

Pat Breher Brings Care and Compassion to Her Volunteer Work

The numbers are staggering: Every nine seconds a woman is battered in the U.S. One in four women and one in seven men will experience some form of domestic violence in their lives.*

At Pisgah Legal Services (PLS), more than 40% of cases involve some form of domestic violence. This is a complex and emotionally charged issue. PLS strives to ensure that our clients are met with compassion and empathy so they feel supported and empowered.



Pat Breher is part of this support system. She has volunteered with Pisgah Legal Services for three years. She responds to calls from people who are survivors of domestic abuse in need of free civil legal assistance for restraining orders, child custody, divorce, and separation. "Pat is an empathetic and compassionate listener, and has a calming influence on our clients," says Beth Herman, Volunteer Program Coordinator for Pisgah Legal Services.

Pat took a few minutes out of her busy schedule to talk about why she volunteers with Pisgah Legal Services.

What is your role as a volunteer screener?

Pat: Potential clients who are experiencing domestic violence call and leave a voicemail with the bare bones of their situation. I call them and talk to them in depth to establish the details of their potential case. I make notes for the attorneys which helps streamline the process so they can have a strong sense of what is involved with the case.

Oftentimes, I am the first person the potential client talks to from PLS, so I feel an important part of what I do is to listen and to reassure them that help is available. If PLS can't help them for some reason, then I let them know of other places they can get help.

I always ask if they have a safety plan. If the answer is no then we talk about the importance of having a plan. For so many people, this is a difficult subject because they have to consider being unsafe with someone that they love or have loved. I refer them to Helpmate or Our Voice to assist with making a plan. This is a crucial part of my conversation with people who call. **Editor's Note:** PLS attorneys also follow up with the client and help them develop a safety plan, as well as recommending medical treatment if needed.

Why is this volunteer work important?

Pat: It must be so intimidating for our callers to reach out to get professional help about such a personal issue and each call is individually different in many ways. In fact, I just got a call from a possible client that was very complicated. I was able to speak with her for over an hour and get a lot of details. After our phone call, I think she felt that someone truly listened to her and heard her story. I feel like this makes a big difference

for people. It reassures them that help is available and is crucial in setting the tone so they can move forward.

Do you feel a connection to the callers?

Pat: Absolutely. I can hear what their experiences have been like and how difficult it is to be in a legal situation against someone that they once loved.

What goes through your mind when you make the phone call to the potential client?

Pat: I'm very conscious of being non-directional and non-judgmental. The less obtrusive I can be when asking tough questions, the better. If I start with a gentle approach, it makes the whole interaction easier for the potential client.

How do you stay calm with clients in crisis?

Pat: I think I have a temperament for doing this type of volunteering and I love doing this work. It's very encouraging and hopeful to see how people deal with difficult situations and take action to move on with their lives.

Why should people volunteer with PLS?

Pat: I would strongly encourage anyone who is interested in doing this type of work to come to PLS and try it out. It's very rewarding.

There are a variety of opportunities to get involved in the work of Pisgah Legal Services. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Beth Herman at

Beth@pisgahlegal.org or call
828-210-3787.

** National Resource Center on Domestic Violence.*