

FIRST STEP'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has been very difficult on adult and child survivors of violence.

The calls to First Step's helpline and Community Response Program have demonstrated how intense psychological and physical abuse can become when people are isolated due to the pandemic. First Step continues to see elevated risk and danger, and an increase in use of physical force, including strangulation, threats, and weapons.

Throughout the pandemic, First Step services have remained available, accessible, and are adaptable to whatever challenges may come. Non-profits are sometimes slow to change, but the pandemic empowered First Step to adapt and innovate quickly, to meet the needs of survivors, staff, donors, and volunteers.

PANDEMIC SERVICE STATISTICS SINCE MARCH 1ST, 2020

- ✓ First Step's helpline staff has answered over 9,700 crisis calls offering safety planning, intervention, emotional support, referrals, and other resources.
- ✓ First Step has provided 27,000 nights of safe housing to 87 adults and 169 children in its residential and transitional supportive housing program.
- ✓ First Step has provided 9,458 hours of crisis intervention and supportive counseling/advocacy to survivors of all ages.
- ✓ First Step Staff helped 1,397 survivors seeking Personal Protection Orders and conducted over 1,000 lethality and danger assessment screenings.
- ✓ First Step has helped over 6,000 clients providing criminal justice advocacy and court support in the Community Response Program.
- ✓ First Step implemented a new Speaker's Bureau Program and provided 230 hours of training to thousands of people in the community educating, advocating, and offering prevention education to professionals, civic groups, and students as part of their efforts to end domestic and sexual violence as we know it.

Board Achievements

First Step's Board of Directors, chaired by Carrie Elaine Tingle from Bridgewater Interiors, has been instrumental in meeting the needs of survivors during the pandemic as well. They have supported the staff to care for themselves as well as survivors during this time. They have helped to ensure the agency had the resources they needed and provided thoughtful leadership and oversight to First Step.

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Spark Joy This Season by Donating Your Vehicle to First Step

Thank You to Our 2021 You Are the Light Sponsors

A Few First Step Heroes

Count Me In!

OTHER ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS

- ✓ Installed new, easier to sanitize vinyl plank flooring in the common areas of the shelter and in the Plymouth office
- ✓ Expanded the Plymouth office to provide greater social distancing to better serve survivors
- ✓ Purchased a new van and cargo trailer to help transport survivors and donations (Margaret Dunning Foundation provided a matching grant and many generous donors helped us meet this fundraising goal)
- ✓ Replaced boilers and HVAC Systems in the shelter with all new-energy efficient systems (funded by VOCA)
- ✓ Added walls and doors in each shelter suite to provide our residents with more privacy (Margaret Dunning Foundation)
- ✓ Replaced the refrigerators in all our shelter suites and in the commercial kitchen (Margaret Dunning Foundation)
- ✓ Installed a new security alarm system in Plymouth and also upgraded information technology infrastructure (Funded by The Wilcox Foundation, the Canton Community Foundation, and the Domestic Violence Cares Act Family-Division of Victim Services, DHHS)
- ✓ Outfitted First Step's advocacy team with modern technology to provide secure, virtual counseling sessions
- ✓ Provided laptops, wi-fi, and more robust technology access to survivors
- ✓ Helped parents to provide virtual school for their children in First Step's shelter and transitional housing programs
- ✓ Updated First Step's Employee Handbook and updated many of HR policies and internal paperwork, reducing waste and increasing accessibility
- ✓ First Step is conducting an internal work process in recognition of the racial reckoning our country and communities are facing, working to support and understand how systems of oppression effect our staff and clients. First Step has committed to being an anti-oppression agency, and currently is undergoing a strategic planning process that includes an agency audit and recommendations for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion work

As you can see by our checked off to do list, First Step has been using this time to adapt programs and facilities to be a better agency, ready to respond to the needs of survivors and the community. Thanks to all the donors, staff, and volunteers who helped to accomplish these important services and tasks!

STRATEGIC JUSTICE AT FIRST STEP

As part of First Step's commitment to being an inclusive environment for all, and in alignment with our anti-racism value and anti-oppression work, the agency has contracted with Rosemary Linares of *Cross Movement Social Justice* for an agency audit. This audit is focusing on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion and has conducted several surveys and focus groups with staff, volunteers, board members, clients, community partners, donors, and survivors of violence outside of First Step's services.



Asandi Conner, First Step Board Member and Strategic Justice Committee Chair

Additionally, First Step has formed a Strategic Justice Committee, under the leadership of Asandi Conner, First Step Board Member. The committee is made up of staff and board members that will be using the findings and recommendations of the audit to build out the agency's next 5-year strategic plan. This way the agency's strategic plan is heavily founded in work that will align with and build on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion for our community of survivors.



Rosemary Linares, Cross Movement Social Justice



FIRST STEP DIRECTOR WANDA MERRIWEATHER RECOGNIZED

First Step's very own Wanda Merriweather was recognized in September 2021 by Michigan's Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence (MCEDSV) for her notable work and commitment to ending violence as we know it. Earlier in the year, Wanda also received the Visionary Voice Award from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center.

First Step has been deeply blessed to also benefit from Wanda's tremendous leadership and commitment to First Step staff and survivors of violence. These recognitions are well deserved and Wanda's legacy in this movement is rich and infinite. We are endlessly proud of Wanda, and so thankful to be able to call her a peer, mentor, colleague, and friend.

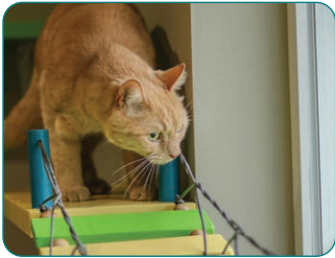
Thank you, Wanda, for your 10 years of serving on the MCEDSV's board, the last 3 as Chair, and your decades of devoted work helping survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Use the link provided to view more information on Wanda's past work.

<https://www.nsvrc.org/saam/visionary-voice-awards/2021>



Wanda Merriweather, Director of Programs

FIRST STEP SUPPORTS SURVIVORS WITH PETS



On November 15th, 2018, First Step opened its on-site animal shelter, the ARK (Animals Receiving Kindness). Often, fear of leaving a pet behind is a huge barrier for survivors. This on-site pet center allows survivors and their families to bring their beloved family pets with them into shelter.

Abusers often use survivors' pets in their tactics of power and control, threatening harm to pets unless survivors comply, taking pets away from survivors through the legal system, withholding money for pet care and necessities, or punishing pets in retribution. With these additional fears hovering over them, it is no surprise that survivors often choose to stay where they know they can watch over their animal loved ones.

For these reasons, First Step has created an environment that is safe for survivors and their entire families – animals included. Animals are considered throughout the spectrum of our services. On the 24-hour helpline, First Responders ask questions about family animals and include pets in safety planning. Survivors can bring their animals to shelter with them, into a welcoming building that is equipped for comfort, cleanliness, health, and safety that is only steps away from their residential suites. The ARK includes comfy indoor and outdoor areas to play and interact with their pets, and a room for pet bathing and wellness visits. First Step works hard to help survivors find pet-friendly residences and provides supplies for families when they leave shelter for their new home.

Including survivors' pets in shelter is not just avoiding a barrier to service – it is also adding to the sources of healing. Pets are not just companions. They offer comfort, protection, friendship, unconditional acceptance, love, hope, and joy – all things that are important in the recovery from trauma. For survivors and their families, the life-long bond created with pets is a source of strength and comfort they can draw on as they work toward their goals.

Research shows us that there is a strong link between animal abuse, domestic violence (DV), and barriers to survivors seeking services:

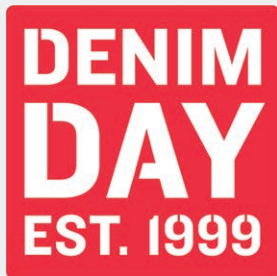
- ▶ 99% OF HOMES WITH PETS CONSIDER THOSE ANIMALS TO BE PART OF THE FAMILY
- ▶ ANIMAL ABUSERS ARE 5X MORE LIKELY TO HARM HUMANS
- ▶ 71% OF PET-OWNING DV SURVIVORS REPORT THAT THEIR ABUSER HAD THREATENED, INJURED, OR KILLED FAMILY PETS
- ▶ 65% OF DV SURVIVORS REPORT THEY DELAYED THE DECISION TO SEEK SERVICES OUT OF FEAR FOR THEIR PETS' WELFARE
- ▶ 48% OF FAMILIES REMAIN WITH THEIR ABUSER DUE TO SHELTERS BEING UNABLE TO ACCOMMODATE PETS



APRIL IS SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH



Every April, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) coordinates the national Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) campaign for the month of April to educate and engage the public in addressing this widespread issue (nsvrc.org/saam).



DENIM DAY IS APRIL 27, 2022!

Denim Day is a campaign on a Wednesday in April in honor of Sexual Assault Awareness Month. The campaign began after a ruling by the Italian Supreme Court where a rape conviction was overturned because the justices felt that since the

victim was wearing tight jeans, she must have helped the person who raped her remove her jeans, thereby implying consent. The following day, the women in the Italian Parliament came to work wearing jeans in solidarity with the victim. Peace Over Violence developed the Denim Day campaign in response to this case and the activism surrounding it. Denim Day asks community members, elected officials, businesses, and students to make a social statement with their fashion statement by wearing jeans on this day as a visible means of protest against the misconceptions that surround sexual violence (www.denimdayinfo.org).

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

- ➔ **Wear teal** during the month of April. **Teal is the color for awareness of SAAM.**
- ➔ **Wear jeans** on Denim Day – April 27, 2022
- ➔ **Provide support to survivors by meeting their most immediate and essential needs by asking colleagues, classmates, and fellow community members to donate at firststep-mi.org/donatenow**
- ➔ **Make a social media statement (use #denimday and #SAAM) against sexual violence in all its forms.**

First Step provides free and confidential support for survivors of sexual assault of all ages. If you or someone you love have been sexually assaulted, contact First Step at 734-722-6800.



Nationwide, **81% OF WOMEN AND 43% OF MEN** reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment and/or assault in their lifetime. *

1 IN 3 FEMALE VICTIMS and about **1 IN 4 MALE VICTIMS** of completed or attempted rape experienced it for the first time between the ages of 11 and 17. *

Approximately **1 IN 8 LESBIANS** and nearly **50% OF BISEXUAL WOMEN** have been raped in their lifetime. +

Nearly **50% OF BISEXUAL MEN** and **4 IN 10 GAY MEN** have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime. +

* nsvrc.org/statistics + glaad.org

**DON'T FORGET!
WEAR JEANS APRIL 27TH**

FIRST STEP LAUNCHES COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM AND SPEAKERS BUREAU

In October of 2020, First Step launched a new **Community Engagement Program and Speakers Bureau**. First Step's Speakers Bureau offers an array of educational opportunities centered around prevention and advocacy which are available to a wide variety of audiences within the community. This is vital to our agency's mission of ending domestic violence and sexual assault, and an important step in connecting survivors to our life saving services. As professionals in domestic violence, sexual assault, and other trauma related topics, we are committed to educating and engaging with our community about our organization and the issues we respond to 24-hours a day. The Bureau consists of experts who have a passion and interest in educating. They complete rigorous training and are actively participating in ongoing personal and professional development. By being on the Bureau, the members get more opportunities to engage with the community, work alongside other staff outside of their program, and opt into requests that pique their interests and honor their skills.

Since launching, the Speakers Bureau has participated in over 90 requests and engaged with over 3,600 people and provided over 230 hours of education and representation in the community. Engagements have ranged from simple presentations and tabling events to multi-day, customized professional trainings catered to the audiences and their professions. Some, of the many, accomplishments include a statewide personalized training to law enforcement on the intersection of domestic violence and



To see a list of commonly requested presentations or training topics, visit firststep-mi.org/community-engagement

animal abuse, as well as a host of in-depth trainings presented to Wayne County's Department of Health and Human Services-Children's Protective Services and Foster Care workers, which focus on the impact of violence on children and families and how to best support survivors. One year later and we already have over 25 engagements on the calendar for this upcoming quarter.

To request a First Step speaker or discuss your ideas and opportunities to partner, contact Audriana Buchanan-Cronk at communityservices@firststep-mi.org or 734-713-0670 to learn more.



wish list

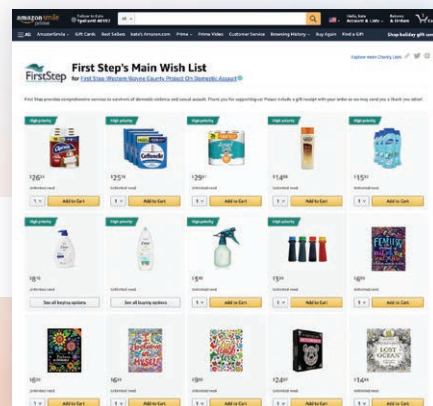
Our Wish List contains items that First Step and the families we serve could use the most. You can make contact-free donations using our Amazon Wish List.

VISIT [BIT.LY/FSWISHLIST](https://bit.ly/fswishlist)

OR POINT YOUR PHONE CAMERA AT THIS IMAGE



amazon wish list



First Step is still accepting new, unused items at our Wayne Facility, 4400 Venoy Road, Monday-Friday from 10am-4pm.

All donations are greatly appreciated but monetary donations are needed most! Please consider donating the cash value or gift cards instead of the actual item. First Step leverages suppliers to get discounts on food and supplies. Your monetary gift may also help First Step cover essential operational expenses such as phone, electricity, heat, etc. Gift cards allow us to support our clients and assist our operating expenses throughout the year. Gift cards from Walmart, Kroger, and Meijer are the most helpful. Donations are being accepted at our Plymouth office, 44567 Pinetree Drive, Fridays ONLY from 10am-4pm.

Visit firststep-mi.org/donate for more information, including our children's wish lists, and call 734-722-1772 with questions.

SPARK JOY AT FIRST STEP THIS SEASON



CARS makes donating your car, truck, motorcycle, RV, or boat easy.

DOES YOUR CAR SPARK JOY?

Help spark joy in your favorite
cause with a car donation.

They take care of everything from the pick-up and sale, to sending you the donation receipt and necessary tax documents. Vehicle donation pick-up is always free to you and most vehicles can be picked up within 24-72 hours. You'll receive an initial car donation receipt upon pick-up and then CARS will work to turn your car into cash to support First Step. Once your vehicle is sold, we will provide you proper tax forms in time to file.

Visit careasy.org/nonprofit/first-step-western-wayne-county to donate your car today.



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BOUGIE LADIES

A FEW FIRST STEP HEROES



EDSEL FORD AND DEARBORN HIGHSCHOOL



RIYA BHAKKAD FAMILY AND FRIENDS



MEIJER NORTHVILLE



HOME DEPOT CANTON



MEIJER WESTLAND



44567 Pinetree Drive
Plymouth, MI 48170



ABOUT FIRST STEP

First Step is an organization in Wayne County, Michigan that provides free comprehensive services to support survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

First Step offers temporary emergency housing, counseling, advocacy, transitional housing, assault response, 24-hour helpline services, children's services, training and education to survivors and to the community.

Help work to make your community violence-free by becoming involved with First Step; volunteer, donate, and stand up for peace and safety in your community.

Call 734.722.1772 for more information.

First Step
44567 Pinetree Drive
Plymouth, MI 48170
734.416.1111

24-Hour Helpline
734.722.6800

First Step
Karen Wilson
Smithbauer Center
4400 Venoy Road
Wayne, MI 48184

firststep-mi.org
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firststepwaynecountymi

COUNT ME IN!

I would like to help FIRST STEP, Wayne County's comprehensive domestic & sexual assault program.

I wish to support First Step with a donation of \$_____

Credit Card: VISA / MC (circle one)

Account#: _____ Exp. ____/____ CSV: _____

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

(Checks payable to First Step)
Please fill out this form completely and mail to:
First Step, 44567 Pinetree Drive, Plymouth, MI 48170



DONATE ONLINE

Visit bit.ly/donatetoFS (or scan the code with your smartphone) to make a secure donation to First Step.



For information about the newsletter or to unsubscribe, contact Theresa Bizoe: 734.656.0730, tbizoe@firststep-mi.org

THE MISSION OF FIRST STEP IS TO ELIMINATE BOTH DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND TO PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES IMPACTED BY THESE CRIMES.



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