excited to share that the Lebanon Zoning Board has granted the parking variance and we have cleared the final hurdle. Our architectural designs are complete, and we are ready to start construction on the new addition, adding programmatic and meeting space to accommodate our growing organization. We look forward to sharing our progress with all of you!

Making an impact

FY24 was an incredible year as we saw the successful launch of several new initiatives, which took many years to come to fruition. Over the past five years, we have doubled staff, created the innovative Multidisciplinary Interview and Training Center (MITC), purchased and renovated Jane's Place, effectively doubling our housing shelter capacity, and expanded the legal services program to include family law.



Abby Tassel, MITC Director, and Ward Goodenough, Windsor County State's Attorney, talking about MITC at the WISE Annual Meeting

The State of Vermont recognized WISE's innovative MITC approach and made it a strategic priority to use MITC as a model for other counties throughout the state. Through MITC, we provide space for survivors to more accurately and fully share their traumatic experiences, we work with local law enforcement to become more trauma-informed, and we continue to build systems to support potential expert witnesses for trials.

We were excited to welcome our first guests into Jane's Place. We had envisioned creating a safe and supportive environment where people can experience the normalcy of community and connection. After two years of renovations, we welcomed our guests into fresh apartments. It was heartwarming to see residents supporting each other, including their children planning playdates and walking to the park together.

The year also saw the debut of family law services in our expanded Legal Services Program. Using a person-centered approach that centers care and respect, the Legal Services team has created a unique practice that is reflective of survivors' actual needs. We provided full legal representation to nearly 100 people.

Another highlight was the piloted Foundations of gender-based violence for professionals, our new workplace-focused program. We invited community businesses and professionals to an intentional training on the impacts of gender-based violence on work, integrating a WISE understanding of the dynamics, experiences, and supportive responses as it impacts their roles as professionals and their respective workplaces. The response was so positive, we added a second session.

Ways to engage with WISE

We are working to create the changes needed for a more peaceful Upper Valley. By having conversations, holding space for exploration, and being in relationship with one another, we can move the needle. There are many ways to join us and help end gender-based violence!

Check out the media section on our new website (wiseuv.org/who-we-are/media). The *WISEr* conversation, connection, community podcast highlights how relationships and collaborations can make real and lasting change. Listen to the latest season of WISE Words, or read some of our booklets. You can learn about gender-based violence by listening, watching, and reading.

Sign up for Foundations of Gender-based Violence or invite us to your club or business! We offer customized workshops educating the community on the realities of gender-based violence, interrupting the culture that enables gender-based violence, and learning how to safely respond and refer victims to needed services.

Become a volunteer. Volunteer advocates help us provide 24-hour crisis response and ambassadors represent WISE throughout the Upper Valley at farmers markets, community events, town meetings, and sporting events.

Make a donation. All our services are free and we rely upon private contributions. Consider making an annual gift or explore longer-term options with your financial and estate planners.

FY24 (July 2023 - June 2024) by the numbers

Advocacy Program

1,355 total people supported
113 average people supported per month
15,734 services provided such as emergency shelter, financial planning assistance, safety planning, court and hospital accompaniments, housing referrals, and shelter assistance

Legal Services Program

108 people supported
96 people provided full representation
61 total cases

Youth Violence Prevention Program

531 lessons
3,226 students
24 schools
9 school districts

Professional Training

health professionals, law enforcement, educators
22 presentations
610 participants

WISE Volunteers

43 active crisis line volunteers supported survivors and donated 9,973 hours
34 ambassadors represented WISE within the community 17 times

