

# Happenings

## NEWSLETTER

### Give Gifts of Hope for the Holidays

For most of us, the holidays are a time of joy. We buy presents for loved ones, eat indulgent foods, and take time to spend with friends and family. For the survivors at Harbor House, this season can bring anxiety. They might be disconnected from their support system. They could be questioning if they made the right decision taking their children out of their home right before the holidays. They are probably wondering if there will be any presents or a big meal. This is why we ask for your help with Gifts of Hope.

Harbor House works all year long to ensure an empowering atmosphere for the families we serve. We need your help to create a festive and safe holiday season. Here are a few ways you can help Harbor House ensure that the children and their parents experience a sense of belonging, hope, and empowerment:

**Give a Holiday Meal Basket.** Fill a laundry basket with nonperishable items to prepare a holiday meal, such as: stuffing, canned vegetables, cranberry sauce, canned potatoes, pie fillings, bread mixes, turkey, and a gift card so survivors can purchase items that may be unique to their holiday tradition.

**Adopt a Family for the Holidays.** You, your family, or neighbors can embrace a family this holiday season and purchase specific items from a family's wish list. Please contact us at 407-703-2890, and we will match you with one of our Harbor House families.



#### Fill the Holiday Gift Shop for Moms.

Help the children staying at Harbor House surprise their moms with a gift this year. Children living in our shelter will have an opportunity to select gifts as they shop in the holiday gift shop for Mom. Purchase ladies pajamas (any size) or items from Bath & Body Works or TJ Maxx. By donating a gift, you can give our children the joy of shopping for that special item for mom.

**No Time for Shopping?** Give any amount to Gifts of Hope and know your gift will keep giving throughout the year! Visit [www.harborhousefl.com/donate/](http://www.harborhousefl.com/donate/) to give the gift of hope today.

**The deadline for receiving all donations is December 10, 2017.**

We will accept donations from November 27 to December 10 on the following days and times:

Monday through Friday 11am until 6pm  
and Saturdays 11am until 3pm

Drop off Location:  
Massey Services, Inc.  
3100 Clay Ave  
Suite #151  
Orlando, FL 32804

For more information or to schedule an additional drop of time, please contact our Donation Coordinator at 407-703-2890 or [donate@harborhousefl.com](mailto:donate@harborhousefl.com). Thank you for making the holidays brighter!

### Program Spotlight

One of the top reasons victims stay in abusive relationships is because they cannot afford to leave. According to The Allstate Foundation, 99% of domestic violence victims experience financial abuse. This alarming statistic means it is vital that survivors receive education and training that will help them gain financial independence at the same time they are working on staying safe and healing physically and emotionally.

During intake with a case manager or advocate, both in Shelter and in Outreach, a financial safety assessment is done on each client. The staffer informs the client about the economic empowerment program. An Economic Empowerment Coordinator will then contact the client within 24 to 48 hours to schedule a one-on-one and inform them of the

## Message from the CEO, Michelle Sperzel

My first 10 months at Harbor House have been filled with a flurry of activity. New staff joined our senior leadership team. We moved into the new Morgan and Morgan Building. We braved grant changes and a hurricane. We restructured staff models and started new legal and youth programs. We solidified existing partnerships and formed new ones. Change is our constant, and we are building upon a very strong foundation.

I've had the pleasure of sitting down with numerous elected officials, community partners, donors, and volunteers. I've told many of them what amazes me the most about Central Florida is the true spirit of collaboration around the issue of Domestic Violence. Collaboration is essential for true social change. We can't transform a community without the brain power and commitment of

others. Whether the change involves creating new programs, services, or processes, the individuals impacted by the change must be involved from the very beginning. Through a shared purpose and vision, we are addressing barriers to women and men seeking safety and domestic violence services. Barriers such as not knowing which injunction to file, access to an injunction attorney, what to do with pets, or planning how to safely leave. You played a part in the creation of these services. The diversity of voices at the table enables us to consider perspectives and possibilities that would otherwise be ignored. I think one of the biggest strengths of Harbor House services is the perspectives of the survivors themselves.

I recently attended our inaugural on campus domestic violence vigil. The intimate gathering of women and

children who are living in our confidential emergency shelter was closed to the public. These are women and children who are going through enormous life changes. Women who are hopeful, scared, inspiring, amazing, thoughtful, in pain, and healing. All of them are on the same journey to become survivors themselves. Being a part of the moment, singing and listening to the women who gave testimony, was a huge reminder as to why I do what I do. Seeing our mission in motion was rewarding and inspiring to me.

I am so incredibly grateful for the power and courage of survivors. Survivors want to share their stories to help others. I was struck with the overall themes of feeling alone before reaching out to Harbor House, the comfort that came from sharing what happened with other survivors in

*Continued on page 4*

## Mission in Motion

Sonya\* came into the emergency shelter in July. Her husband of nearly a decade had subjected her to physical, emotional, mental, and financial abuse for the better part of a decade. She had made attempts to leave him in the past, but she knew it had to stick this time. She saw how the abuse was affecting her children and made the decision to make a permanent change.

When Sonya first came to Harbor House, she did not have her children with her. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) had removed the children from her custody due to domestic violence in the home. She was only able to see the kids once per week during visitation.

"I have never seen anyone more focused," our shelter-based Economic Empowerment Coordinator explained.

"She came in with the attitude that nothing is going to stop her this time and has worked nonstop since she got here."

In less than two months, Sonya filed for and was granted a two-year injunction for protection from her abuser; attended classes on economic empowerment, Domestic Violence 101, resume writing, and financial safety; opened a checking account with our partner Wells Fargo; signed up to start GED classes; was approved for a microloan from the National Network to End Domestic Violence as a step in rebuilding her credit; and secured full-time employment with a predictable schedule, full benefits, vacation time, and a 401(k).

The best moment came three weeks into Sonya's shelter stay when she got

her children back after working with DCF through our joint Child Protection Investigator (CPI) program. She is taking parenting classes through our Children's Services program and is focused on making sure things are stable for the kids.

The next step for Sonya and her children is to secure permanent housing. She is working hard on that goal with guidance and referrals from Harbor House.

All of our programs are important and can make a huge difference in the lives of the survivors we serve. With your help Harbor House is helping families like Sonya's make lifetime changes and helping them end the cycle of domestic violence.

*\*Name changed to protect identity.*

## Program Spotlight, continued

Personal Finances 101 classes that are held regularly.

"This program is empowerment based," the Shelter-based coordinator stated. "I am here to work with the residents, but it is their choice."

"Financial instability is one of the biggest challenges they face," said the Outreach-based coordinator. "We make an economic empowerment service agreement, do financial safety planning, then talk about housing, bills, how to increase income and reduce expenses, credit, savings, and short

and long term goals."

Harbor House offers many services internally, but the coordinators also make referrals to other resources in the community. Some of the organizations that help our clients by offering services or sharing knowledge include IDignity, ProLiteracy, Orange County Literacy League, Homeless Services Network, Wells Fargo, Annabelle's Closet, and National Network to End Domestic Violence.

Harbor House's Economic Empowerment program in Shelter is

part of comprehensive, wraparound services that were an important part of the restructuring by new leadership over the summer. Before these changes were instituted, a survivor like Sonya (featured in the *Mission in Motion* story on page 2) might have to retell her story to three or four advocates to get plugged into all the different services. Having one main point person advocating on their behalf makes life easier for survivors, and we are already seeing better results as they access resources and regain independence.

## Champions Recognized at Purple Door Luncheon

In October, we observed Domestic Violence Awareness Month with more than 450 community members at Harbor House's Purple Door Luncheon. Elected officials, partners, and supporters turned out to the event held at the Rosen Centre to bring awareness to the reality of domestic violence in Orange County. We learned about how we can all be advocates, activists, and champions in the fight against domestic violence and heard from Lisa Alexander, an inspiring domestic violence survivor about her experience using Harbor House's services. Lisa shared, "Harbor House saved my life and gave me hope. They educated me on domestic violence. They provided a safe place for me and my children. Where would I be if they were not there?"

We celebrated our Champions of Courage award winners: Champion of Justice - Chief Michael L. McKinley, Apopka Police Department; Champion of Equality - Commissioner Patty Sheehan, City of Orlando District 4; Champion of Advocacy - Ted Maines, Ted Maines Interiors; and Champion of Courage - Muslim Women's Organization.

With the support of our sponsors and generous donors, the Purple Door Luncheon raised more than \$120,000! Thank you to everyone who attended and gave to ensure Harbor House's services are always available and free to anyone who needs them.

The Purple Door Luncheon would not have been possible without the generous

support of our sponsors. This year's presenting sponsor was Wells Fargo. We also want to thank: Bank of America, WKMG, Florida Hospital, Orlando Health, Massey Services, SeaWorld, Orlando Regional REALTOR Association, Heavener Foundation, Orlando Police Department, Orange County Sheriff's Department, Alegeus, BakerHostetler, Darden Restaurants, WaterOak



Advisors, LLC, Thumbprint, Jim and Alexis Pugh, and Marshalls.

## Save the Date

Put the 2018 Purple Door Luncheon on your calendar now! It is scheduled for

**October 17, 2018**



## It Takes Courage

**IT TAKES COURAGE** TO STOP ABUSE

Each year hundreds of volunteers fan out across Orlando to visit apartment complexes and subdivisions, hanging door tags

with the message "It Takes Courage to Stop Abuse". Our goal is simple: get the right information to the right people at the right time to save lives. Gather your friends, family, and coworkers and volunteer to inform those in our community who need it most about the free services Harbor House has to offer. It Takes Courage is Saturday, February 17, 2018. We are partnering with Orlando Police Department and Apopka Police Department and volunteers to distribute information to more than 20,000 homes. If you can help out, contact us at [volunteer@harborhousefl.com](mailto:volunteer@harborhousefl.com).

## Paws for Peace Walk

Bring your furry friends and join us for the 8th Annual Paws for Peace Walk on Saturday, April 21, 2018 at Blue Jacket Park.



The Paws for Peace Walk is a fun and leisurely stroll for pets, their families, and friends to raise awareness about domestic abuse and its effect on pets and their owners. The walk benefits the Paws for Peace Kennel at Harbor House.

With your help, our last walk was a record breaker, drawing more than 500 walkers and their pets and raising over \$50,000 to keep pets in Orange County safe! Be on the lookout for 2018 walk registration coming soon.

## Message from the CEO, continued

support group, and the urgency in their voices as they told their stories of pain and wanting to heal. One survivor said she never thought about leaving but finally, out of fear for her life, ran out her front door and saw a police car driving past her house. She said, "I love my husband, but I love me more, and I am going to fight for me." The small crowd joined her in a chant of "Love doesn't hurt! Love doesn't hurt!"

When a survivor comes into our shelter or to an outreach office, she is looking for a clean slate, solutions to a problem, or a safe place for her family. Often, she is dealing with many firsts. The first time living on her own, the first time raising her children by herself, the first time controlling her finances, her first time asking for help. It is because of supporters like you that we are here for her. The women, children, and men we work with come

in with the same fears we all have. Some don't think they can make it on their own. Some are more scared to raise children on their own than they are of the violence in the home. Some are terrified that it is too late for them to make a huge life change. But do you know what? They do it, and they trust us to help them.

As you move through this holiday season, I challenge all of you to think of the things you hold dear. Now picture giving all of that up. Imagine having to tell intimate details of your life to a stranger. I ask that you acknowledge the courage it takes for a survivor to leave her home. Thank you for creating a community where she feels supported as she starts a different life. Thank you for helping us to build upon this foundation. And finally, thank you for saving the lives of women, children and men at Harbor House.

## Walk a Mile in Her Shoes Returns in February



Men, women, and children, strap on your high heels or blingy flip flops for a fun walk to raise awareness about violence against women.

Plan to kick up your heels with us at the 6th Annual Walk a Mile in Her Shoes on Thursday, February 8, 2018.

## Stay in the Know

