

DECEMBER 2020

HARBOR HOUSE

Happenings

NEWSLETTER

Pepsi and Shaq Making Difference at Harbor House



There was a big buzz on our emergency shelter campus in November when we had a visit from the big man himself, NBA legend Shaquille O'Neal.

In partnership with the Pepsi Stronger Together initiative, Shaq came to Harbor House for a groundbreaking ceremony on two half basketball courts. "When Pepsi approached me and the Shaquille O'Neal Foundation, I was thrilled to have the chance to participate. We create pathways for underserved youth, to help them reach their full potential - working to instill hope and bring about change in communities, collectively shaping a brighter future for our children. These issues are close to my heart - and they're integral to the amazing work the team here at Harbor House is doing for those who need it most in Central Florida. I've always believed in role models, and how they can positively affect individuals and keep them on the right track. The people here today, with the amazing work they do, are the picture of role models."

Pepsi officials said the groundbreaking was just the first step in a partnership with the Orlando Magic and the Shaquille O'Neal Foundation that will include a series of many donations

and activations that include de-escalation and self-defense training courses for Harbor House clients and staff provided by the CTG Foundation.

Derek Lewis, President, South Division of PepsiCo said, "While we are a global brand that reaches so many, the truth is, the work we do pales in comparison to those on the front lines. Those protecting the health and safety of our people. Health workers, law enforcement organizations, food service professionals, and, of course, the amazing people here at Harbor House. So many are thankful for the work you do, and this is our small way of giving back."

Harbor House CEO Michelle Sperzel said, "When I joined Harbor House almost four years ago, I always wanted to have a basketball court for our youth because I believe in the power of play. I believe in the values, teamwork, and life skills you learn on and off the court. Living in a shelter is hard and it's even harder as a youth/teenager. Our children are high-risk for emotional, social, and behavioral difficulties in life. The power of PLAY helps children build resilience, which



builds more hope. It gives them stability. They build trust in others. It allows them to believe they can accomplish their dreams."

Also in attendance were Magic head coach Steve Clifford and guard Terrence Ross, Orange County Undersheriff Mark Canti, Orlando Police Deputy Chief Jose Velez, and State Attorney Aramis Ayala.

COVID-19 Response

Harbor House has remained open and here to serve abuse survivors, their children, and their pets throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. At a time when people are being warned to stay at home for safety, home is often the most dangerous place for our clients to be. Putting into practice the recommended social distancing, mask wearing, and stringent cleaning protocols, Harbor House continues to serve domestic abuse survivors via our emergency shelter, 24/7 hotline, outreach offices, and at the Orange County Courthouse.

Our youth advocates have been especially busy with more children staying on campus all day. We've offered distance learning support for students in K-12 in addition to our on-site daycare and preschool. The Trail Blazers day camp they developed has been keeping the kids busy when they have a break from school.

Thank you to everyone who has continued to give during this time to ensure Harbor House is always here with free, confidential services for anyone who needs them.

Message from the CEO, Michelle Sperzel

Like many people, I went into 2020 with excitement! I thought it was going to be the year of vision. A year of change. I had NO idea how accurate those statements would be.

I normally associate vision and change with hope and prosperity, but what we've seen this year has been extreme hardships, uncertainty, and illness. Worldwide reports of domestic violence have risen sharply since the start of the pandemic. Conditions created by COVID-19 – unexpected time at home, unemployment and financial insecurity, and stress – add to and can escalate the behavior of an abuser. Through it all Harbor House – powered by you – stayed open and continued to provide services to women, children, men, and pets.

Domestic violence goes up whenever families spend more time together, such as the winter and summer breaks. As we head into winter, we know our numbers will increase and, as COVID continues to impact our community economically, abuse in the home will increase. More people will call or text our crisis line for help. More will reach out for legal advice, call about housing options, and ask about our support groups. Because of supporters like you, survivors' immediate needs will be met, but we are quickly learning the cost of domestic violence during COVID is greater than any of us could predict. I am not just talking about the monetary cost. We also need to factor in the emotional, mental, and physical cost of someone who is experiencing abuse. We need to adopt a long-term view and be prepared for an uptick in demand for care and social services related to domestic violence. The country may not feel the full weight of the ramifications of the pandemic for months or years to come. In fact, we all need to be vigilant and mindful that our survivors and their children may have increased mental health issues as a result of domestic violence during COVID-19.

How are we making an impact now?

During COVID-19, we witnessed additional needs in the lives of survivors. Because of the amazing support, we've already begun creating programs to help. Change came in a way we didn't expect. In August, we launched a monthly grocery distribution where we handed out 60 boxes filled with fresh meats and produce as well as non-perishable foods. In November, we distributed 130 Thanksgiving meals to families in our Outreach program. We are able to offer these food programs because of the amazing support of Universal Orlando Foundation and Southeastern Food Bank. This program isn't only about helping with food. It is a needed touch point. When a survivor comes in to pick up food, she is able to meet with her advocate to safety plan and connect with community resources. I think the most important parts of the program are the brief emotional check ins and the positive words of affirmation that are exchanged.

Our new vision statement adopted in 2019 is: Harbor House is a leader in transforming all lives impacted by domestic abuse.

It is my experience that when people think about Harbor House, they only think about adults. My vision has been to create a children's program where the kids receive just as many opportunities as the adults. We need to focus on ALL lives impacted by abuse, and this means the children and teens living in a home with domestic violence. COVID pushed us to focus on youth because we had so many children living at the emergency shelter. We converted our youth group room into a distance learning center. Our youth advocates developed after-school programs. We added Trail Blazers, an on-site weeklong trauma-informed day camp for children. We are hosting a session every school break and have added more children/youth support groups. We are also thrilled about the new partnership with Pepsi Stronger Together and Shaquille O'Neal and the addition of two half basketball courts! The power of play is

powerful and will help our youth by teaching new skills but also by offering them a "place to escape" through playing basketball, tag, yoga, or even painting. You can read all about it in our cover story.



What does our immediate future hold?

New programs and agency changes are coming out of our new normal. In the first quarter of 2021, we will add more support groups and domestic violence workshops, open another outreach office, and expand the food program. We are building our youth programs, expanding our outreach and case management services, and exploring adding "city park" and more garden spaces to our campus. All the updates are being made on the suggestions of survivors and their loved ones. We are determined to help survivors feel safe and empowered.

We also want to get you more involved. Help us build awareness by participating in Walk a Mile in Her Shoes in February, run with our Young Professionals Board at their second 5k this spring, and come out and raise awareness about animal abuse and domestic violence at the Paws for Peace Walk in April.

On behalf of all those we serve, thank you for all you do to make this possible, and for your commitment to our mission throughout the year.

Michelle

Raising Awareness During DVAM

COVID-19 has impacted every aspect of our lives this year, including how we observe Domestic Violence Awareness Month at Harbor House. While we had to cancel the annual Purple Door Luncheon, our biggest yearly awareness and fundraising event, we kept plenty busy throughout October with other activities.

We opened the month with a press conference on October 1. Many media outlets covered the joint event which featured Harbor House CEO Michelle Sperzel, Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings, Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer, Orange County Sheriff John Mina, Orlando Police Chief Orlando Rolón, and State Attorney Aramis Ayala speaking out against domestic violence in our community.

WKMG News 6 hosted an awareness day on October 8, during which they ran interviews with survivors and Harbor House staff while raising money to continue our services.

Purple Tie Tuesday this year looked a



little different as we added masks to the suggested accessories you could use to show your support and raise awareness. We had more participation than ever from partners across Central Florida sharing their pictures across social media.

On October 21, Harbor House hosted our first domestic violence conference, *Moving Beyond the Bruises*. The virtual event featured renowned experts Myra Strand and Mark Wynn and was attended by more than 100 professionals from law enforcement, social services, and academia.

The children living at our emergency shelter were delighted by the Trunk or Treat produced by staff and volunteers

the week before Halloween. They had a second chance to get more candy on Halloween by trick or treating through the Harbor House offices.

Harbor House teamed up with our sister center, Help Now of Osceola, for the Domestic Violence Awareness Walk/Run/Bike on October 25. The virtual event raised awareness

about domestic violence and brought in much-needed funds for both centers.

We closed out the month with our 4th Annual Candlelight Vigil. The special evening was filled with survivor testimonials and inspiring performances. The names of 13 Orange County residents who had died due to domestic violence in the first 10 months of 2020 were read and a moment of silence observed.

Thank you to everyone who participated in these events and helped us bring awareness to the epidemic of intimate partner violence.

Handbags Goes Virtual



After having to postpone their signature event in the spring, Harbor House's Young Professionals Board worked hard to adapt to the realities of hosting a fundraiser during a pandemic. They did a fantastic job of moving Handbags for Hope to a virtual auction held online.

With a selection of more than 80 new and gently used designer handbags up for bid, Handbags for Hope brought in more than \$5,000 for youth and children's programming at Harbor House.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the auction. We hope to be back in person in 2021 and are already accepting purse donations.

Friends & Family Class



One of the questions our staff receives most often when we are out in the community is: How can I help my friend, family member, or coworker who I suspect is being abused?

In response to that question, we are developing a new series designed specifically with loved ones of domestic violence victims in mind. *Checking In: Domestic Violence Education & Resources for Friends & Family* will begin in February, meeting once per week in the evenings as a five-week series. Topics will include safety planning, Harbor House and community resources, how to talk to a survivor, avoiding victim blaming and revictimization, and much more.

The classes are free to attend. For more information, email contactus@harborhousefl.com.

Harbor House Launches Online Thrift Store

We are excited to announce the launch of Harbor House Shoppe, an online thrift store that supports the free, confidential services Harbor House provides to domestic violence survivors, their children, and their pets.



support our emergency shelter, outreach services, youth and children's programming, and kennel.

The store has everything from jewelry and handbags to dog toys and fun holiday sweaters. Make your holiday shopping easy by buying online and having

When you buy from Harbor House Shoppe, you help end domestic violence in our community in two ways:

1) Survivors benefit from items donated to the thrift store and often are

able to select home goods and furnishings to help them outfit a new home.

2) Items are sold to the public with 100% of the net proceeds going to

items shipped directly to you or opt to pick up at our office in Orlando.

You can start shopping now at www.hhshoppe.myshopify.com.

Walk a Mile in Her Shoes



Calling all men! Strap on your high heels for the 9th Annual Walk a Mile in Her Shoes on Thursday, February 4, 2021.

Whatever your footwear, strut or stroll through downtown Orlando to raise awareness of domestic abuse and the resources available to survivors through Harbor House.

Though Walk a Mile in Her Shoes carries a serious message, it's a lot of fun too. Men are invited to

literally walk a mile in high heels to get a little taste of life as a woman while showing their support. Of course, women are invited to walk too, and heels are encouraged but not required.

We'll be making adjustments to allow for more social distancing, and event masks will be available for purchase as well as t-shirts when you register. More details are coming soon at www.harborhousefl.com.

We will continue to monitor the status of COVID-19 infections in our area and make adjustments, up to and including making Walk a Mile a virtual event. Stay tuned!

Paws for Peace Walk



Tails are wagging in anticipation of the 10th Annual Paws for Peace Walk—that's 70 in dog years! Make plans to join us at Blue Jacket Park on Saturday, April 17, 2021.

The Paws for Peace

Walk raises the funds to keep the on-site kennel at our emergency shelter running. No one wants to leave a family member behind, especially not with an abuser. Your support at Paws for Peace helps keep family member, even the furry ones, safe and together.

While our current plans are to hold the Paws for Peace Walk live and in-person, realize that the format could change depending on COVID-19 guidelines in April.

Get more information and register at www.harborhousefl.com/paws.

How to Get Help

If you or a loved one is being abused and you want someone to talk to, you can connect with a Harbor House advocate 24/7 by calling or texting 407.886.2856. Or email contactus@harborhousefl.com. All services are free and confidential.

Stay in the Know



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