

THE SHELTER

FOR ABUSED WOMEN & CHILDREN



by Linda Oberhaus, CEO

Brooke was physically, emotionally and financially bankrupt when she arrived at The Shelter with a garbage bag of clothes and her two dogs.

At 20, she had been abused her entire life; first by her mother and then by her boyfriend Jeff. Although he did not work, Jeff controlled all their finances and withheld money to control and punish Brooke if she did not do as he said. She lived in constant fear. If she came home late from work, she was threatened or beaten. Sometimes Jeff would show up at her workplace and assault her in front of her coworkers.

Socially isolated, Brooke's only source of happiness was spending time with her two dogs. When Jeff began to kick and abuse them, she took a coworker's advice and came to The Shelter because it had a kennel. She arrived bruised, broken and ashamed.

Brooke's story is not unique. Last year in Collier County, there were over 1,600 reports of domestic violence, including three murders, 41 rapes and 1,201 aggravated assaults. Chances are very likely you know at least one of these victims.

At The Shelter, Brooke had time to focus on herself and heal. She received counseling and came to understand the abuse she suffered was not her fault. She also took part in The Shelter's

economic empowerment classes, applied for a credit card and opened a savings account. She found the self-confidence to eventually enroll in college and move into her own apartment.

Statistics show that one in three women are victims of domestic violence. Many, like Brooke, suffer in silence, unsure where to turn for help.

One of our most frequently asked questions is, "Why does she stay?" There are as many reasons as there are survivors, including lack of transportation, employment or financial resources, fear of retaliation, reluctance to uproot their children, and religious beliefs.

Many victims do leave and despite taking every legal measure available to them, they are killed by their abusers. A 2018 study by the Florida Attorney General showed that 32% of perpetrators had an injunction for protection filed against them by the decedent at the time of her death. Over the past five years, 33% of the murders in Collier County were domestic violence homicides, according to statistics from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

It is critical that victims of domestic violence and human trafficking have safe shelter. This year, The Shelter answered 1,523 calls to its crisis line and provided 18,371 nights of shelter to adults, children and their pets. While we recognize that some victims are getting the help they need, the unfortunate reality is that for every victim we assist, there are hundreds more in desperate need of help.

For this reason, we eagerly anticipate the opening of the Shelly Stayer Shelter in Immokalee this spring. In addition to serving survivors of domestic violence, this 21,000-square-foot, 60-bed shelter will accommodate the long-term therapeutic needs of victims of human trafficking. We are grateful to Shelly Stayer for her lead gift and for the many generous donors who are making this facility

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a reality. Having local safe shelter will impact this community for generations to come.

It is important to understand that domestic violence and human trafficking are crimes against all of us, because violence at home does not stop at the front door. It infects our workplaces, schools, social circles and places of worship. Failure to recognize and report domestic violence puts the entire community at risk. Many mass murderers had a history of domestic violence prior to committing their violent public attacks.

It is vital that as a community, we have the courage to stand up and speak out. You can make a difference. Join The Shelter’s mission to prevent, protect and prevail over domestic violence and human trafficking. Call 239.775.3862 or go to naplesshelter.org to find out how you can help create a community where every home is a safe haven for the family it shelters.

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Family is important to Shelly Stayer. She believes that every family has a basic right to be safe in their own home. But the ugly reality is that too many Collier County women and children wake each day to uncertainty and go to bed each night in fear. The problem is compounded when safe shelter is more than 45 minutes away.

A former board member of The Shelter, Shelly chose to make an impact with a \$3 million lead gift to establish an emergency shelter in Immokalee, FL. This new shelter will allow survivors in Eastern Collier County to be safe as well as close to their family support systems, employment and their children’s schools. In addition to serving victims of domestic violence, the facility will accommodate the long-term therapeutic needs of victims of human trafficking.

Since her initial gift, hundreds of supporters have joined Shelly in her passion to assist families in need of safe shelter. For more information about how you can get involved to make this shelter a reality, go on-line to naplesshelter.org/Immokalee or call The Shelter at 239.775.3862.

If you or someone you know is a victim of domestic violence or human trafficking, call The Shelter’s Crisis Hotline at 239.775.1101.

