

THE FIRST ✿ THE ONLY

Vero Beach

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Magazine®

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it's all part of our*

Cultural Connection





In 2021, SafeSpace opened a new 19-bed emergency shelter in Vero Beach. The previous building was closed in 2004 due to hurricane damage.

‘Gimme Shelter’

SAFESPACE OFFERS A CHANCE TO REST, RECOVER, AND REBUILD LIVES
BROKEN BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

It was more than 50 years ago that Rolling Stones lead vocalist Mick Jagger and guitarist Keith Richards penned the lyrics to “Gimme Shelter,” the lead track on the band’s 1969 album *Let It Bleed*.

Ooh, a storm threatening
My very life today.
If I don’t get some shelter
Ooh yeah
I’m gonna fade away.

While the song’s inspiration might easily be attributed to the Vietnam War and the associated social unrest of those times, according to a 2012 NPR interview with Keith Richards, watching a late-afternoon London rainstorm was the actual germ of the idea.

“Suddenly the sky went completely black, and an incredible monsoon came down,” said

Richards. “It was just people running around looking for shelter.”

“Completely black” is exactly the way I heard Shirley describe her memory of the time that lapsed between the Christmas Eve punch in the face from her then-boyfriend and the helping hand from the bag boy who found her in the grocery store parking lot. “It was not the first time he hit me,” Shirley recalls,



BY JEFFREY R. PICKERING

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“With this new facility, we are dedicated to providing safety and support to victims and survivors of domestic abuse.”

- TERESA ALBIZU



The residential program provided by SafeSpace is designed to give shelter and peace to domestic violence survivors of all ages.

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Office and community spaces are included in the new SafeSpace home in Vero Beach.



“But it was the first time I was knocked unconscious. I was terrified and I had nowhere to go.”

I met Shirley almost 30 years ago while volunteering at a shelter for homeless women in the Brooklyn neighborhood of East New York. It was the first time I can remember ever meeting someone who had been a victim of domestic violence. Unfortunately, it was not the last.

Domestic violence statistics in the United States are staggering. One out of every three women and one out of every four men have experienced some form of intimate partner violence in their lifetimes. Every year, more than 12 million people are affected by intimate partner violence, and more than 15 million children are exposed to

domestic violence. On an average day, domestic violence hotlines nationwide receive more than 20,000 calls.

In Indian River County, the annual total of reported domestic violence-related offenses have been declining over the past decade. Between 2009 and 2019, the rate of reported offenses declined by more than 75 percent. However, for the first time in more than a decade, in 2020 this rate increased. Four hundred sixty-six people reported an assault or other violent crime in the home to law enforcement. Most were women, many with children in the home at the time of the crime.

“I am a survivor,” says Melissa, one of the mothers who reported being a victim of domestic violence in

2020. She and her son, Ben, turned to SafeSpace to help them escape.

For more than 40 years, SafeSpace has been operating on the Treasure Coast as a single-source provider to aid victims seeking assistance to escape domestic partner abuse. While its Vero Beach facility was closed in 2004 due to hurricane damage, the organization continued to provide Indian River County residents with a comprehensive array of nonresidential programs to help them transition to an independent life free from violence.

“With help from SafeSpace, I was empowered to take control of my own life,” Melissa continues. “I think we are thriving as a family, even if it is just the two of us. We get to be

a family however we want to be a family.”

Last year, with a grant of \$50,000 from Indian River Community Foundation and additional support from other local funders, SafeSpace opened a 19-bed emergency shelter in Vero Beach. “The facility is designed to expand its capacity to 24 beds in times of greater need,” says CEO Teresa Albizu. “With this new facility, we are dedicated to providing safety and support to victims and survivors of domestic abuse.”

According to Keith Touchberry, Fellsmere chief of police and president of the Florida Police Chiefs Association, “SafeSpace is a great community partner. They are a founding partner of the Fellsmere Action

“SafeSpace is a great community partner.”

– KEITH TOUCHBERRY



The new SafeSpace residence in Vero Beach was made possible by a \$50,000 grant from Indian River Community Foundation along with money contributed by other local donors.

Community Team and a very helpful resource when our police officers encounter domestic violence situations. We allow them to use our station for safe, confidential meetings with the victims they serve. I am grateful they are here.”

What SafeSpace does is best represented in the words of one of its current emergency shelter residents: “I was broken and alone. No job. No hope. Two little boys to take care of. SafeSpace has given me the courage to keep on fighting. Residing here has taught me that there is always light at the end of the tunnel.”

Light at the end of the tunnel, safe space, and shelter from the storm.

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger of domestic violence, call 911. If non-emergency help is needed, call the free, confidential, 24-7 SafeSpace hotline at 772-288-7023. An advocate will help to complete a risk assessment and create a safety plan.

To learn more about how you can support SafeSpace with a charitable gift, visit www.safespacefl.org or call 772-223-2399. ☎

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