

Justice



DVPI Offering Hope, and Pursuing Possibility

When Paula Mastroianni looks at the challenges ahead, one word comes to mind: possibility.

Paula, who became the CEO of the Domestic Violence Project, Inc. (DVPI) in mid-October, knows there's a lot of work to do. This has been a particularly brutal year: DVPI faced multiple funding cuts, requiring layoffs and reductions in services; the remaining staff members are stretched thin; the organization was operating without a permanent leader for many months; and domestic violence is increasing as the pandemic exacerbates life stressors for already vulnerable families. And yet, Paula sees an organization poised to do great things.

No one could argue that DVPI's work is anything but essential. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men nationwide have experienced severe physical violence by an intimate partner.¹ Here in Stark County, the Ohio Attorney General's office indicates that 1,759 incidents of domestic violence were reported to police in 2018.²

DVPI shelters survivors, helps them transition into new lives removed from abuse, and serves as a guide and support for those involved with the court system. DVPI staff also stay in touch, to make sure clients have the support and resources they need to continue moving toward safer lives.

Paula has hit the ground running:

She's focusing on securing additional funding, which is no easy feat right now. In-person fundraising events are no longer a possibility; in 2021, she plans to stage a digital event instead. Another major goal is to make giving as easy as possible by starting a recurring gift program.

She wants to unify the staff and help them know they are supported in a common goal of helping clients. She's taking the time to do a "listening tour," to make sure she engages staff members and really hears their concerns. She's working hard to foster an environment of respect and support for her staff, whose jobs are difficult even in

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the best of times. They're also significantly underpaid compared to their counterparts at similar organizations, which makes hiring a challenge. Paula wants to pay them more, and eventually position the organization as a local employer of choice for those seeking social services careers.

She's also committed to telling DVPI's story. Because it's a small, local organization without a marketing budget, DVPI's voice can sometimes get lost. Many people in abusive situations are unaware DVPI can help them. Paula plans to use her marketing and communications experience to garner media exposure, so both those experiencing domestic violence and those who support the work will keep the organization top of mind.

And that will help DVPI—and those it serves—to enter a whole new world of possibility. ✨

The Six Kinds of Abuse:

- Digital Abuse** stalks you online
- Financial Abuse** prevents your independence
- Mental Abuse** threatens your life
- Physical Abuse** makes you feel unhinged
- Sexual Violence** unwanted sexual comments or advances
- Verbal Abuse** makes you feel small

¹ [cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_executive_summary-a.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs_executive_summary-a.pdf)

² ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Files/Reports/Domestic-Violence-Reports/Domestic-Violence-Reports-2018/2018-Domestic-Violence-Incidents-by-County-and-Age