



# Newsletter

www.ShelterHouseNWFL.org  
24-Hour Hotline: 1-800-44-ABUSE  
Administrative Office  
16 Ferry Road, SE  
Fort Walton Beach, FL 32548

## Spring 2015

### Positive Changes Coming to Outreach Program

When Camila\* first came to Shelter House in the summer of 2014, she was reserved and seemed to always choose her words very carefully. We came to find out she was still living at home with her abusive husband.

Years of living under his control had eroded her self-esteem. She did not trust herself to make the right decisions for herself and her child.

After her initial meeting with an Outreach advocate, Camila committed to attending a weekly domestic violence support group. As the months went by, the advocates saw a marked change in her demeanor. Camila already had a job, but she found the confidence to return to school so that she could advance in her chosen career.

Camila attended Shelter House's Women and Money workshops and gained financial knowledge. She saved money and moved out with her child where she paid her own way—apartment, car, utilities.

With the help of our Outreach program and her own determination, Camila found her voice.

Change like Camila experienced takes time and hard work, but we see big and small changes happening every day in our Outreach program. Unlike participants in our Emergency Shelter program, Outreach participants are living on their own, with friends or family, in one of our transitional housing apartments or, as in Camila's case, still in the home with their abuser.

As we move this month into our new program office located at 16 Ferry Road, SE in Fort Walton Beach, our staff is excited about the positive changes this new space will bring to the Outreach program.

Following best practices, advocates will no longer meet with participants in their offices. Instead, the new building has dedicated therapeutic rooms where peer counseling will take place without the typical office distractions like telephones and computers. Participants can focus on conversations with an advocate and what can

sometimes be complicated legal paperwork without interruption. In addition to providing a listening ear in a safe, calm environment, our advocates assist participants with safety planning, filing injunctions and assistance filing for Victim's Compensation and Relocation funds.

Another feature of the new building is a separate children's waiting room that will help shield little ears from the very grown up discussions that take place in our offices. Mothers will know their children are happily distracted by toys or a movie while they are taking a few moments to work on

themselves and build a safe, happy life for their families. And women without children will not have to worry about holding themselves together in front of little ones.

Support groups formerly met in a room with couches and chairs. The new building will host support groups around a table. Research shows

that survivors feel safer about revealing their experiences when they have the barrier of a table in front of them. The table also allows participants to take notes on their feelings, things to reflect on later or tips learned from the advocate facilitating the group or other survivors.

Support groups are not simply a time to vent, although that is an important part of the process. Survivors gain strength from hearing that others have lived through something similar. They learn strategies for coping with triggers. They are encouraged to stay strong and not return to their abusers. This time each week allows them to check in with themselves and learn from fellow survivors how to handle different situations. Shelter House provides childcare during support group, alleviating another worry.

If you or someone you know would like to speak to an advocate and is considering attending a support group, call our 24/7 hotline at 850-863-4777 or 1-800-44-ABUSE.

*\*Name changed to protect identity.*

### Sexual Assault Awareness Month



A sexual assault occurs every 107 seconds in the U.S. for victims age 12 and up. In the time it takes you to read this brief column, another woman, man or teen

will be assaulted.

We recognize April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month and take time to remember and honor those whose lives have been touched by violence. We also work to raise awareness and prevent future violence.

Here are a few simple ways you can join with Shelter House to support victims and bring about change:

- Volunteer—Shelter House has opportunities to fit every schedule. Help out one time at an event or come into the office every week.
- Follow us on Facebook and Twitter and share the articles and events we post.
- Donate items for sexual violence hospital kits: new socks and underwear, elastic waist pajama or yoga pants, brushes, travel size toothpaste, deodorant and hand sanitizer.
- Take care of yourself. If you are a survivor, either recent or from an assault many years ago, contact Shelter House to speak to an advocate or join a support group.
- Buy and wear a Shelter House *Be the Good in the World* t-shirt and tell people why you are wearing it.

Together we can make a change!

## Message from the Executive Director, Michelle Sperzel

So much has happened since we published our last newsletter in October! We are wrapping up the shelter expansion from 24 beds to 36 beds; we purchased and started to remodel a new program office; the board and staff wrote our three-year strategic plan; and on top of all of that, Shelter House is celebrating turning 30!

We are just in awe of the support of Impact 100 of Northwest Florida and what their grant has allowed us to do. The purchase of the building at 16 Ferry will change how we are able to serve survivors in our community. We will have four support/peer group rooms, two children's rooms and a large training room. Eventually, we will start a sexual assault nurse examiner program and convert one of the support rooms into a sexual assault exam room. We are still in the process of updating the building and plan to have our grand opening/birthday party on April 30th! While we won't have

everything complete, we are excited and can't wait to move into the new location. We could not do this without the financial support of Destin Charity Wine Auction Foundation, Raise the Roof donors and the support of more than 100 volunteers and the hundreds of hours they have spent on the building.

The yearlong project to expand and update the shelter has been amazing. We can't wait to start using the new bedrooms! The updated kitchen is much more functional with double stoves, sinks, dishwashers and microwaves. We are thrilled about all the support we are getting with Raise the Roof. Please think about supporting the campaign! We still have doors that need to be replaced, light fixtures that need to be updated and two bathrooms that need to be gutted and remodeled. After that, the shelter will be almost new!

The outpouring of support for the new building and expanded shelter has been humbly. This is truly a community investment. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the project financially and physically. Because of you, we are changing services for survivors in Okaloosa and Walton counties.

Finally, we look ahead to the transition of leadership. The staff and board have created a three-year plan that includes expanding sexual assault services, focusing on core services and so much more. As we celebrate our 30th anniversary, we can look back knowing that we have helped hundreds of women and children. What started as an idea around a coffee table has grown into an agency that provides life changing and lifesaving services. The consistent force in this journey has been the support from the community and the common belief that we need to help each other.

### 4th Annual Walk Her Way



Walk Her Way returns to Rosemary Beach for its fourth year.

Mark your calendar for Friday, June 12 at 6:30pm for this fun, one-of-kind event.

There is no shortage of feathers, sequins and glitter as men, women and children take to the streets in high heels for the one-mile walk to raise awareness about domestic violence.

Team registrations are encouraged and sponsorships are available.

Walk Her Way is produced by Rosemary Beach Foundation to benefit Shelter House and the foundation. For more information or to register, visit [www.WalkHerWay.com](http://www.WalkHerWay.com).

### Economic Empowerment

Shelter House is offering FREE workshops to the public in the coming months as part of our Women and Money (WAM!) program. But don't let the name fool you—men are welcome to attend too!



The upcoming workshops will take place at the Fort Walton Beach Public Library. There is no fee to attend, but you must call 850-243-1201 to reserve your space.

- May 2: Car Maintenance, 10am—12pm
- May 16: Budgeting & Banking, 10am—12pm
- June 6: Day of WAM!, 10am—2pm (lunch provided)



**Allstate**  
Foundation

WAM! programming is made possible by a grant from The Allstate Foundation. To learn more about Allstate's commitment to helping domestic violence survivors gain financial skills and tools to break free and stay free from abuse, visit [www.AllstateFoundation.org](http://www.AllstateFoundation.org).

### Destin Charity Wine Auction Weekend

Destin Charity Wine Auction Weekend, celebrating its tenth anniversary this year, will take place April 23—26.



The auction will feature around 200 live and silent auction offerings, many of which are unavailable anywhere else. Hundreds of auction attendees will bid on rare and highly sought after wines and wine-oriented trips.

Last year's auction ranked as the fourth highest grossing wine auction in the country by *Wine Spectator* magazine and grossed more than \$2 million for local charities that help children, including Shelter House. In the past decade, the Foundation has donated more than \$8 million and impacted the lives of more than 55,000 youth.



SOUTH WALTON BEACHES  
WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL

The weekend includes patron dinners, wine tastings, seminars and the South Walton Beaches Wine & Food Festival. Tickets go fast, so buy yours today.

For more information, visit [www.dcwaf.org](http://www.dcwaf.org) or [www.sowalwine.com](http://www.sowalwine.com).

### Mother's Day Drive

Every woman should feel special and appreciated on Mother's Day. Shelter House is collecting items for mom gift bags that we'll give out at our pre-Mother's Day self-care night. We are looking for donations of magazines, chocolates, makeup, nail polish and nail care, bath gel, journals or anything you think might brighten a mom's day!



## Volunteer Spotlight: Red Horse Squadron



When the Air Force needs construction done quickly and done right, they call in the Red Horse Squadron. Shelter House was incredibly fortunate to have this talented group of men and women lend their skills to our recent construction projects.

"A friend told me about a great opportunity to give back and support our local community. I like helping out anyone in need and utilize my special skills," said SSgt Edward "Ski" Gimzhevskiy. "I enjoy working and nothing feels better than making improvements to someone's quality of life and positively impacting people in need."



Since August, more than two dozen airmen from Hurlburt Field's 823rd Red Horse Squadron have volunteered more than 2,060 hours working on the emergency shelter expansion and new program office remodel. The 823rd contributed labor and manpower, as well as the special skills and knowledge. They removed carpet and tile, replacing flooring, removed concrete pad, installed a new privacy/security fence around the shelter, repaired walls, installed service windows and more. These renovations will result in an increase of shelter bed

nights from 8,760 to 11,680 annually.

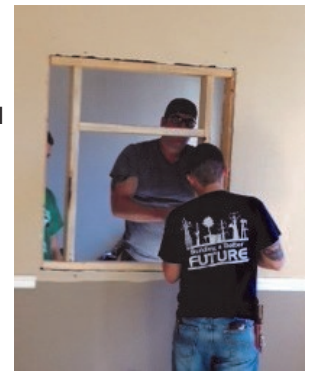
It did not take long to see that Red Horse lives up to its motto: Can do. Will do. Have done.

The 823rd Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers (RED HORSE) provides the Air Force with a highly mobile civil engineer response force to support contingency and special operations worldwide. In simple terms, they deploy when heavy repair and construction are needed, including in remote and high-threat environments.

Shelter House reaped the benefits of the Red Horse's expertise, and the airmen

appreciated the opportunity to give back. "It was great! I gained useful training in different type of training setting," said SrA Zachary Roach. "It was a very useful experience. It feels great to contribute to my community."

In large part thanks to the contributions of 823rd Red Horse Squadron, the first major phase of both the emergency shelter expansion and the new program office projects will wrap up this month.



## Emergency Shelter Renovation Continues, Help Still Needed

The extreme makeover on our emergency shelter is well underway, and several large projects have been completed. The transformation has been nothing short of amazing.

It was just over a year ago that the Florida Department of Children and Families announced Shelter House as a grant recipient to renovate and expand the emergency shelter.

The timing of the grant was critical since the shelter often operated near or at capacity. Post-construction the shelter will have 36 beds, an increase of 12, not including six cribs. The renovation also saw a complete transformation of the kitchen and laundry room, upgrades to safety features, new fencing and the addition of an apartment and dorm-style suite.

These updates are increasing the comfort, convenience and security for more than 300 women and children who stay in the emergency shelter each year.

Even though the total project is not yet



*Emergency Shelter Kitchen Before Renovation*



*Emergency Shelter Kitchen After Renovation*

complete, the first phase is already making a difference in the lives of those we serve. One family stayed in our emergency shelter before and after renovations began. When they recently returned for their second stay, the children's jaws dropped when they saw

the new kitchen. They turned to their mom and asked if this was the same place. They couldn't believe their eyes! The kids loved that their mom had plenty of space to cook for them in a bright, shiny kitchen. The new kitchen quickly became their favorite room, a gathering place where they could be a family and share stories about their day.

We would like to thank the dozens of dedicated volunteers who gave hundreds of hours to this project, including St. Peter Catholic Church, Junior League of the Emerald Coast, Ernie Carey, Eglin Company Grade Officer's Council and Hurlburt Field's Red Horse Squadron, Mission Support Group and 1st SEOMS.

While the grant helped us make a huge leap forward, there is still much to be done at the emergency shelter. More beds and upgraded doors are needed. Repairs are due on the existing bedrooms, living space and yard. Updates to the bathrooms, plumbing and roof are critical. Please see the Raise the Roof insert included with this newsletter for more information on how you can help.

## Purses with a Purpose Breaks Records



More than 270 shoppers came out to Grand Boulevard at Sandestin last month for the Emerald Coast's most fashionable event, Purses with a Purpose.

The two-day purse sale and auction featured its biggest inventory yet with 1,200 bags up for grab and brought in more than \$12,000! A purse fashion show featuring styles and iconic women from the 1930s through today was a big hit with the crowd.



Thank you to our 2015 sponsors: Grand Boulevard at Sandestin, Silver Sands Premium Outlets, Pin Up Girls Hair Studio, Rock the House, Travinia Italian Kitchen, Ella Madison Boutique and Lynn Roberts International.

Since its inception, Purses with a Purpose has raised more than \$53,000 to support lifesaving services at Shelter House.



### Shelter House Shopping List

#### Immediate Needs:

Diapers (large sizes, 4+)  
Baby wipes  
Juice  
Trash bags  
Resealable plastic bags (quart & gallon)  
Canned tuna & chicken  
New bed pillows  
Tampons  
Deodorant

#### Monetary:

Gift cards for gas & grocery stores (WalMart, Kmart, Target, Publix, Winn Dixie)

#### Food:

Non-perishable/canned food & fruits  
Frozen foods  
Cold food items (meat, milk, eggs, etc.)  
Breakfast cereal  
Mac & cheese

#### Cleaning Supplies:

Laundry & disinfectant soap  
Dryer sheets  
Disinfectants (e.g. Lysol)

If your organization or place of work would like a cell phone drop off box, call the office at 850.243.1201 or email [info@shelterhousenwfl.org](mailto:info@shelterhousenwfl.org).

### Upcoming Events

#### April

**Destin Charity Wine Auction Weekend**  
(Grand Boulevard at Sandestin): April 24-26

**Shelter House Open House & 30th Birthday Party** (16 Ferry Road, SE, Fort Walton Beach): April 30

#### May

**Car Maintenance Workshop** (Fort Walton Beach Public Library): May 2

**Budgeting & Banking Workshop** (Fort Walton Beach Public Library): May 16

#### June

**Day of WAM!** (Fort Walton Beach Public Library): June 6

**Walk Her Way** (Rosemary Beach): June 12

*Shelter House, Inc. does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, age, national origin, mental or physical disability/disability status, sex/gender, pregnancy, military status/status as a veteran, genetic information, citizenship, immigration status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender orientation, limited English proficiency, language spoken or other legally protected status.*

Sponsored by Shelter House, the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the State of Florida, Department of Children and Families.



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Call Michelle at 850.243.1201 if you are interested in serving on the Board or Fundraising Committee.

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