

Women Against Abusive Relationships

Executive Summary

Community Partner

Roxanne Epperson

Student Consulting Team

Atah Okaisabor

Deekshita Vedula

Sihan Wu

Background

Women Against Abusive Relationships (WAAR) is an education, awareness, and prevention program based in Pittsburgh, PA. They teach participants how to identify signs of an abusive relationship and what a healthy relationship looks like. WAAR's mission is to break the cycle of violence against women and girls and aid in their healing process. They accomplish their mission through their weekly podcast, monthly panel discussions, and consolidating online resources such as the National Domestic Violence Hotline phone number, safety planning, and other healing resources. WAAR was founded in 2001 by Roxanne Epperson and went into a hiatus period from 2016 to 2021 while Roxanne completed her educational journey in 2019. During the pandemic, Roxanne resumed WAAR operations with an online-only format. Roxanne currently leads WAAR from her home with the help of 2 members of her community. Currently, WAAR maintains an online presence through their website, waarheals.org, social media activity, podcasts, and panel discussions.

Project Description

Project Opportunity

Shelters often have different requirements on who they can accept. Some shelters only accept women and children while others consider various factors in the applicant's circumstances. Having an easily accessible tool for people who are looking for shelter based on location and circumstance compatibility would support many victims in securing safety away from their abusers. The process previously was to manually call nearby shelter options, or by recommendations from previous shelter stayers. Additionally, there is no system to keep track of members' healing journeys or how WAAR has positively impacted them.

Project Vision

By expanding WAAR's current website to include features that allow members to find shelters with available capacity for their needs and find more resources, our client will be able to better aid victims of abuse and build a larger community of survivors that can communicate with each other. Shelters will also be able to better provide services to those in need. The expansion of the website to include these resources would help WAAR reach more victims in need of support, provide information about safe places victims can go to depending on their needs, what services they can receive, build a strong community, and keep a record of the resources that can help

victims for their reference. The website will also have an optional survey for members to share their healing journey with other members of WAAR using written and video testimonials.

Project Outcomes

Our project outcomes incorporate an understanding of issues current domestic abuse victims face in trying to locate a shelter that fits their needs and is close to them. The outcomes visible on WAAR's website include a filterable list of shelter information (for shelters in Pennsylvania) by service, special population, and zip code with information on how to find shelters and help if they are located outside of Pennsylvania (domestic and international), and a survey for members to share their experiences with others. Additionally, the outcomes include user testing, and a process for Roxanne to make changes to the shelter locator information on the website via communicating to shelters, members, and her website's hired freelancer for when a shelter updates the services they provide, populations they assist, or hours they operate.

Project Deliverables

Our deliverables include documentation and tutorials for the tools we used for expanding the website and adding or changing information about shelters. They also include wireframes for the pages we added to the website regarding decisions we made about the design. We have also included meeting notes, website screenshots, the website URL and login information, issues we ran into, information about alternative approaches we researched but did not select, and suggestions for next steps.

Recommendations

We recommend that Roxanne reach out to groups of shelters to possibly expand the functionality of the shelter locator with additional information including availability of beds. We recommend future IS teams to review our documentation to better understand our solution, and implement additional features such as shelter beds availability, information about shelters in both America and internationally to filter through and add resources for locating specific needs such as diapers or transportation.

Student Consulting Team

Atah Okaisabor led quality assurance for the project. She is a fourth-year student majoring in Information Systems with a minor in Business Administration. She will be graduating in May and working at Microsoft as a support engineer.

Deekshita Vedula served as the project manager. She is a third-year student majoring in Information Systems with a minor in Computer Science. She will be interning with Microsoft over the summer as a software engineering intern.

Sihan Wu was responsible for managing the client relationship. She is a third-year student majoring in Information Systems with an additional major in Human-Computer Interaction. She will be working at Amazon this summer as a UX design intern.