



Late Summer Newsletter

August 2026

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Expanding Access in Rural York County

Caring Unlimited Selected as Pilot Site for New National Project

Caring Unlimited is one of only two Domestic Violence Resource Centers nationwide selected to serve as a pilot site for the new Rural Initiatives for Service Enhancement (RISE) Project.

The RISE Project is an program of Praxis, a national technical assistance provider, and is funded by the US Department of Justice Office of Violence Against Women. The Project aims to enhance victim/survivor-serving organizations' capacity to meet the needs of survivors in rural areas.

People experiencing domestic violence in rural areas face unique challenges to accessing services, and the programs serving those communities may not have the dedicated resources needed to effectively reach them. More than half of York County's residents live in areas considered rural. In York County, survivors in rural regions face increased and intense isolation, a lack of public transportation, and a lack of available community resources overall.

Caring Unlimited's proven high-quality services, creative and effective safety planning strategies, and leadership as an advocacy organization serving rural communities led to the agency's selection as one of just two pilot sites for this project.

Through this process Caring Unlimited continues its commitment to providing truly accessible programs and services to anyone experiencing domestic abuse and violence in York County.

"We are seeing in real time the way that increased demand for our services, reduced community resources, current global events, and advocate burnout prevent us from doing our best work.

The RISE Project gives us the support, structure, outside viewpoint, and expertise to look critically at our work, consider what more integrated, trauma responsive, and survivor centered work could be, and begin to make the changes needed to achieve these goals."
- Julia Davidson,
Advocacy Director

Challenges, Connections, and Opportunities:

A Message from CU's Executive Director

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Caring Unlimited
Executive Director

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Dear Friend,

This season has brought new opportunities, meaningful successes, and hard choices for Caring Unlimited and for the survivors you trust us to serve.

We are exploring new strategies to connect with survivors in York County's rural regions, like the RISE Project you read about on page 1, and we are fostering partnerships that offer survivors new opportunities for personal growth, healing, and connection.

Connections like these matter because isolation is a tactic of abuse. People who cause harm deliberately cut survivors off from family and friends and limit access to resources such as money and transportation. Victims feel trapped in the relationship with nowhere to turn. Healing begins with a connection where hope is restored.

At Caring Unlimited we connect with survivors to ensure they have more support, more options, more resources, and more hope. Supporters like you make that possible.

"I didn't know what my life could look like, but I'm starting to see."

I counted. Each month, 170 people call our 24-Hour Helpline. Every one of those callers is a unique individual with unique needs. With your help, we ensure each person is immediately connected with an advocate who will listen and help them find a path toward safety. With your help, we continue to provide the holistic support that leads to long term well-being (pages 4 and 5).

"This process helped me understand it is okay to speak up and do what is best for myself and my family."

We celebrated successful statewide advocacy efforts that will increase funding for essential domestic violence services in 2027 and strengthen programs that hold people who use abuse accountable. You helped give survivors a chance to be part of these important conversations and influence change.

"Thank you for helping to advocate for us to have a voice with a group of people who can actually make change."

Our services are free of charge to anyone in need, but they are not free to provide. We made the difficult decision to suspend hiring for two positions due to funding constraints and an unpredictable funding environment. **We are depending on you. Give today, so that survivors can reach an advocate, access emergency support, and take the next step toward safety this fall and into the coming year.**

Thank you for believing in a community where survivors are heard, supported, and safe. Your generosity makes this work possible!

With Gratitude,

Susan Giambalvo
Executive Director

The impact of your gift today

\$25 replaces essential documents

\$50 meets emergency needs such as gas or groceries

\$100 supports one night of emergency shelter for a family

\$250 creates accessible educational opportunities online and in schools

\$500 covers attorney fees for survivors seeking an order of Protection from Abuse

\$1000 prepares a Transitional Housing Program apartment for a family starting over



 Caring Unlimited is welcoming and affirming. We do not discriminate in access to services or employment on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, family status, or any other characteristic protected by law.

2026 Community Celebration

Caring Unlimited's annual Community Celebration in early June gave us the opportunity to connect with you, celebrate our impact in the community, and formally honor some of the amazing people that work alongside us to end domestic violence. It was a fun, inspiring, and powerful evening. **We hope you will join us next year as we celebrate our 50th Anniversary serving York County!**

2026 Community Impact Award

Becky Wirtes



Becky Wirtes and Emily Gormley, Caring Unlimited's Director of Development and Community Engagement

Caring Unlimited's Community Impact Award recognizes an individual or group whose actions not only make a difference on their own but also make an exponential difference as they open and expand the opportunities for survivors of domestic violence in our community.

2026 Community Impact Award recipient, Becky Wirtes founded Caring Unlimited's Atlantic Plunge fundraiser 25 years ago.

The Atlantic Plunge was born out of Becky's recognition that survivors need non-judgmental, easily accessible, caring support and resources. Held annually on New Year's Day, the Atlantic Plunge has raised just over \$500,000 since its creation. Becky's commitment to, and enthusiasm for, this event has raised awareness, educated the community, and made an impact on the lives of countless survivors.

2026 Community Partner Award

Michele Meyer



Michele Meyer accepts the 2026 Community Partner Award

Caring Unlimited's Community Partner Award is given annually to a business, group, or individual member of our community whose support significantly impacts CU's mission to end domestic violence.

2026 recipient, Representative Michele Meyer, who represents Eliot and parts of Kittery and South Berwick, is a champion for survivors and Maine's Domestic Violence Resource Centers.

Michele's leadership in Maine's House of Representatives has been instrumental to raising awareness about the realities of DV in Maine and to securing critical funding for domestic violence response and prevention programs. As co-sponsor of *An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence*, Michele persistently and successfully advocated for a critical one-time increase in state funds to all of Maine's DV Resource Centers.



Join our Circle of Caring Today!

Make a difference all year!

- Set your monthly gift at any amount and your gift will be made automatically!
- Make your gift knowing it is being used to meet the greatest needs throughout the year- real help, right here in our community!



More Support. More Options.

Collaboration with Carlisle Academy Offers Equine Therapy for Survivors

A new partnership with Carlisle Academy in Lyman, is allowing survivors who use Caring Unlimited's services to participate in equine therapy. The experience fosters healing as clients are guided in building a connection with the horses and noticing the horses' and their own physical responses.

As prey animals, horses are often on high alert and are sensitive to their surroundings and people. Survivors of domestic violence have endured sustained stress, unpredictability, and volatility. Learning to slow down and become attuned to the horses helps survivors regulate their nervous systems after living in prolonged fear and distress.

After just two sessions, participants in CU's program have described the experience as calming and noted it helped them feel more grounded. One client reported that she could feel her blood pressure dropping when spending time with the horses.

Caring Unlimited provides a broad range of support and practical resources for survivors and their children. Innovative community partnerships such as this expand options for survivors as they heal from the trauma of abuse.



Summer Fun Creates Joyful New Memories

A Program Note from Nicole Trafton, Transitional Housing Family Advocate

Our Monday Fun Day events bring the true meaning of a village to our residents. They provide an opportunity for families to come together, build relationships, and get to know one another better. Through these gatherings, residents are able to learn from one another, support one another, and continue growing as a community.

For the children, Monday Fun Days offer a chance to play, explore, and create positive memories. They also provide valuable time for staff and residents to connect outside of day-to-day responsibilities, helping to strengthen relationships and foster a sense of belonging. Most importantly, these events give us something to celebrate together. They are a meaningful way for us to show our residents how much they are appreciated and valued, while also reminding them that they deserve joy, recognition, and opportunities to celebrate life's special moments.



Pictured above: a community birthday party for Survivors and their children.

You are an essential part of the community that ensures survivors have access to unique and impactful programs like those listed above.

Your commitment to our mission enables us to meet survivors' needs, expand the opportunities our programs provide, and raise awareness and understanding through education and collaboration.



Scan above to make your secure online gift today.

More Resources. More Hope.

Transitional Housing Program Apartments Welcome Survivors Home

Caring Unlimited's Transitional Housing Program, in partnership with Sanford Housing Authority, supports survivors and their children for up to two years as they rebuild their lives in the wake of abuse. Eleven agency-owned apartments in Sanford range from one to three-bedroom units.

Each apartment is fully furnished for new residents before they move in. For children's rooms, advocates pay attention to details including their ages and preferences (favorite color, sport, characters, animals, etc.) to create bedrooms and spaces that feel immediately like home.

The details of a fully furnished apartment ensure that residents are not immediately facing financial challenges to obtain the basic necessities for a new home and supports financial security by allowing survivors to focus on long term goals such as saving, building credit, and job training or employment. Caring Unlimited relies on the generosity of our community to support this program, including to defray the cost of furnishing and maintaining apartments.



Scan to learn more about our frequently needed items, and how to arrange a drop off or donation.



Pictured at left: Furnished apartments prepared for a new family to move in.

Freedom Wheels Program Offers Survivors Independence

Caring Unlimited's Freedom Wheels Program is a car donation and repair program for survivors connected with CU's services. Access to safe and reliable transportation reduces barriers that prevent survivors from maintaining employment, meeting family needs, and moving toward greater safety and independence. In York County where public transportation resources are lacking, and on-demand ride services like Uber are expensive, if available, access to a vehicle is truly life changing.

"Do I find this program useful? No, I don't just find it useful—I consider it a lifesaver! Because, thanks to this car, I was able to work, provide for my children, and feel like I could move forward with my life once again. Thank you, thank you, thank you for having programs like this and for not leaving us alone."

- Freedom Wheels Client

Survivor Stories Project 2026: Share Your Story

Sharing stories is a powerful way of raising awareness about domestic violence in our communities, as well as a way of healing from abuse.

Caring Unlimited's Survivor Stories Project invites survivors to write, read, or have their stories shared anonymously each October as part of Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM).

CU's free writing guide and online story submission form offers anyone who has experienced abuse the opportunity to draft and share their story while determining whatever level of anonymity they choose.

Add your voice to The Survivor Stories Project.

Scan for more information about The Project and how to share your story.



OCTOBER IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH!

Follow Caring Unlimited on social media for details about our 2026 Domestic Violence Awareness Month events!

 @caring_unlimited

 @caring.unlimited

**Make a Gift Today
in honor of DV
Awareness Month**



Volunteer Opportunities Available

Helpline | Events | Service Projects |
Board and Committee Service

Pictured: Community members gathering for the 2025 Survivor Stories Project.

