



Rebuilding a Life Founded on Love

Shelter's transitional housing provides hopeful futures following abuse

Editor's Note: Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect individuals.

Near the heart of Naples, a smiling woman opens the door to a colorful Key West-inspired cottage. Her 4-year-old daughter is wrapped around her leg, face buried in a shy hello.

This is their home — the first where the two feel safe together.

"It's been a roller coaster for the past four or five years," says Sheryl, now sitting in her living room in a Transitional Living Cottage, one of seven owned and operated by The Shelter for Abused Women & Children. Each cottage is furnished with items from The Shelter Options Shoppe and decorated by The

Shelter Guild, a group of about 280 members that supports the shelter's programs.

The rent is tailored to Sheryl's income, and she and her daughter will be permitted to live in the cottage for two years as she regains stability by building credit, saving money and getting an

CREDIT: KELLY JANE FARRELL



The Shelter for Abused Women & Children provides transitional housing cottages for up to two years to help rebuild lives on a solid foundation following abuse.

education. When she's ready to leave, she'll be able to take the furnishings with her.

SHERYL'S STORY

Born in Africa and with U.S. citizenship pending, Sheryl's abusers manipulated and controlled her, in part by threatening her with deportation.

To flee from an abusive husband in Georgia, Sheryl and her daughter were invited to live with a family in Naples. But she found herself in another threatening situation. The job she expected upon arrival didn't exist. The man of the house began pressuring her for intimacy.

"I was thinking, 'What have I gotten myself into?'"

His advances escalated. He gave her an ultimatum: Stay under his terms or leave. He threatened to tell her husband where she was. She immediately retreated to a bedroom where her daughter was napping. He didn't follow.

"I don't think there's any prayer I didn't say that day," Sheryl says. "I'm a Catholic. I did the rosary three times."

She had \$8.

She connected with the shelter the next day. A staff member sent an Uber to pick her up as quickly as she could pack.

She was relieved to arrive, but healing was just beginning.

"It was two weeks before I could go outside (of the shelter). I was so scared," she says.

In the year since, she has accepted every class, resource and referral the shelter has offered. She attended counseling and courses with topics such as parenting, money management, relationship skills, meditation and others.

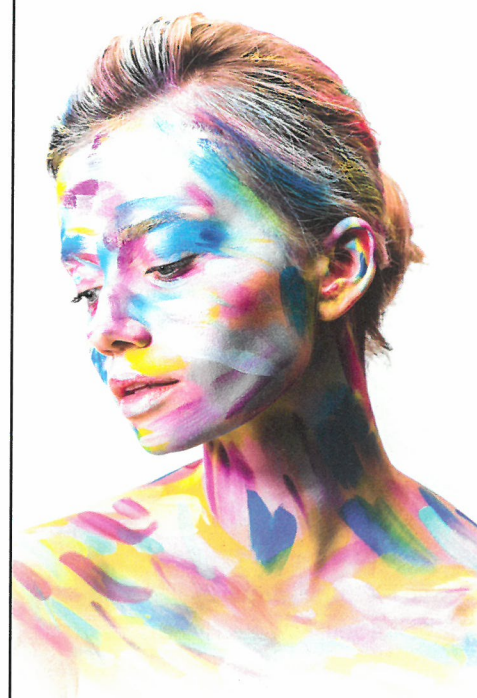
The support changed the way she thought, especially about the people who harmed her.

"I was imagining them in coffins ... And then one day, I just woke up and said, 'I forgive.' I wasn't thinking of them anymore," she says.

Sheryl works and goes to a technical college. Though her citizenship remains pending, she's applying to nursing schools.

WHITNEY'S STORY

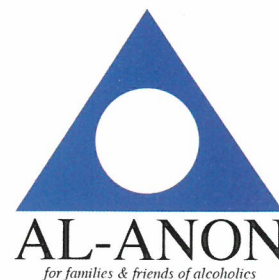
The 60-bed emergency shelter provides

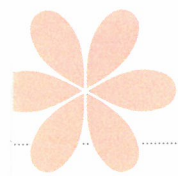


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safety from physical, emotional or financial abuse for an average of 47 days. The recovery — the rebuilding of a home and a life — often takes more time. With luck and support, those being sheltered transition to long-term recovery.

"It is luck ... it's also a lot of work," says Whitney, who lives in one of the other cottages near Sheryl.

Residents in the cottages have created a tight-knit neighborhood.

"You can imagine someone who lives through something just like you; how quickly you would bond with that person. That person becomes your family," says the shelter's chief operating officer, Julie Franklin.

But Whitney, a former Marco Island resident, didn't think of herself as abused. She didn't believe financial abuse was a real thing.

But Karen Harmon, the shelter's outreach manager, reports that 99 percent of domestic violence cases involve financial abuse. Concern over ability to provide financially for themselves and their children is one of the leading reasons the abused remain with, or return to, an abusive partner, Harmon says.

Whitney had been cut off from all credit cards and bank accounts by her

banker husband and given increasingly meager gas and grocery allowances. When one of her children came out as transgender, Whitney's husband and members of his church wanted to send the child to a conversion camp. Whitney resisted.

"I was imagining them in coffins ... And then one day, I just woke up and said, 'I forgive.'"

~ Sheryl, transitional living cottage resident

"He was stressed. People act crazy, or not like themselves, when they're stressed," she explains of her husband.

"It wasn't just the marriage ... (The religious community) was very cult-like. I believed everything they said — until I didn't."

Over the course of two days, under the guise of tidying and taking items to Goodwill, she and her teens left their home and went to the shelter, bringing their dog and two cats.

Now they live together in a cottage. Whitney, 50, is divorced, going to school full time, working part time and raising two college-bound teenagers, with one already in college.

"The kids have been great," Whitney says. They didn't care where we lived. They'd live in a car. They told me, 'You leave. We'll follow.'"

After living in the shelter for about four months, she describes "feeling like the luckiest person alive" when she learned her application for the transitional cottage had been approved.

She saw the love that Shelter Guild members put into finding all the items for their home — utensils, paintings, paper towels, backpacks, soap — everything they needed. Shelter employees, volunteers and

donors thought of everything.

"I'm a pretty composed person, but I lost it," Whitney recalls of the day she received keys to the cottage.

"I'm going to be sure you have your nest, and your wings, you'll be able to do it," she echoes of the shelter's support.

Whitney is eager to give back, speaking at events and sharing her experiences. "Why wouldn't we turn around and share it? *"

Kelly Jane Farrell's communications profession began 21 years ago as a sports writer for a local newspaper in Romeo, Michigan. She now lives in Naples with Panda, a rescued border collie.



By the Numbers

:: **4** - The number of transitional housing beds in 2003 located within The Shelter for Abused Women & Children.

:: **2008** - The year four cottages were built.

:: **7** - Existing cottages. An eighth is now under construction.

:: **500,000** - Dollars needed for a naming opportunity to construct and endow the ninth and final cottage.

:: **27 & 66** - Adults and children, respectively, assisted since building the first cottage.

:: **1,300** - Square feet per home, with three bedrooms and two bathrooms in each.

