

SPRING | SUMMER 2019

THE WOARRIOR WORD

The WOAR Quarterly Newsletter



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A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WHAT'S IN A NAME? EVERYTHING...

Dr. Monique Howard, PhD
WOAR Executive Director

We heard you Philadelphia. **WOAR** heard you. After a few failed attempts, **WOAR** is proud to announce that it has finally undergone an agency wide name change, shifting the original name, **Women Organized Against Rape** to our acronym **WOAR**.

We also have added a new tag line to our name: **Philadelphia Center Against Sexual Violence**.

This change was vital in making sure that it is clear to ALL people who have experienced sexual violence that our services are for YOU and still **FREE**.

WOAR is constantly working to welcome survivors that may not fit the societal narrative of who experiences sexual violence as demonstrated with our **LGBTQ** specific services and **Healthy Masculinity Initiative**.

Our services have always been inclusive; it was time for **WOAR** to demonstrate its values outwardly with a new name.

We look forward to continuing to offer expansive services for all victims and survivors of sexual violence.

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WHAT'S IN A NAME? EVERYTHING...

Dr. Monique Howard, PhD
WOAR Executive Director

continued...

Help us spread the word, we are **WOAR** - **Philadelphia Center Against Sexual Violence**. **WOAR** for short.

WOAR has several volunteer opportunities available.

Contact us at: info@woar.org if you are interested in loaning us your time, treasure or talent.

We need volunteers for; event planning, marketing/communications/public relations, and more...

Thank you for your continued support of our work and our mission. We hope to see you at the many community events that we are attending.



DIRECT SERVICES SCOOP

HEALING THROUGH EMPOWERMENT

By Anne Miller-Uueda, MSS, LCSW
WOAR Counselor

In the fall of 2018, **WOAR** started a partnership with **Women in Transition (WIT)** to offer clients from both agencies a new approach to healing. With input from colleagues outside of Philadelphia doing similar work, folks from WIT and WOAR developed a group that integrates self-defense instruction with psycho-education, processing, and mindfulness.

We've named this group: *Healing through Empowerment*.

There are multiple healing factors in this group. First, through both mindfulness and encouraging clients to stay in the moment

during self-defense instruction, this group helps clients tune into the mind-body connection, a key component for healing.

The Body Keeps Score states, "Agency starts with...our awareness of subtle sensory, body-based feelings: the greater that awareness, the greater our potential to control our lives. Knowing what we feel is the first step to knowing why we feel that way".

Secondly, there have been multiple positive impacts documented in the literature of self-defense training for survivors, including improving self-efficacy, improving assertiveness, and decreasing risk of re-victimization.

DIRECT SERVICES SCOOP

HEALING THROUGH EMPOWERMENT

By Anne Miller-Uueda, MSS, LCSW
Counselor

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Additionally, by allowing clients in the group to experience the anxiety of the inevitable triggers involved in self-defense instruction, this group acts as a type of exposure therapy. Exposure therapies are well known to decrease PTSD related symptoms and shame.

Finally, as with all processing groups, this group allows survivors to access the healing factors of group dynamics, including instillation of hope, universality, imparting information, altruism, and interpersonal learning.

At the time of this writing, one group was completed and a second in process. Survey feedback from clients in the completed group indicated participants had an increased belief in the ability to defend themselves, improved assertiveness skills and belief in the ability to set boundaries, improved value of the self, and increased recognition of own strength.

As one of the co-facilitators of this group, I want to add that it has been moving and an honor to watch group participants progress in their self-awareness, confidence, and assertiveness. We frequently yell "NO!" in the group and it is amazing to hear the progression in the loudness and firmness of the no's each week.

As with all my work at WOAR, I am awed and inspired by the participants in this group.



We are currently recruiting for the next round of the Healing through Empowerment group.

To participate you must be connected to an individual counselor at WOAR, WIT, or Lutheran Settlement House.

If you are interested in participating, talk to your individual counselor.

EDUCATION ENLIGHTENMENT

HEALING THROUGH EMPOWERMENT

By Quinn Pellerito
WOAR Education Specialist

WOAR is excited to continue its LGBTQ Sexual Violence Processing Group. WOAR recognizes that this population experiences sexual violence at high rates.

We see this in data that reveals 60% of bisexual women and over 50% of people who are transgender will experience sexual violence within their lifetime. Even though this population experiences sexual violence at high rates, the LGBTQ community is less likely to access the care they need due to fear of mistreatment. This is especially pronounced for people who are transgender. Of those sexually assaulted in the past year, only 1% accessed a rape crisis center and 2% actively reported the reason they did not receive services was because of a fear of mistreatment (2015 US Transgender Survey).

WOAR is working to combat these barriers to care by offering LGBTQ Specific services.

WOAR offers the LGBTQ Sexual Violence Support Group as a way to provide services that are built for the community it is meant to serve. We expect seeing a service built for the LGBTQ community will minimize this anticipation of mistreatment and help people access the care they need.

The support group has elements that let community members know that they can feel safer and that their needs are valued ranging from, having a non-binary transgender person represented as a facilitator, understanding pronouns, and not making gendered assumptions about sexual violence.

We know that providing these spaces of refuge are important in the healing of LGBTQ victims and survivors and we see maintaining this group as a necessity in serving this community.

Our challenge in running the LGBTQ support group is combating the effects of minority stress. The concept of minority stress is that recurring observable incidents of discrimination and mistreatment related to a person's minority status build up and become internalized stress. Often this manifests in behaviors such as hyper-vigilance for future incidents, a mistrust of providers, anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. One of the group facilitators and therapists at WOAR notes that the LGBTQ groups are markedly more anxious and it takes more time to build group cohesion and trust. This is something that the facilitators are adjusting for in group.

The facilitators are currently playing with the structure of group and making adjustments to account for minority stress. One thing we are doing is allowing members who have already attended the LGBTQ group to come back for future iterations. We are seeing that this establishes a portion of the group that is already comfortable in the space and with us as providers and they can model that for newcomers.

Additionally, we are experimenting with different therapy formats and working to create more interactive sessions. An example of this is playing a self-worth related game in group that built trust and helped members affirm each other.

EDUCATION ENLIGHTENMENT

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WOAR Education Specialist

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Structurally, we are testing out different layouts for group such as having a shorter break in between the end and start of iterations of the group to encourage continuity as well as increasing how many weeks the group runs.

WOAR sees these adjustments making a difference. The first iteration of the group was very small and in its second run it has nearly doubled in size. We are looking forward to continuing to offer this service and anticipate awareness of this resource to increase over time.

It is important to note that WOAR is doing more for the *LGBTQ Community* than offering this one LGBTQ specific sexual violence processing group. WOAR holds a broader vision to shift these barriers to care systematically within the city of Philadelphia.

We additionally know that victim experiences in hate crimes based on sexual orientation indicate that such hate crimes are less likely to be reported to the authorities than other types of hate crimes, due to perceived homophobic and transphobic bias in the criminal justice system.

WOAR offers free professional development to other providers that work with *LGBTQ* folks or people who have experienced sexual violence in a variety of settings from victim service agencies, legal settings, health care providers, and more.

WOAR also hosts a monthly meeting for those in the helping professions to work together on better understanding the factors that intersect with *LGBTQ sexual violence*.

On the community level, WOAR is offering a support group for care givers of *LGBTQ youth* and *adults* to combat family rejection which can be so painful for individuals affected.

WOAR is working to combat the issue of *LGBTQ sexual violence* from all angles including prevention, barriers to care, and direct service.

We look forward to continue to chip away at this issue.



WOAR Education Specialist, Quinn Pellerito

VOICES OF A WOARRIOR

HEALING THROUGH EMPOWERMENT

By WOAR Client

I never thought I'd be the type of person to walk into **WOAR**. The survivor part of me was like this whole other human buried deep in my flesh. She wasn't allowed out. To this day, I have trouble claiming words around sexual violence: rape, victim, traumatic event. It's all way more complicated for me.

I remember seeking refuge in this space: a last ditch effort to fix myself. I felt out of control and had no handle on coping after years of running from my many truths. I was afraid that trauma therapy would be the worst amalgamation of therapy you see on TV. Maybe an emotionless 60-year-old straight white woman would greet me at the door, stare with dead eyes and expect me to hash out excruciating details of my most guarded secrets

I imagined it to be worse than reporting, being put through a trial, and never receiving justice. But I also knew I really needed a change. It's so hard to keep someone hidden beneath you; my body ached, my brain was hyper-aware, and my stomach sick.

I'm glad I made it here.

I can tell you that trauma therapy isn't what I thought. My **WOAR** counselor greets me with a warm, considerate smile each week. We chat about our great fashion choices as we head back to her office. When we sit, she's within arm's reach and let me choose exactly what we do. Her office is like a gentle slow hug that lasts the whole 50 minutes.

Don't get me wrong, there is a lot of hard work happening here, but there is a fundamental understanding that my path to healing is and always will be on MY terms.

Never has my **WOAR** therapist pushed me to disclose in ways that I didn't initiate. So much of the work here is not the details of trauma itself: it's the living part. That's the part that I came running in the door to save.

I needed help doing the surviving.

My life is scheduled around my appointments at **WOAR** now. I often rush there: it feels like a gift. Once I arrive at **WOAR**, the girl that was once held down in my solarplex, walks with me.

Liberated. She is learning to cope, navigating her triggers, trying to build trust, releasing shame, forgiving herself, and meets her eyes with a smile in the mirror. I'm healing. Which is a statement that I was once sure I would never say.

I can rest my qualms with the language used around survivors here. Complexities, questions, and the in between are welcomed. Surviving intersects with all the parts of my life, so it will never be wrapped in a clean box. It's messy, non-linear and there are pieces still missing.

I look over at my **WOAR** therapist each week (often with a lump in my throat) knowing that she may be one of the only people in my life that I fully trust.

VOICES OF A WOARRIOR

HEALING THROUGH EMPOWERMENT

By WOAR Client

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Just having a relationship like that, is in itself, incredibly healing for those of us that rarely feel safe. I've been lucky enough to be in groups at WOAR as well that connect me to other survivors strategize how to exist in the aftermath. It's strange that healing can happen just by hearing your own experiences validated by others. We can all sit in the same room, swapping stories or knowledge or questions that have cycled through us and support each other: heal each other. That's a powerful room to be in. I've been there, it's magic. I have found a community I didn't know I needed and a safe space I was afraid to seek.



WOAR Alums, Sefi S. and Brittany K. at Hands Around City Hall 2019

#SAAM SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH HIGHLIGHTS



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