

# Into the Light

## Breaking the Silence on Domestic Violence



Once upon a time ... it's the fairy tale we all grew up dreaming - falling in love with a handsome prince, or princess, getting swept off our feet and living happily ever after. However, for many, what may start out as a fairy tale ends as a nightmare.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, on average, 20 people per minute are victims of physical violence by an intimate partner. In Northwest Indiana, there is a beacon of hope for victims of domestic violence. St. Jude House provides women and men a safe haven at a time when hope seems impossible.



Mother Mary Theresa



Donald J. Burrell



Sister Joseph Marie Zenda, OSF

### Over a Century of Caring

Josephine Dudzik had always been a devout, generous and compassionate woman. An immigrant to the United States from Poland in 1881, she and her family settled in Chicago. Deeply moved by the condition of the poor, aged and orphaned in her neighborhood during the financial crisis of 1893, Dudzik formed a religious community to help aid the distressed residents. In 1894, the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago was formed and led by Dudzik who became known as Mother Mary Theresa. Since then, the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago have served in various ministries, including caring for the sick and elderly, providing housing and services for residents in independent, assisted living and skilled nursing facilities, operating child care centers, teaching, pastoral care and social service work.

### A Promise Made

In 1959, Donald J. Burrell sold his car for \$700 and used the money to start a darkroom in the basement offices of the Catholic Diocese of Gary, Indiana, with the support of then Bishop Andrew G. Grutka. At that time, Burrell made a promise to St. Jude, the patron saint of those in need or in desperate situations, that he would do something to honor the Saint in exchange for help with his business venture. Over the years, Burrell's business grew into one of the nation's leading independent professional photographic laboratories, Burrell Imaging.

### The Vision Takes Shape

In the early 1990s, Sister Joseph Marie Zenda, OSF, then chairperson of the board of directors for St. Anthony Medical Center in Crown Point, Indiana, had a conversation with board member Burrell, "We were talking about the great need in society at that time," relates Zenda, "and we spoke about what those needs may be and what we can do to help people in this community have stability in their life and a new start." They identified the need for a domestic violence shelter in Northwest Indiana that would provide refuge for those in need.

True to his word, Burrell kept the promise he had made years earlier by partnering with Zenda and the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of Chicago to provide funding for the construction of a domestic violence shelter in Crown Point, Indiana.

On November 13, 1995, St. Jude House opened its doors and began helping those caught in abusive relationships. For the Sisters who had built a reputation on their outstanding work with women and children, a domestic violence shelter was not only a perfect fit but served to expand and support their mission. "Historically, our Sisters have always had a presence in responding to social needs," explains Zenda, "our mission is to respond in service and in joy to these needs as they arise." >>

*On November 13, 1995, St. Jude House opened its doors and began helping those caught in abusive relationships.*

Photo courtesy of Robert Fish, Franciscan Ministries



Brianne



Linda Perez

Photo courtesy of John J. Watkins, Times of Northwest Indiana

## Brianne's Story

Imagine kissing your two month old baby goodbye after being told you'd never see him again. Your partner carrying that baby away, leaving you behind beaten, bloodied and bruised to care for your other child, a two year old son. Brianne didn't have to imagine this scenario, she lived it. Like so many other survivors, Brianne had endured the cycle of domestic violence for months, beginning with aggressive and belittling behavior, followed by violence and then guilt, only to be repeated again and again.

But on this day, Brianne had enough; she began to form an exit strategy. Under the guise of going to church, she left with a friend and her two year old son and went to the police station. Hours later she would find herself back at the same apartment building, this time with the police by her side and standing at the bottom of a staircase while her abuser stood at the top holding their two month old baby threatening to throw him down the staircase. Once her abuser was in custody and her baby was safe, she gathered up whatever she could, stayed the night with a friend and went to St. Jude House the following day.

## A Beacon of Hope

"In the last 20 years we've been available to people who've needed our services," states Linda Perez, executive director of St. Jude House, "during those years we've helped over 10,500 individuals and it's not just people in Crown Point, we've helped people all over Northwest Indiana and Illinois."

The 30 bed shelter provides not only beds, food and lodging, but also offers services based on individual client needs. "Every client's needs are different," explains Perez, "we set up goals specific to them based on their assessment and continuing throughout their stay."

The 45-day program includes services in case management, legal advocacy and group services. Case management staff works to determine the needs of clients and assists in finding available community resources and programs to meet those needs. They help identify housing options and employment opportunities and then work together with the client towards achieving those goals. "We have a relationship with WorkOne, a career and employment resource organization, and they hold on-site workshops for resume writing and other job-related matters," explains Perez. "We also work with the housing authorities and different landlords to help clients find housing."

The legal advocacy team serves a number of critical functions for clients, including coordinating with local law enforcement and identifying pro bono attorneys which can help with protective orders, divorce and custody issues and other legal hurdles clients may face. The legal advocacy team also provides cell phones to clients so in case of emergency, they can call 911.

Group services provides clients the opportunity to participate in multiple support groups which focus on addressing the issues surrounding healthy and unhealthy relationships, self-esteem, coping skills, self-defeating behaviors, codependency, anger management, verbal and emotional abuse, power and control and stress management to list just a few. Perez points out, "Based on that initial intake with the client, we'll know right away what that assessment is and what their needs are and we can tailor our services to their needs. Someone might need help with child support or they're going through a divorce and need help with that or someone might just need help with employment or finding a home."

"What breaks my heart is the children," continues Perez, "many times they don't want to leave. It's a reminder that we may be the only structure and stability they've seen in their lives." For this reason, St. Jude House has a children's department with a child advocate and activity aides who help the children cope through activities.

## Home Safe Home

St. Jude House was the first, and is still one of the only shelters within the state of Indiana that publishes their address on their website, business cards and printed materials. "I would like to believe we are the pioneers in going that route," states Perez, "while most shelters are confidential and don't publicize their addresses, we do because we want to be easily accessible to someone who needs our help. We also don't want any of our clients or victim survivors to feel embarrassed."

Brianne, along with her two sons, stayed at St. Jude House for a little over two months. Her case manager helped her secure an apartment and furniture, she signed up for college and was excited about starting her new life.

And then, she took him back.

Shortly thereafter, she decided to leave him for good and turned back to St. Jude House. "I was so embarrassed that St. Jude House offered me all of these services, encouraged me and tried to support me, and then I take him back," remembers Brianne, "so when I had to call them and tell them what happened, they weren't mad. They said it's okay, it happens, it's a cycle and you'll get through it."

"People might take a few steps back, we do it all the time in life, but pick yourself back up," stresses Perez, "and whatever you need from us, however we can help, whatever resources we can provide for you, wherever you're at, we're here to help you. That's why St. Jude House is here."

Within the last few years, St. Jude House has also sheltered men, one with children, who had been in abusive relationships. "Domestic violence doesn't know gender, religion, income level or education level," states Perez, "there's no stereotype of a victim of domestic violence." Perez, herself a survivor of domestic abuse, points out, "I have my MBA, I have my career, I am a professional and no one would have ever known."

Oftentimes a victim of domestic violence doesn't have control of their finances, they may have a checking or savings account but no control over it. According to Perez, "Many times the financial portion of domestic violence is not a main focus and the fact is the majority of time the

victim doesn't have access to their resources or accounts." St. Jude House is working on bringing awareness to this aspect of domestic abuse and has aligned with the Allstate Foundation's Purple Purse Challenge which seeks to empower people to pull their purse strings back and take more control of their financial situation.

## Continuing the Mission

The Franciscan Sisters of Chicago sponsor and continue to support St. Jude House; however, as Perez explains, "The goal for St. Jude House is to be self-sustainable, so we focus on government grants, federal grants, community donations and sponsorships." Zenda agrees, "The hope is St. Jude House will remain and help others in the future. It was also the hope when it was first built, that it would become independent and eventually be self-sustaining." In addition to sponsorships and grants, St. Jude House receives support from local community foundations and several fundraisers held throughout the year.

With all the attention being paid to domestic violence issues courtesy of the NFL, NHL and newly revamped public service announcements, Perez cautions this surge in publicity isn't nearly enough, "Those are things to get attention; but, we as a community need to make sure we are talking about it and that we're sharing information. Those are the conversations we need to start having. Whether it's someone close to you, a family member, friend or your best friend, it's happening around you and that's why we really need to start talking."

That's exactly what Brianne is doing; she has become an advocate for domestic violence awareness by speaking out and sharing her story. She has also set up a support group on Facebook and continues to shine the light on domestic violence issues. "St. Jude House gave me a voice," says Brianne, "they listen and continue to encourage and support me." >>

