



FIRST STEP
Domestic Violence Services

Annual Report

(419) 435-7300

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www.firststepfostoria.org

Letter from the Director

To the Supporters, Community Partners, Donors and Friends of First Step,

As the Executive Director of First Step, I am proud to present the 2025 Annual Report, which reflects our steadfast dedication to supporting survivors of domestic violence. For 45 years, First Step has served as a vital resource, offering a safe haven and essential services to individuals across Seneca, Sandusky, Wood, and Wyandot counties. Our committed team works diligently to empower survivors on their healing journeys, fostering resilience and cultivating a supportive community that inspires strength and courage.

Throughout my tenure with this organization, I have been deeply moved by the resilience of countless survivors and their families. Each day, I have the privilege of witnessing their bravery as they take their initial steps toward liberation. The past year has been characterized by growth and transformation, as First Step has guided many individuals from uncertainty to renewed self-worth and confidence. Our team remains devoted to ensuring that every survivor receives the compassion and support they need to navigate their healing and empowerment.

In the last year, First Step has expanded its reach beyond in-shelter clients, providing extensive counseling and advocacy services to numerous outreach clients. Our Community Outreach efforts have flourished, particularly with the introduction of a new Employer Outreach Program. Domestic Violence Awareness Month was notably impactful, with First Step participating in various educational events across all four counties. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated volunteers and donors, whose contributions have enabled us to achieve a record number of in-kind donations and a nearly 50% increase in private donations.

In 2025, the shelter consistently operated at full capacity, reflecting a significant rise in the number of individuals seeking assistance. Our hotline experienced an alarming increase in calls for help, nearly doubling in volume. Although the total number of bed nights stabilized this year due to the shelter's full occupancy, the demand for services remains high. As the sole domestic violence shelter in Seneca County, First Step continues to play a crucial role in addressing this escalating need. Additionally, we expanded our capacity to support survivors' pets by installing a new dog run and partnering with a local kennel.

Regrettably, in 2025, First Step was unable to accommodate 113 survivors and their children due to limited shelter space. Our comprehensive services include client transportation, activities for children, art therapy, life skills training, case management, and court accompaniment, all aimed at supporting those in crisis. The persistent demand underscores the importance of our work and the necessity for continued support and resources.

As we enter the New Year, First Step is eager to advance our advocacy efforts alongside our prevention and education programs. We are committed to increasing the number of clients who receive counseling and court accompaniment services. Furthermore, we are actively exploring strategies to expand our shelter capacity to meet the growing needs of our community. Our focus remains on providing essential support and resources, and we look forward to implementing these vital initiatives.

We appreciate your commitment to our vision of a world where everyone can live free from violence and abuse. We firmly believe that domestic violence is unacceptable and that every individual deserves kindness and respect. By working together, we can foster a safe environment where all individuals feel valued and secure. Your support is instrumental in advancing toward a future where dignity is upheld for all, and violence is eradicated from our lives.

With Gratitude,

AMY KINNEY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



About Us



First Step is a domestic violence shelter serving Wood, Wyandot, Seneca, and Sandusky counties in Northwest Ohio. Since 1980, First Step has provided shelter for victims of domestic violence and their children, 24-hour support line, advocacy, and outreach and support programs for men, women, and children.



We were the first domestic violence shelter built from the ground up in the state of Ohio and the fourth in the nation. At First Step, we believe every individual has the right to live a life free from violence and abuse. We work toward a future where domestic violence is not tolerated, and all people are treated with respect and dignity. To further support healing, we also have a certified therapy dog on site, Gracie, offering comfort and emotional support to those we serve.

Our Mission

"To provide safety, shelter and services to victims of domestic violence through community resources and collaboration."

Our Services

- Shelter
- Advocacy
- Court Accompaniment
- Safe at Home Program
- 24/7 Hotline Support
- Life Skills Support
- Therapy Dog
- Counseling
- Housing Assistance
- Education



Board of Directors

Our Board of Directors has played a pivotal role in steering our organization towards unprecedented growth this year, their strategic guidance and unwavering commitment have proved to be invaluable assets to our success. This year, we have been excited to welcome new members, as well as continuing to build upon on the relationships formed with our more seasoned members. 100% of our board members have participated in the Ohio Attorney General's Charitable University. We could not be more thankful for everything each of them does for First Step.



Susan Wren

President

Scott Harlow

Treasurer

Rebecca Terry

Secretary

Pamela Moore

Board Member

Jennifer Croy

Board Member

Kelly Giacalone

Board Member

Jael Stetzik

Board Member

Pam Morral

Board Member

Jill Filliater

Board Member

Linda Lopez-Fouts

Board Member

2025 Statistics

595

Crisis Calls Answered

24

Clinical Counseling Clients

49

Total Survivors in Shelter
(27 adults, 22 children)

3,847

Total Bed Nights in Shelter

250

Warm Coats Given Away

4,767

Miles of Transportation

16

Outreach Clients

181

Volunteers

18

Educational Presentations
Given

113

Individuals Unable to Serve
(Shelter Availability)

Survivor Statements

“They helped me feel safe and loved as a stranger, helping me see that it is possible to stand on my own because I am truly never alone. I realized immediately why you call yourself First Step, because you provide refuge for those who don’t have the means to find the way to life or even feel they deserve to live”

“I am extremely grateful for the support and guidance I have received as a resident of the shelter. It has allowed me to grow and become a more emotionally stable parent and has been a steppingstone to independent living.”

“...you guys helped me to understand why I need to keep fighting, and fought with me.”

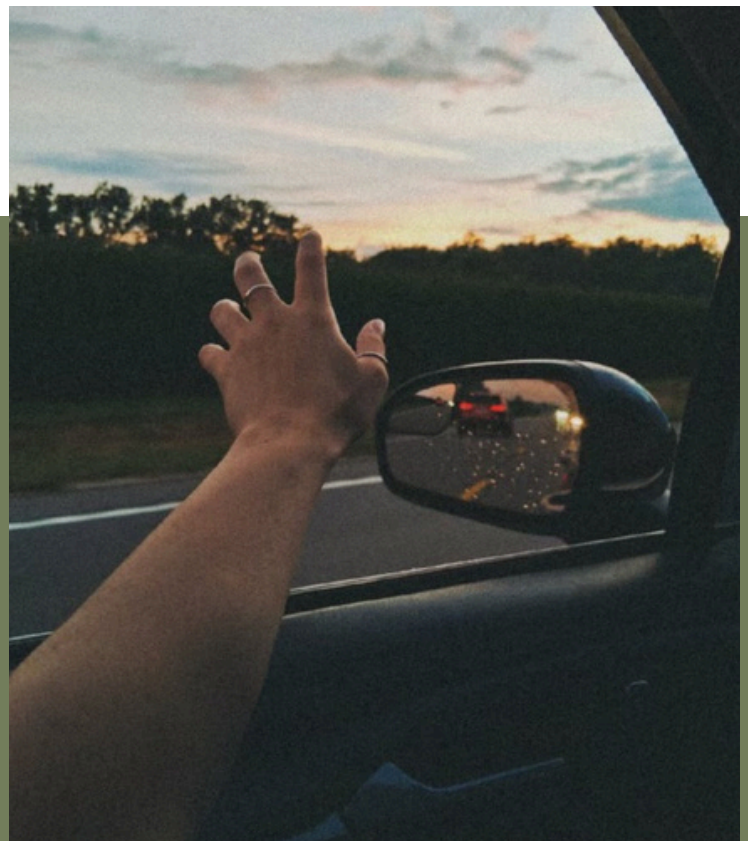
Survivor Success

After six years in an abusive relationship, a mother made the brave decision to leave when the violence escalated. She and her four-year-old son sought safety through emergency shelter, but limited time and resources initially made it difficult to secure stability.

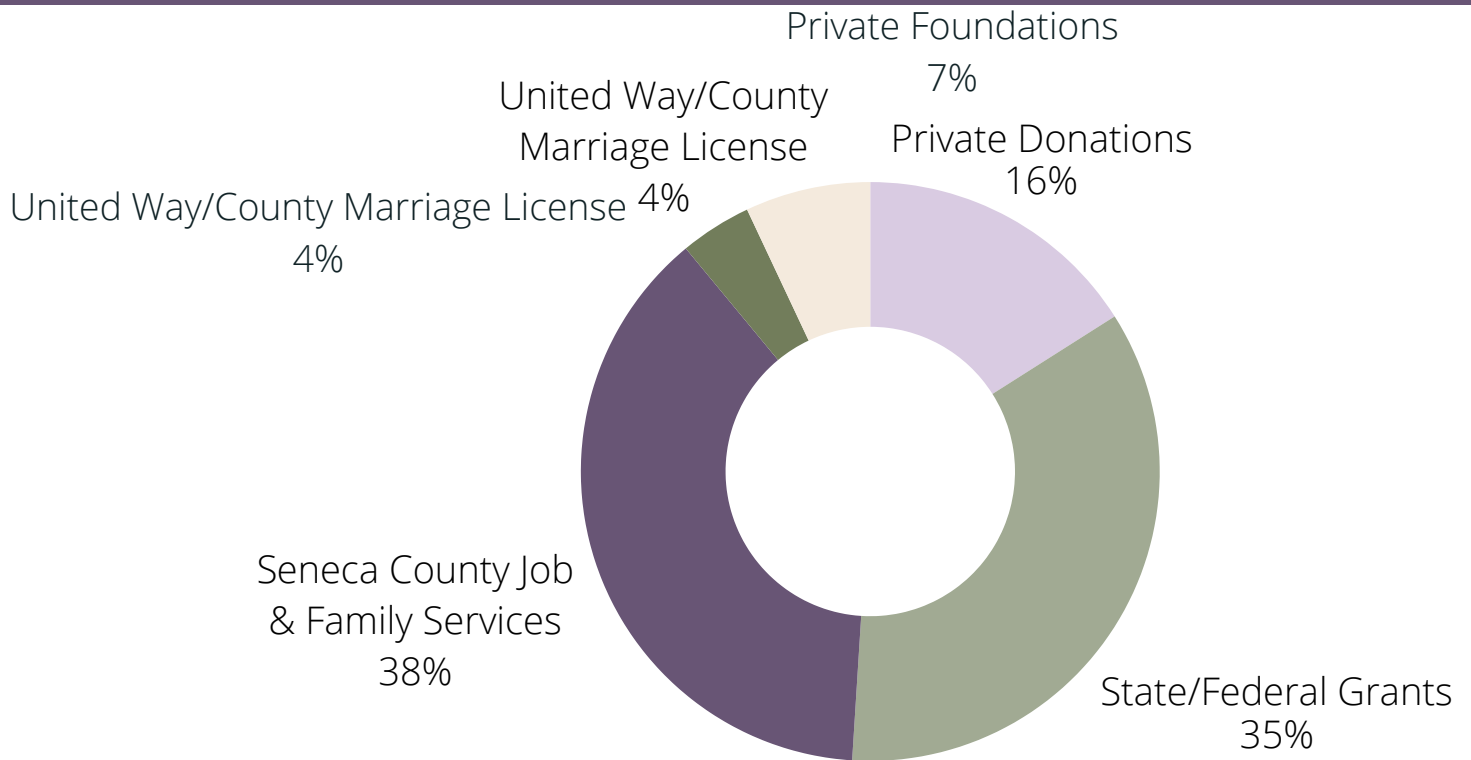
Upon entering First Step's shelter program, she shared how the abuse had affected her mental health and confidence. With consistent advocacy and support, she secured employment, enrolled her son in preschool, and began rebuilding her independence. After five months, she transitioned into permanent housing with assistance from GLCAP.

With help from generous community partners, she furnished her new home and created a safe, welcoming space for her family. Today, she remains connected to First Step and continues to participate in family events. Her journey highlights the resilience of survivors and the lasting impact of compassionate, trauma-responsive support.

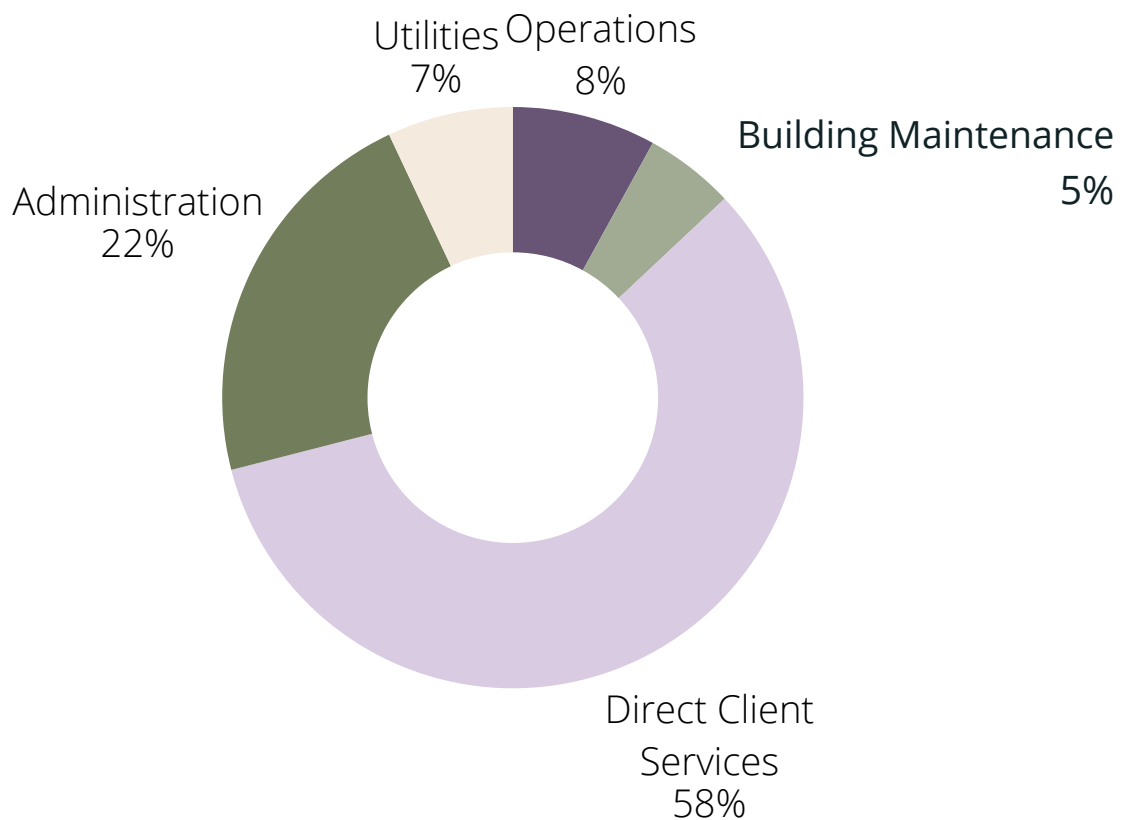
We asked,
*"Take a picture of what
freedom looks like to you"*



Revenue & Expenses



Revenue



Expenses

Private Major Donors



- National Machinery Foundation
- Loyal Order of Moose #1567 - Fostoria
- St. John's United Church of Christ - Fostoria
- Union United Church of Christ - Bascom
- Tiffin Community Foundation
- KLEPBRO
- Fostoria Area Safety Council
- Ohio Logistics
- Firelands Association of Realtors
- Fremont Federal Credit Union
- Joan Stoner
- Geenex Solar
- St. Francis Ministries



Community Support



- Elite Clean
- St. Luke's Lutheran Church - North Baltimore
- Faith Formation Group at St. Wendelin
- Union United Church of Christ - Bascom
- Dr. Ryan Kinn
- Fostoria First Church of the Nazarene
- Trinity United Brethren Church - Fostoria
- First Presbyterian Church
- Soroptimist of Fremont
- Allen Eiry Senior Center
- Geary Family YMCA
- Good Shepherd Kennel



Community Engagement

Events:

- Red Carpet Affair Sponsored by St. Francis Ministries
- Fostoria Church of the Nazarene Fall Festival
- Heidelberg University Community Crisis Response Team
- Wyandot Co. Health Dept. Family Fest
- Fostoria Farmer's Market
- Tiffin-Seneca Public library Storybook Festival
- Veteran's and First Responders Fair
- Transformation Life Center Gala
- Wyandot Co. Community Council
- Seneca Co. Community Council
- Safeguarding Older Adults
- Ohio Logistics
- Geary Family YMCA
- Walk for Hope



At First Step, we are constantly trying to make new connections, these events were just a few ways that we were able to engage with our community this year.

Over 2,400 community members were reached through our 171 total hours of involvement in local events

Community Presentations

- Tiffin Rotary Club
- North Central Ohio Educational Service Center
- United Way of Fostoria
- Seneca Co. Job & Family Services
- Wyandot Co. Community Council
- Seneca Co. Community Council
- Wyandot Rotary Club
- Heidelberg University - Take Back the Night
- Fremont Chapter of Soroptimist International
- McCutchenville Trinity UCC
- Fremont GLCAP
- Pheonix Recovery House
- Light House Sober Living
- Fostoria Rotary Club
- Attica Fire Department
- Marathon - Findlay
- Northwest Ohio Association United Church of Christ Boundary Training



Domestic Violence Awareness Month

October's Domestic Violence Awareness Month was a significant success this year. We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who participated, increased their understanding of domestic violence, and supported our efforts through generous donations.

Throughout the month, First Step hosted six community events across the four counties we serve and delivered three educational presentations on domestic violence and the services we provide. We were also honored to receive three official proclamations recognizing Domestic Violence Awareness Month from: Don Mennel, Mayor of Fostoria, Lee Wilkinson, Mayor of Tiffin, and the Seneca County Commissioners, Anthony Paradiso, Bill Frankart, and Brent Busdeker.

Through presentations and outreach events, we connected with over 300 community members. In addition, 27 businesses in Seneca County committed to becoming allies for survivors of domestic violence, further strengthening our community's response and support network.

Thank you to everyone who helped make this month impactful. Your continued support allows us to educate, advocate, and stand with survivors throughout our community.



Domestic Violence Awareness Month

During the month of October, businesses throughout Seneca County had the opportunity to become recognized allies for survivors in our community. Participating businesses received hand-painted purple pumpkins created by survivors in our shelter. These pumpkins were displayed publicly to signal that survivors can shop safely and confidently, knowing there is a supportive ally within the community.

This initiative helped promote awareness, visibility, and a sense of safety for survivors while strengthening community partnerships in support of ending domestic violence.

Thank you to those who participated!



THIS BUSINESS SUPPORTS SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

For Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October, every business displaying a **hand-painted purple pumpkin, created by a survivor in our shelter**, is an ally to those experiencing domestic violence. Together, we raise awareness, offer hope, and remind our community: **Domestic violence is not a private matter—we must stop it together.**



Almost 1 in 2 women (47.3%) and more than 2 in 5 men (44.2%) reported experiencing contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking victimization by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime. -CDC

In our community we will not allow Domestic Violence

Website:  Facebook: 

Contact us today for services
+419-435-7300
PO Box 1103
Info@firststepfostoria.org

Business Ally's for Survivors of Domestic Violence

- Wolph Chiropractic's
- PT Link
- UIS
- Mood. Hair Studio
- Washington St. Outfitters
- Level Up
- The Laird
- The Social Cigar
- Tom Rodgers Flowers
- SOUL Boutique
- The Secret Seamstress
- Deckers Furniture
- H & E Janitorial



- PanYan Bookstore
- St. Catherines
- Javas Enchanted Bean
- Calico Charlies
- Fostoria Dells
- Bojun
- Au Soleil
- A Mom and Pop Tattoo Shop
- Center St. Antiques
- Serenity Christian Counseling
- Fostoria Arts Council
- Geary Family YMCA
- MST Pub

Employer Outreach Program

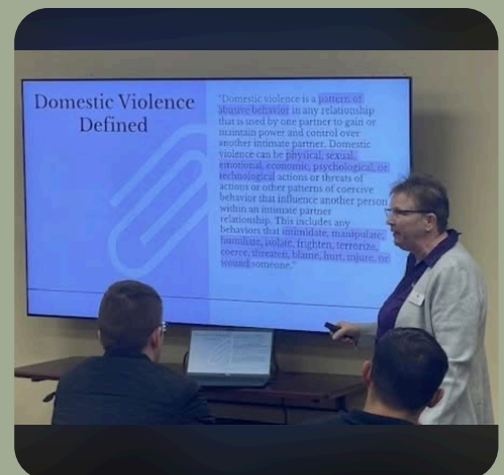
We are grateful to National Machinery Foundation for their support of our New Employers Outreach Program, an initiative designed to help local employers create healthier, trauma-responsive workplaces. This program strengthens employee well-being, resilience, and retention by equipping employers with the knowledge and tools needed to support individuals experiencing trauma or secondary trauma in their personal or professional lives.

Through this program, First Step provides onsite presentations and training on domestic violence, counseling referrals for employees impacted by trauma, and discreet educational resources—including handouts, brochures, and digital tools—for employees to access safely and confidentially.

Many survivors of domestic violence do not disclose their abuse due to fear of losing their employment. By funding the new Employers Outreach Program, National Machinery is helping remove a critical barrier to seeking support—ensuring that survivors can access resources without risking their livelihoods

Employers Making a Change:

- Beerco
- National Machinery
- Kaubisch Public Library
- Seneca County Job and Family Services
- Ohio Logistics
- Heidelberg University
- Key Bank
- Fremont Great Lakes Community Action Partnership



Program Sponsor:



Volunteer Highlight



Denise and Steve Wells have been volunteers for First Step since 1992. They have both retired; Denise from Excello and Steve from Honeywell and as an EMT for Bascom and Risingsun Fire Department.

Denise states that when they began volunteering for First Step, it was more of an advocate role, helping the police while the survivors would gather their things and taking pictures of their injuries. Their role for the past twenty-plus years has been to gather and store household items and clothing for survivors and transport those items to the survivor's new home. Denise states that they have helped over 400 families move!

We are so very thankful for Denise and Steve and their loyalty and service to the agency and the community.

Donors & Supporters

Inland Tarp

Key Bank

Patty Kinion

Fostoria City Schools

St. Luke's Lutheran Church - North Baltimore

Cedar Creek Church

Custom Glass Solutions

First Presbyterian Church - Tiffin

Justice for Migrant Women - Fremont

Terry and Pat Magers

All Saints Parish - New Riegel

Bascom Community Church

Jason Kooman

Karl and Gene Heaver

Eloise Reinhart

Lynn Tucker-Roberts

Order of the Eastern Star - Fostoria

Delta Kappa Gamma Alpha Sigma - Findlay

Amanda Homan

Trinity United Church of Christ -

McCutchenville

Pamela Moore

Kelly Giacalone

Trinity United Brethren Church - Fostoria

Mary Brag

Sue Sander

Zion United Church of Christ - Bettsville

Hopewell Church of God - Tiffin

Fostoria Church of God

Republic United Church of Christ

Women of the ELCA Central Conference

Alpha Zeta - Bowling Green

First Church of God - Risingsun

Lorie Earnhart

Susan Wren

Scott Harlow

Rebecca Terry

Jael Stetzik

Pam Morral

Nancy Rubbenstein

Jennifer Croy

Jill Filiater

Joe Wolph - Foundation for Music Education

Linda Lopez-Fouts

Gail Sherman

H&E Janitorial



Event Sponsors



Baumann Auto Group

St. Francis Senior Ministries

To Learn More...

Thank you so much for reading our 2025 Annual Report. If you know someone in need of assistance or would like to get involved with our organization, please reach out via phone, email, or the contact form on our website.



FIRST STEP
Domestic Violence Services



Phone Number

(419) 435-7300



Email Address

info@firststepfostoria.org



Website

www.firststepfostoria.org

