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Welcome New Executive Director of W&FLC

An Exclusive Interview with Jennifer Wenderoth-Holster, MPA

By Dawn Jackson, Marketing & Community Outreach Director



Jennifer Wenderoth-Holster, MPA, W&FLC Ex.Director

Jennifer, Congrats on your new position as Executive Director at Women & Family Life Center. How has it been thus far adjusting to the position, the office, staff and board members?

Thank you. So far, things have been wonderful. We are busy, but that is a good thing, as it means we are helping people in the community. There really hasn't been any time of adjusting; on day one, I walked into the office and jumped right in. There was work to do, people to help—no time to waste. W&FLC is a cozy office that feels more like a home. I believe that is due largely in part to the staff and the board that I get to work with daily.

Is your background experience primarily from the non-profit world? What was your previous position? And how different is your current position from you used to do?

I started in the non-profit world over a decade ago and then switched to working for the state.

The truth is I missed working for non-profits, so much that I went back and got a Master's degree in Public Administration, with a concentration in Non-Profit Management and within 2 months of graduating made my way back to the non-profit world in a leadership role.

The most recent position I had before coming to W&FLC was as the Women and Families Center Sexual Assault Crisis Services Director. It is a fantastic organization, but I was looking to make more of a difference on the Shoreline, where I have spent my entire life. The difference between the two organizations is W&FLC does not just focus on one thing. When someone comes to W&FLC for services, they get to meet with a Referral Navigator who will help them with several issues they may be dealing with. We are there to help free women and families from violence and harassment, access safe and affordable housing, attain economic security, and rebuild their confidence and sense of community. The W&FLC is making a change on the Shoreline that is something I want to help with. I want to be a part of, who wouldn't?

Let's talk about your Vision for the Center. What services does W&FLC currently offer and what changes or additions to you hope to add?

Currently, we have the Guided Assistance Program (GAP), which is what we call our umbrella program. Everyone we work with goes through the GAP. It is a unique service not offered by any other organization on the Shoreline. It provides personalized support and referrals for crisis services, social services, and

mental health resources to women and families from the 16 towns served by the Center. We also offer Financial Consults, which is one-on-one appointments with a volunteer Financial Coach to review finances and help participants take control of their economic independence and success. We have Lawyer Time, which is also one-on-one appointments with a volunteer attorney for legal guidance and to understand rights and the legal process better. Then we have ADAPT, which is a divorce process workshop. The workshop is designed to provide a comprehensive overview of divorce to help participants acquire the tools needed to make the best choices for themselves and their families. We also have the Shoreline Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Task Force. The mission of the Task Force is to provide education, coordinate resources, and aid in the prevention of domestic violence and assault across Shoreline communities. And finally, we have the Shoreline Housing piece. Our Diversion Specialist provides time-limited case management to participants accessing the Greater New Haven CAN who are not currently receiving housing-related case management services. The goal is to divert clients from entering shelters whenever safe and appropriate to do so. Participants are referred to and successfully linked to all appropriate resources as quickly as possible, including emergency shelter openings when no viable diversion plan is actualized.

Where I see additions for the future of W&FLC is growing our partnership with other programs in the shoreline area so we can provide more individualized services to those in need.

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Expanding our services to those who have experienced domestic violence and providing more services to those going through a crisis.

Who is your primary clientele and what towns are serviced by W&FLC?

We provide services to anyone regardless of income from any of the following 16 towns Branford, Chester, Clinton, Deep River, East Haven, East Lyme, Essex, Guilford, Killingworth, Lyme, Madison, North Branford, North Haven, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, and Westbrook. However, just because you do not live in these towns does not mean we still cannot help. Last year we served people in 54 towns in Connecticut. We are a small organization, but we are mighty.

Where were you raised?

I was raised in Madison, and I chose to stay local when I went to college; and I even came home every weekend to go to church and stay active in local organizations. After college and even when I got married, I wanted to remain on the Shoreline. There is something so special about the Shoreline. I think it's funny because some of the kids I grew up with who couldn't wait to leave the area are now moving back with their families. They realize it is a wonderful place to live and raise a family.

What type of schooling/training/ experience helped you achieve your current status?

I have a Bachelor's degree in Sociology, Women, Gender, and Sexualities Studies from Central Connecticut State University and a Master's degree in Public Administration, with a concentration in Non-Profit Management, from the University of New Haven. In addition to this, I have certification in Sexual Assault Crisis Counseling and Advocacy and certification in Domestic Violence Crisis Counseling and Advocacy. I have been involved in the Women & Family Life Center's Shoreline Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Task Force for the past four years and always saw myself working for W&FLC, so I guess it was just meant to be.

Do you have full support from your family?

I have been married to my supportive husband, Kevin for six years and we currently have four-legged 'children,' including a very spoiled dog, Maddy, named after Madison. I hope to have her become a comfort dog, something that we can utilize with our participants here at W&FLC. With any new position, there are extra hours to put in to get fully situated with everything, but the 10-minute commute is much nicer than the 45-minute commute I used to make.

In planning for the future, what's still on your personal/professional bucket list?

A few years ago, I started an organization called Let It Be Heard which provides education and awareness outreach around the topics of sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking. One day I would like to expand that into a larger organization called Maddy's Mission, yes, in honor of my fur baby Maddy. The organization would partner rescued pets with victims and survivors of domestic violence, stalking, and veterans while providing supportive services. However, I am thrilled to be with the Women and Family Life Center, and I am looking forward to a long career with such a meaningful organization.

What is Jennifer like NOT on the job?

I love spending time with my husband, family, and friends. If it is warm outside, count me in, whatever it is. I find relaxation in singing and being a crafty creative person. I am a fish, and if there is a body of water, pool, lake, ocean, you may have to drag me out. I enjoy traveling and am hoping to visit some fun places in the next year.

Any last comments you'd like to share?

The Women & Family Life Center is celebrating its 30th year. We will have some exciting programs and events over this new year, including our EmpowerHER gala on March 24th.