

A New Walk-in Legal Clinic at the Pace Women's Justice Center

IN JUNE 2018, the Pace Women's Justice Center ("PWJC") opened new office space. The 4,000 square-foot office, which was the former Student Life Center on the Pace Law campus, includes a new walk-in legal clinic (the "Clinic") and will allow PWJC to serve as many as 600 more clients a year.

PWJC is the leading civil legal services and training provider addressing domestic violence, sexual assault and elder abuse in Westchester and Putnam counties, providing free legal help to thousands each year who would otherwise not be able to afford representation. The new \$1.5 million office space was funded by Pace University and private donors including a \$100,000 grant from Impact 100 Westchester.

Prior to the opening of this new space, PWJC served more than 3,000 clients per year. PWJC's previous office was a small space adjacent to the

Pace Law campus that was not sufficient to meet the growing numbers of survivors who are in need of their services. PWJC's attorneys assist clients in and out of the courtroom, helping them to obtain orders of protection, custody of their children, child support and divorces. Victims of interpersonal violence have many needs arising from the abuse, and PWJC believes that clients do better in the long term if they are treated holistically. Thus, PWJC connects their clients with a broad range of social services such as shelter, medical care, counseling and immigration assistance, in order to help them find a pathway to safety. PWJC also trains social service providers and police officers across the region in how to handle cases of abuse.

Cindy Kanusher, executive director of PWJC, said the Clinic is the first of its kind in Westchester and Putnam providing free legal services without an appointment in a warm and welcoming space, to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and elder abuse. "The Clinic is a safe alternative to PWJC's satellite offices in the White Plains and Yonkers courthouses for clients who are afraid to go to court. Many victims fear facing their abuser in the courtroom, and immigrant victims are often afraid of the judicial system and deportation."

"Domestic violence, sexual assault and elder abuse are pervasive problems that affect communities all over the country, including ours," said Kanusher. "The explosion of the #MeToo Campaign demonstrates the need for the Pace Women's Justice Center's walk-in clinic; more victims of abuse are speaking out and needing help and the Clinic will remove obstacles that many victims face when coming forward. We know that the opening of this Clinic will save lives. We will give people the critical help that they need to feel safe, and we will be at their side every step of the way throughout the legal process."

She added, "We are so thankful to everyone who generously contributed to the development of the

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The ribbon cutting for the June 2018 opening of the PWJC's new office space and walk-in legal clinic

new walk-in clinic, especially our partners, Pace and Impact 100 Westchester.”

The Clinic has had a substantial and positive impact on the community since opening its doors on June 1, 2018. In its first eight months of being open, the Clinic has served 418 clients. As part of the Clinic’s services, staff and pro bono attorneys provide clients with free legal advice and counsel on a range of legal issues, including orders of protection, child and spousal support, child custody/visitation, divorce and immigration issues. Clients are then referred to one of PWJC’s other programs for ongoing legal representation or to outside legal agencies and social service providers for additional assistance.

There are currently 12 pro bono attorneys volunteering at the Clinic, and three more attorneys are presently in the process of being trained. The majority of the pro bono attorneys volunteer one time per week for a period of approximately 3–4 hours. In its first eight months, since opening on June 1, 2018, pro bono attorneys have donated 918 hours of their time, which translates into in-kind services totaling \$321,300. In addition, the Clinic has collaborated with Pace Law to provide practical, hands-on learn-

ing experiences for law students interested in working with victims and survivors of domestic violence, elder abuse and sexual assault. Through the Pro Bono Externship Seminar, two Pace Law student externs volunteered with the Clinic for course credit in the Fall 2018, contributing a combined total of 290 hours. Additionally, a 2L Pace Law student is currently volunteering at the Clinic this semester through the same Pro Bono Externship Seminar program. To complement the fieldwork experience, Pace Law Students are mentored by PWJC staff attorneys and volunteer attorneys, four of whom are Pace Law Graduates.

“We are proud that the Women’s Justice Center has been a part of the Pace Law community for the past 25 years,” said Dean Horace Anderson. “The PWJC provides critical services to thousands of clients a year. It also provides an opportunity for our students to work with supervising attorneys as they advocate and seek justice for women and families in need.”

For further information about PWJC’s Walk-in Clinic services, please call 914-422-4188. For information about emergency Orders of Protection, please contact PWJC’s Family Court Legal Program at 914-995-7400 (White Plains) or 914-231-2886 (Yonkers). Call PWJC’s Main Office at 914-422-4069 for all other questions. ■