



Sheltervoice

Quarterly Newsletter of The Women's Shelter
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My Year At The Women's Shelter

By A Shelter Resident

It's a sunny day on the morning of July 19, 2012. It's only 10 am, but already oh-so-hot-and-humid. She has been up since 4 AM checking and checking again to be certain she has done everything she possibly can to create a clean and composed closure of her current circumstances. In the center of this latest crossroad, she's dispersed of all the material possessions she's gathered over the past six-plus years.

She has sold anything she could for cash and given away most of the things she can no longer carry with her. A generous friend has offered to assume responsibility for the carefully packed containers of the items she simply cannot carry, give away, or sell. It's taken some doing, but she's managed to pack what she believes is bottom-line necessary into a large backpack, duffel bag and carpetbag satchel—all stuffed to spreading seams to carry with her along with one Eiderdown pillow.

When the time comes, she takes one last look around the funky little apartment where during the cold winter months she had baked homemade bread—to eat and for gifts, but mostly just to have the oven on for heat. She'll always associate this space with near physical death and the struggle she faced to support her spirit.

She purchases her bus ticket and a jar of locally-culled honey. She would be excited to embark on this new journey if she weren't so exhausted. Once the bus arrives, she hands her friend the keys to her apartment and the jar of honey. She does not allow herself to look back as she boards the bus that will carry her to the big city of Columbia, South Carolina, where, she *has to*



believe, she will be able to create better circumstances. She's grateful to be getting out of a bad relationship—with Dillon, SC.

Six weeks prior to this scene, she had surmised that, despite her concerted and proactive efforts, she had failed to obtain even a part-time work position. Her unemployment insurance benefits would cease, and she would be without any source of income to sustain even her current sad situation. She had initiated her research regarding her next avenue towards survival. Three conditions needed to be met: 1) a safe place to stay, 2) a big city offering more opportunity for employment and 3) staying in SC to continue to pursue ongoing legal actions. These conditions had led her to listings of women's shelters in Columbia, SC, to which she could travel without great expense. Certainly she had never aspired to being almost sixty and staying in a shelter, but she accepted it as her only viable option.

She called all of the listings, grateful to learn there were shelters for females in Columbia. There had been

one website that she was particularly drawn to because of the presentation, information, and pictures—The Women’s Shelter.

When she called and spoke with the House Director, she learned she would first need to meet with her for an interview to discern if The Women’s Shelter would be a good “fit.” And so it is with a leap of faith that she boards the bus bound for Columbia, spends the night in a seedy motel and makes her way to

the 10:30 AM appointment the following morning.

She steps up onto the expansive porch, and she knows it is where she wants to be. *Please.* The porch is fully screened, very clean and filled with nice furniture. There are two wooden slat benches bearing brass dedication plaques, a homey, hand-painted sign: “Welcome to the Porch.”

The House Director is an attractive, physically fit, mature and smartly attired woman who greets

her warmly. Then they get right down to business. The House Director asks her details about the circumstances that led her to seek assistance and explains the program services and expectations. It is what she needs, and she wants to be here.

She cried in the arms of this wonderful House Director, the woman who accepted her, not only to The Women’s Shelter, but to her new home.

(To be continued)

Volunteers Give The Best Gifts: Themselves

We rely on the support, time, and talents of the many wonderful individuals and groups (civic, church, military and school) who give their time to The Women’s Shelter. From volunteers who visit the shelter on a weekly basis to volunteers who come during special events to the volunteers who believe in the mission and contribute from afar—we are so thankful for all of you!

Residents of The Women’s Shelter have benefited from some wonderful instructors who have led classes on everything from basic computer training to resume building and interviewing

skills. We’ve had volunteers who shared their knowledge of yoga, line dancing, writing, and Bible studies with The Women’s Shelter. In addition to bigger classes, volunteers have spent time tutoring one-on-one for the GED and teaching general literacy skills.

We count on volunteers to help with projects at our main shelter and our transitional housing units. Volunteers have scraped, painted, and cleaned. They’ve shampooed carpets, performed yard work, and planted vegetables and flowers. On top of all this, volunteers have assisted with organizing closets and our library, with running

errands and with meal preparation.

Finally we’ve been blessed with volunteers who help put together gift bags on holidays like Valentine’s Day, Easter, and Mother’s Day; and volunteers who spend their time collecting items from our Wish List.

To list all our volunteers’ contributions would take more room than space will allow. These are just *some* of the many ways volunteers have been involved since January 2013. A heartfelt “*thank you!*” to all who have partnered with us to provide help and hope to women in crisis.

Be sure to shop Revente’s Second Chances (formerly Revente’s Last Call) at 3050-A Millwood Avenue, Columbia, 29205

From Resident to Staff

An Interview with Joanne Gardner

How long have you been associated with The Women's Shelter?

I was a program participant in 2005. I've been a volunteer since 2006 and was hired full-time as the night manager in 2009.

What does a typical night shift look like?

I have dinner with the women — a dinner prepared by the residents. After dinner, I take them to a Narcotics Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in the community. We are also fortunate to have professional volunteers come to the shelter to lead classes such as Life Skills, Resume Writing, Basic Computer Skills, and Yoga. The remainder of the evening is spent enjoying some down time, preparing for the next day, or reflecting back over the day.

What's your favorite thing about working at The Women's Shelter?

I enjoy our family-style dinners. We share both the joys and struggles of our day. When new residents come into the program, we go around the table and say something we like about ourselves and something we like about the house. I love working here.

What's your favorite time of year at The Women's Shelter?

The energy at Christmas time. We do the twelve days of Christmas. Each day the residents get a small gift. The expressions of gratitude on their faces are heartwarming. There are so many wonderful volunteers—civic groups, church groups, individuals—that make the holidays special for the women.

What was your experience like as a resident?

I knew I had to make some changes. I had to learn how to change. I didn't know you were supposed to go to bed at night. I didn't know you were supposed to go to a job every day. The Women's Shelter taught me how to live a structured life and allowed me time to build a foundation for responsible living.

What is a favorite memory from your time as a resident?

Being invited to continue into the second phase of the program - transitional housing - was definitely one of my greatest memories. Getting to start a new life in my own home was significant to me. Having my own key to my own home felt good. Food and electricity in the place I called home was something I had not always had.

How would you describe The Women's Shelter?

This is a beautiful place. It gave me my life back. When I walk in, I feel gratitude. I know I'm safe. I know I'm wanted and welcome. The very best part is when you walk onto the porch there is a sign made by a former resident that says "Welcome to the Porch".

What in particular makes you proud of your work?

I try to encourage the women by saying "if I can change, you can, too." Because truly if I could make it—anyone can. But you can't force anyone to change. They have to want to do that on their own. They have to be willing and ready to let someone else guide them through the process.

I've seen women get their lives back. I've seen women reunited with their children. It feels good when a lady comes in here for the first time, and I'm able to tell her to hold her head up. The Women's Shelter saves lives—look at me.

What else should people know about you?

After all I've been given, now it's my opportunity to give back the love and support I've received. I hope to be a guiding light for other women in crisis.



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

*Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
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Columbia, SC*

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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