



Sheltervoice

Quarterly Newsletter of The Women's Shelter
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Spring Reflections, A Worthwhile Journey

By Kathy Riley, Executive Director

The other day I began to reflect on how many years I have been with The Women's Shelter. It is astounding to think that it will be 36 years this summer. To think where we started and how far we have come only reaffirms my belief in miracles. It is also a story worth retelling.

In 1977 I began working with John Zenoni and Providence Home. It was mainly a place for homeless men but also struggling to open a place for women. From 1977 thru 1979 Providence Home for Women wandered from neighborhood to neighborhood trying to find a permanent place to settle. With two primary challenges, we needed to be on a bus line and be a place where our women would feel safe. We found the perfect location on North Main Street. The house was in need of major repair but even on that first day we could see the possibilities. Little did I know, it would take years before the vision would come to fruition.

Being young and feeling invincible can make-up for so much. Money and resources were so scarce in those early days. Today we know homeless folks exist and are mindful of the major problems they battle. In the 70's most people just thought of homeless as a "bunch of drunks". There were few programs or housing options for the homeless but especially homeless women. Homelessness was a male problem. Today we know better.

Alcoholism was a major problem for our residents in the early days. Crack cocaine and AIDS were new words in



the late 70's and domestic abuse was still a hidden problem with few resources available to women

trying to get out of dangerous situations. Shelter women battled a myriad of complex problems but one common denominator united them, the will to change.

In 1986 the Shelter purchased its first of seventeen additional units of housing in the neighborhood. The need for women to live in safe, affordable housing became our mission. Suddenly, we were housing specialists catering to minimum wage earners with severe problems. Our primary house on North Main Street has become the gate-keeper to our Transitional Housing Program. Hundreds of women have been given the opportunity to work themselves out of desperate situations.

In 1991 The Women's Shelter spun off from Providence Home and became its own non-profit organization. Besides acquiring our 17 units of additional housing, the Shelter also converted a 3 bay garage in the backyard to a free dental clinic. With favor, it seems as each need arose we would try to find a solution..

Today we look different from the early days, yet the mission has remained the same. It has been a journey; one I never thought would take 36 years of my life. Would I change anything? Never.

Following My Heart

By Cynthia Ellis, Transitional Housing Director

My eyes first began to open to the needs of women in crisis in the 1990s. I was volunteering in the singles ministry at my church and also on weekends at a retreat center with Caden International, a ministry that provides a "home away from home" for military personnel. Conversations with female soldiers revealed that many had experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse; dysfunctional relationships; addictions; or other issues that still negatively impacted their lives. In the singles ministry, I again saw the scars and challenges of dysfunctional relationships, abuse, divorce, addiction, and single parenting that some of the women faced. This led me to attend classes to learn how to help women address the deeper issues that kept them from moving forward in their lives.

As a volunteer I facilitated support groups dealing with attitudes, self-

esteem, boundaries, and recovery. In 1998 I had the opportunity to accept a full-time position as the Program Administrator at Killingsworth, a transitional home for women in crisis in Columbia. Four years later I accepted a position in Little Rock, Arkansas, as the Executive Director of Second Genesis, a transitional housing and life-skills program for formally incarcerated women. I learned a lot during my years working at these agencies. After moving back to Columbia I began volunteering in 2006 at The Women's Shelter leading a weekly group for the residents. I was impressed with the hope and the support that the shelter and its programs gave to women as they began to rebuild their lives. In October of 2012 I gratefully accepted the invitation to join the staff at The Women's Shelter as the Transitional Housing Director.

The Transitional Housing Program is available to women who successfully complete the 90-day Primary Shelter Program. The women are able to move

from the primary shelter into one of seventeen housing units made up of apartments, duplexes, or single family homes within six blocks of the main shelter. They must continue to work at least 25 hours per week and participate in recovery and life skills classes. Additionally, we work with them to address long-term issues such as career goals, reuniting with family, working through financial or legal problems, pursuing educational goals, and locating permanent housing. The average stay for a woman in our Transitional Program is nine months, but they can stay for up to two years.

All of the program participants are exposed to a new way of living and are given the tools and support to be successful. It is a privilege to watch the transformation of those who choose to fully embrace this new way of life. I am proud to be part of an organization that so powerfully impacts the lives of women.

Mothers - More Precious than Gold!

By Angie Whitehead, Program Director

Mother's Day is just around the corner and for many the day is full of joy and celebration. Still, there are those who might have mixed emotions on this holiday. The idyllic imagery of motherhood often doesn't match up with the reality of life: the reality that the relationships involved with motherhood are often far more complicated than we would wish.

Although they remain positive, Mother's Day is a time for them to pay tribute to the one person who has made it possible for them to see the light of life, their mother or mother figure. Of all the people who add value to their lives, a mother is undoubtedly the most special.

Whether it is their own mother or someone they look up to, the basic thought of Mother's Day for the women at the Shelter is learning to express themselves to that someone who has been with them

during both good and bad times.

We understand that Mother's Day can be difficult without your children. The women at the Shelter struggle under the heaviness of heart that accompanies children whom they can't be with. The women work to strengthen the everlasting bond and to rebuild the trust that has been compromised by the choices they have made. The emptiness stings the heart of every mother here.

The staff at the Women's Shelter try to put together a special day. We honor all the women in a special way. We emphasize the value of their role as a mother. Even though they are not actively parenting they are still role models in the eyes of their children. The women are struggling for ways to right their wrongdoings while they search for opportunity to strengthen the ultimate bond: Mother and child.

The women are facing the special day with a renewed faith in themselves as mothers and as daughters. They have found a certain peace in knowing that of all the rights of women, the greatest gift is to be a mother. They embrace the knowledge that regardless of their mistakes, God's grace is big enough to cover it all.

As we prepare for the special day we would like to thank everyone who helps to make all the holidays special and a day they will never forget. We would like to wish everyone a very special day.

**HAPPY
MOTHER'S DAY**



Honor That Special Woman in Your Life

Mother's Day is approaching - May 12, 2013. This is a particularly special day here at The Women's Shelter. One of our local artists, Ann Lyness, designed a beautiful greeting card with a heartfelt inscription.

Purchase a card to honor each special woman in your life and you not only celebrate a loved one, but you help support The Women's Shelter as well. Simply send us by May 3rd the names and addresses of your special women, along with a check for \$8 per card: and we will address and mail each card in time for Mother's Day.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Mother's Day Card Order Sheet (please print clearly)

Your Name: _____ Your Phone: _____
[as you wish it to appear on the card (s)]

Honoree's Name and Address: _____

Street City State Zip Code

Honoree's Name and Address: _____

Street City State Zip Code

Please mail Card Order Sheet, along with a check made out to "The Women's Shelter" (\$8 per card), in the enclosed envelope BY MAY 3rd!! If you need more room, please use additional paper. THANK YOU!!



*The Women's Shelter
3425 North Main Street
Columbia, SC 29203*

*Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit #1018
Columbia, SC*

Address Service Requested

Wish List

The Women's Shelter greatly appreciates and strongly depends on the generous donations of individuals, churches and other civic groups. We do not have a lot of storage space, but the items listed below are needed and used continuously. Feel free to donate the items listed at your convenience. If you have any other items you would like to donate, please contact us. Thank you for your continued generosity! (803) 779-4706

SEASONAL WISHES

- ◆ Baked goods/desserts
- ◆ Fresh fruits/vegetables
- ◆ Soft drinks
- ◆ Bedroom slippers-all sizes
- ◆ Gift cards for haircuts
- ◆ Phone cards
- ◆ Zoo/movie/entertainment tickets
- ◆ Basic alarm clocks
- ◆ Answering machines
- ◆ Umbrellas
- ◆ Small day planners

ONGOING NEEDS LIST

- ◆ Gently used black pants/tennis shoes
- ◆ Coffee/tea
- ◆ Creamer
- ◆ Sugar
- ◆ Sugar free items
- ◆ Toilet paper/paper towels
- ◆ Paper plates
- ◆ Tall kitchen bags
- ◆ Tin Foil/cling wrap/zip lock bags
- ◆ Laundry detergent/Regular & HE
- ◆ Dryer sheets/ liquid softener
- ◆ Cleaning supplies