

October 15, 2019

# OFFICIAL STATEMENT FROM THE WOMEN AND GENDER ADVOCACY CENTER (WGAC)

Regarding: Process and Procedures for Resources & Referrals

**The WGAC is aware of a recent resolution proposed to ASCSU which called into question the way we operate. While the resolution was ultimately removed from the floor on 10/09/19, we are deeply concerned about the impact caused by the misinformation included in the resolution as well as the potential for similar legislation to resurface in the future.**

**We cannot remain silent about misinformation concerning our services. We pride ourselves on being able to support any student who comes to us. For that reason, the student body deserves to know accurate information about who we are and how we will support them.**

**Please use the following facts to help us correct misinformation.**

## **ABOUT ADVOCACY:**

- WGAC provides confidential victim advocacy to survivors of interpersonal violence. Advocacy includes connecting students to campus and community resources that can provide emotional, legal, academic and medical services in the aftermath of trauma.
- Two critical components of our ethical guidelines for advocacy include making specific relevant referrals and allowing a victim to choose their own path of healing. As a result, we are invested in making sure survivors feel empowered to make informed choices about what is best for them, and we support a survivor's rights to make those choices. Advocates are trained to remove any personal values when making referrals and always put the needs of survivors first.
- To be a hotline volunteer, you must attend over 45 hours of training. Full time advocates are required to have a full year of post-graduate experience in the field. Both volunteers and professional advocates go through on-going training to stay current with trauma informed care, laws and legislation, and local resources. We take competency very seriously and make life-long learning a core component of our work.

## **ABOUT OUR CASELOAD:**

- Since the inception of the Interpersonal Violence Safety and Response Fee (which partially funds our office) in 2011, our advocacy staff has had over 5,000 appointments with over 1,700 survivors. That's over 1,700 examples of survivors who fought through stigma, shame, and blame to seek resources. We couldn't be more proud of each and every person who found the strength to connect with advocacy.
- On average, we see 4 new survivors a day. Calls to our 24-hr hotline have increased each year. As a result, last year the Student Fee Review Board through ASCSU requested we increase our fee to accommodate hiring an additional advocate.

## **ABOUT REFERRALS FOR PREGNANCY:**

- Since the inception of the student fee in 2011, less than 5 students have requested resources for pregnancy. This represents .003% of our total cases. We mention this not as an attempt to minimize the needs of pregnant students experiencing IPV, but rather to illustrate how intentional we are when making referrals for pregnant students.
- The intent when making referrals is to reduce the number of touchpoints by connecting students with the most appropriate, comprehensive, and inclusive resources as quickly as possible. In these cases, depending on the expressed needs students, our primary referrals are to the CSU Health Network, Planned Parenthood, off-campus primary care physicians/OB/GYNs, and/or Adoption Dreams Come True. On a case by case basis, other referrals may be appropriate.

## ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH PLAZA DAY:

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- Every April we host a Plaza Day for Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Our center invites select campus and community resources to host a table. This is not a reproductive health event but rather raises awareness about sexual violence.
- All invited organizations have demonstrated a commitment to offering inclusive, trauma-informed, comprehensive medical resources for CSU students, staff, and faculty and/or have trained educators who are knowledgeable about the issue of interpersonal violence and/or our Center.

## ABOUT STUDENT EMPLOYEES AND OUR SOCIAL MEDIA:

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- Some of our student employees are also members of student organizations on campus. We do not monitor or infringe on an employee's right to associate with others when they are not "on the clock" nor do we pressure participation in specific organizations. Those choices belong to each individual. When "on the clock", every employee is expected to follow the advocacy code of ethics and our guiding philosophies, which do not allow us to infringe on or shame an individual survivor's federally granted medical rights.
- Our Instagram account has been in existence since 2016. Since that time we have had over 230 posts, one of which referenced a topic tied to reproductive health (specifically, STI testing). This represents .0004% of our total posts.
- Our Facebook page has been in existence since 2013. Since that time we have had well over a thousand posts, 6 of which reference a topic tied to reproductive health. This represents less than .0006% of our total posts.

## ABOUT THE IMPACT ON THE CENTER

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- Many students have expressed concerns about our office being "defunded". While the past resolution did not explicitly name defunding as an option, it also did not explicitly state what would happen should the WGAC decline any demands. It is understandable why many students have expressed concern that defunding could come in the future, especially if Student Fee Review Board members are authors on any legislation referencing student fees.
- A core value of our center is to always believe survivors. We have been informed through non-confidential means that a student came in under the guise of seeking resources and secretly recorded an advocacy meeting. This student then shared this information with other members of ASCSU and requested approval to play a selected portion of the recording during the ASCSU senate meeting on 10/09/19. To knowingly participate in behavior which could cause advocates to feel suspicious of students seeking our resources is an exceptionally unethical act. Future suspicion by advocates has the potential to come across as disbelief. It cannot be overstated that simply being believed may save a survivor's life, and undermining this integral part of the survivor-advocate interaction is profoundly concerning.
- This residual impact from the resolution has taken time and energy away from staff during one of our busiest months. October is Relationship Violence Awareness Month which requires a great deal of prevention programming and our Center sees an increase in survivor needs around Homecoming and Halloween.
- WGAC staff remains strong and committed to believing and supporting anyone who comes through our doors. Thank you for the referrals and support from our amazing campus and community partners.

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## A CLOSING MESSAGE TO SURVIVORS: WE BELIEVE YOU AND ARE HERE FOR YOU.



**In Solidarity,**  
The Staff of The Women and Gender Advocacy Center

Questions or comments? Contact Monica Rivera, Director OR submit anonymous comments via "feedback" button on our website