

BY
LANE NIESET

Toward a Greater Whole

Linda Oberhaus shares a mission of caring

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hen people walk into The Shelter for Abused Women & Children, a 60-bed emergency shelter in Naples, they can sense it's a happy place to be, despite its heavy mission. "My mantra is 'Happy, Healthy, Whole,' and that's a requirement to work here, because you can't give what you don't have," says CEO Linda Oberhaus. "I try to lead by example, walk the walk and demonstrate those things every day here at the shelter."

The Massachusetts native started early in the health services field, first as a high school peer counselor and then as a volunteer in the sexual abuse unit at the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay and buddy with the Tampa AIDS Network, assisting individuals diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. "There are so many young people today struggling with career decisions, but that was never a struggle for me; I always felt I would end up in this profession somehow," she says.

The volunteer gigs were the catalyst she needed to land her first full-time employment with Northside Behavioral Mental Health Center. "At 19 years old, I was a sponge. I loved the work so much and I was soaking the experience up," she says. "I was working with the chronically mentally ill, coming out of the state hospital, in a group home setting—it was really rewarding."

Oberhaus went on to receive undergraduate and graduate degrees in social work from the University of South Florida and, after nearly 30 years in the field, has "never veered off that path," she says, adding that a social degree is extremely marketable because of the intern experience.

It's now been 12 years since the CEO joined The Shelter for Abused Women & Children, and one of the key takeaways she's learned is the value of philanthropy. "The scope of services we can provide to victims of both domestic violence and human trafficking wouldn't be possible without caring people in the community, who give both their time and their resources," she says.

In April, the shelter is expanding with a second, 60-bed center—but that's not the only way The Shelter for Abused Women & Children is growing. The CEO has enacted capital and endowment campaigns, placing a strong focus on training and promoting members in every area of the organization, from programming to development and administration. "I think we've done a good job in terms of growth and reputation, and we want to be sure we are able to maintain that," she explains. "We want to ensure the shelter will remain stable and the organization will continue to live on and help people who really need these services."

ERIK KELLAR



“Happy, Healthy, Whole”: Linda Oberhaus lives by her mantra and leads by example.



Linda Oberhaus

Chief Executive Officer of The Shelter for Abused Women & Children

Hometown: Lynn, Massachusetts

Residence: Naples

Education: Master of Social Work (MSW) from University of South Florida; Executive Education Certificates from Harvard Business and Harvard Kennedy Schools

Partial work history: More than 30 years of professional experience in the human services field. Served as executive director of The Spring of Tampa Bay before moving to The Shelter for Abused Women & Children in Naples, where she has served as CEO for more than 12 years. Named one of South Florida’s Top 25 CEOs by the Cape Coral Community Foundation in 2019 and Gulfshore Life Woman of the Year in 2017.

Personal: Partner of nine years,

Janeice Martin, a Collier County Court judge who also presides over the community’s Drug Court Program. Two children: Christopher, 32-year-old military veteran and graduate of the National Aviation Academy, and Brooke, a 23-year-old graduate of University of North Florida who is currently employed at one of Florida’s certified domestic violence centers.

Hobbies: Health and fitness, travel, spirituality, reading and spending time with family and friends

Secret passion: Incorporating Blue Zones principles into daily life so she can live longer and healthier. 