

Spring 2025

The Courage to Start Over

Watching My Mom Heal from Abuse and Reclaim Her Life

As a child, I couldn't see it. The quiet tension in our house, the way my mom avoided my dad's gaze, and the moments when her smile didn't quite reach her eyes—it all felt normal to me. It wasn't until I grew older that I began to piece together the truth. What I once thought was ordinary was anything but, and by the time I understood, I knew I had to find a way to help.

I always go back to the same rainy night, I was just drifting off to sleep when shouting jolted me awake. I crept out of my room and from the top of the stairs, I saw my mom lying on the floor, my dad standing over her, yelling. She looked terrified, but I was frozen with fear and confusion. After he stormed out, I ran down to see if my mom was okay. Tears streamed down her face, but after I helped her up, she reassured me everything was okay and laid beside me until we both fell asleep.

I was about thirteen years old when I started noticing the signs but I wasn't mature enough to really understand. My mom, Mai, an immigrant from Thailand, used to tell stories about her younger self—a bold woman who crossed oceans alone with nothing but a backpack to come to America. But as I got older, that vibrant image faded as she became more withdrawn and uncertain of herself. My dad's anger with her only grew, and though I wanted to protect her, I didn't know how.

Everything came to a head the night of my high school graduation party. As I celebrated with friends, I saw my parents arguing through the kitchen window, but tried to ignore it. That night, after the house emptied, I found my mom sitting on my bed, crying, her cheek reddened and her arms scratched as though she had fought to protect herself. Tears fell silently as I asked, "How long?" She barely whispered, "Too long."

That night, she shared everything—how scared she was of my dad and how she longed to leave. As the night grew long and she fell asleep beside me, I researched



ways to help her. I came across information about Abby's House and it seemed like a safe place where my mom could start fresh. The next day, after dad left for work, we decided to go to Abby's House. We spoke with the Director of Housing, and mom filled out an application. We left, our arms linked, hoping for a brighter future.

Not long after, my mom got the call: a room was available. Excited but scared, she asked, "What if he finds me?" I reassured her that I'd help her make a quiet exit. When the day finally came, we loaded up the car while my dad was away and began yet another courageous journey for my mom.

At Abby's House, my mom began to heal. When I visited her, I saw glimpses of the vibrant woman she used to be. She told me about her advocate, who taught her how to manage her own finances, and about group therapy sessions where she learned about healthy relationships and how to heal from her past. "These people are really helping me," she said one day, her voice full of gratitude. "Thank you for getting me here."

Abby's House didn't just save my mom—it changed me too. Watching her grow and thrive, supported by an incredible community, fills me with gratitude. I now see her strength more clearly than ever, and I am grateful to Abby's for giving her a new beginning and a community that lifted us up when we needed it most.



Annette Rafferty
Founder

Julie Orozco
Executive Director

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Bright Spot

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Mission Statement

The mission of Abby's House is to provide shelter and affordable housing, as well as advocacy and support services, to homeless, battered, and low-income women, with or without children.

Vision Statement

Abby's House empowers the women we serve to lead self-directed lives filled with dignity and hope.



A Message from Executive Director Julie Orozco

Dear Friends of Abby's House,

As we step into 2025, we carry forward the momentum of a truly transformative year. In 2024, we celebrated the shelter's reopening (the porch light is on!), expanded support services, and strengthened our advocacy efforts. **Thanks to your generosity, all programs at Abby's House were fully funded in 2024, ensuring women received the resources they deserve.**



Julie Orozco
Executive Director

It is a privilege to be at Abby's House knowing that this is a place where so many women have found a home. It is an even greater privilege to walk alongside people like you who are committed to ensuring everyone has a place to call their own.

Yet, the challenges remain. As the housing crisis deepens, more women face instability, making our work more vital than ever. But, when we come together, we can create lasting change. Here's how your impact was felt in 2024:

- 77 women and 11 children total lived in Abby's House permanent supportive housing.
- 4,985 meals were served by volunteers and staff to women and children.
- 742 women accessed free essential pantry items and groceries through our Food Pantry program.
- 26 women received direct support through the Annette Rafferty Survive to Thrive (ARST) Funds, helping with rental assistance, transportation, medical co-pays, educational courses, and more.
- 80 women in the community received Thrift Shop vouchers for needed clothing and household items, referred by partner organizations.

Your unwavering dedication to the women and children of Abby's House has made all of this possible. In 2024, you and more than 2,870 generous donors contributed both monetary and in-kind gifts to support our mission. We are deeply grateful for your compassion, commitment, and generosity.

And now, we look ahead. In one year, we will celebrate 50 years of Abby's House—a milestone honoring our history, the resilience of every woman we've served, and the unwavering support of those who believe in their future. In preparation for this milestone, a group comprised of staff and board members will spend the next several months engaged in an evaluation of our programming, ensuring the closest alignment possible to best practices in the field of supportive housing. The ever-changing housing landscape requires that we keep a keen eye on the efficacy of our work and we are excited to take on this improvement project.

We remain committed to ensuring that every woman who walks through our doors has access to the safety, stability, and support she deserves.

Thank you for continuing on this journey. Thank you for believing in a future where every woman has the opportunity to thrive.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Safe Homes are Out of Reach

Abby's House stands strong in the fight for safe, affordable housing.

When ushering in a new year, many celebrate the chance to begin anew, to reset, and to look forward to the future. However, for many across the country, the state of Massachusetts, and the Worcester area, one issue continues to grow: a lack of safe and affordable housing.

With budgets stretched thin, maintaining stable housing has become increasingly difficult. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, Massachusetts is the second most expensive state to live in, with a two-bedroom apartment averaging \$2,332 per month—requiring an hourly wage of \$45. In Worcester, renters face similar struggles, needing \$31.94 per hour or 2.1 full-time minimum wage jobs to afford a \$1,661 monthly rent. As housing costs soar, the shortage of shelter beds leaves many without a safe place to stay. The Department of Housing and Urban Development reported that in 2024, Worcester County saw 1,927 people experiencing homelessness, including 718 children and 936 women.

As families in the Worcester area struggle to find affordable housing and secure shelter, Abby's House and its dedicated staff are working tirelessly to help low-income women and children get back on their feet and thrive. Fielding over 4,000 calls from those in need of shelter or affordable housing, the Women's Services Team and the Front Desk staff have felt the brunt of the ever-growing affordable housing crisis.

Abby's House is ready to continue supporting those in crisis for years to come. Since its reopening last July, the Abby's House shelter has been home to 18 women and 22 children, with 3 women and 1 child transitioning into permanent Abby's House housing. Over 130 women have received advocacy and referrals services, ensuring they get the necessary support to navigate their path to stability.

Abby's House recognizes that the affordable housing crisis is far from over and remains committed to offering shelter, advocacy, and support services. This work ensures women and children can achieve their goals, access critical resources, and find safe, affordable housing while gaining the confidence to lead lives of dignity and independence.

Building Futures Together

Jeanne's Ongoing Impact as a Housing Hero

With reliable, ongoing generosity, Housing Heroes—our recurring donors—help sustain the vital work of Abby's House. Their ongoing support ensures that women and children have access to essential services and a safe place to turn every day. These dependable donors, like longtime supporter Jeanne Adler, provide sustaining resources that make lasting change possible.

Jeanne's connection with Abby's House began in 1988, when she first met Founder Annette Rafferty, who introduced her to the organization. "Annette came to our church's women's fellowship group. I had no idea what Abby's was, but she was looking for volunteers. So, a friend and I signed up to volunteer one night in the shelter once a month, and we did that for 10 years," Jeanne recalled. Her commitment didn't stop there – she worked as a staff member for over 3 years.

Jeanne's monthly donations help sustain Abby's House and its life-changing work. "It means a great deal to me, I like to help Abby's, I believe in what they're doing, and I have since I began as a volunteer." Jeanne said. Her belief in Abby's mission led her to become a recurring donor. Her support has been steadfast, and throughout the years she has increased her giving, at times, even providing extra donations beyond her monthly support.

Jeanne's commitment to the Abby's House mission goes beyond financial support. "Volunteering at the Thrift Shop keeps me connected, and that means a lot to me, to be personally connected at least once a week; I really cherish that time," she said. Her desire to give back resonates with her respect for the work being done at Abby's House and the changes that are brought to the lives of the women we support. "Abby's House is very unique and very special. I've seen the changes over the years firsthand. There's nothing like Abby's House. There isn't."



Become a Housing Hero today!

Join Jeanne in becoming a Housing Hero today, providing the steady, ongoing support that ensures women and children at Abby's House have a safe place to call home. Start your recurring donation at abbyshouse.org/donate.

Get Involved At Abby's House!



Abby's House is a community of people working collectively to achieve its mission. **Your contributions of time, talent, and treasure make an impact in the lives of the women and children.**

Make A Gift:

Your gift makes it possible for women and children to dream of a hopeful future. Once safely housed, women develop a plan to avoid future homelessness and housing insecurity. To make a gift, visit abbyshouse.org/donate.

Set up monthly recurring gifts to guarantee a bright future for the women and children of Abby's House.

Donate Needed Items:

To fully serve the women who come through our doors each year, Abby's House relies on donated items. See our list of needed items online at abbyshouse.org/donate-needed-items.

Your Thrift Shop donations also help clothe women and children in need, and raise funds for Abby's House programs. Visit abbyshouse.org/thrift-shop.

Volunteer:

We're looking for dedicated individuals to staff the overnight shelter or help in the Thrift Shop! Training is provided by Abby's House staff. To learn more and to fill out a volunteer application, visit abbyshouse.org/volunteer.

Preserve the Legacy of Abby's House:

Passionate about history? Help shape how Abby's House is remembered! Join our Legacy Preservation Task Force. Email us at abbyshousehistory@gmail.com

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who donated in honor of my 95th birthday to support ARST! Your generosity truly warms my heart and makes a lasting impact.

Sincerely, Annette

12th Annual Spring-Tacular: Bringing Home to Everyone

Presented by Counseling & Assessment Clinic of Worcester, LLC

Thursday, May 8 - Thursday, May 15, 2025

Celebration & Online Auction

Mark your calendars for the 12th Annual Spring-Tacular on May 15, 2025 at the Prior Performing Arts Center at Holy Cross! Get ready for an inspiring evening dedicated to creating home and belonging for all.

Online auction will feature local businesses, family friendly adventures, sports memorabilia, a 7-day vacation rental on the Cape and more!

Learn more at abbyshouse.org/spring-tacular

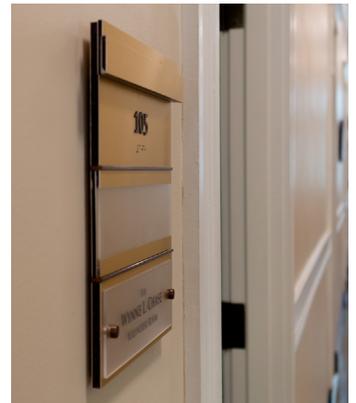
Honor A Loved One With A Lasting Legacy

Room Naming Opportunities Available

Make a meaningful impact by naming a space in our newly renovated shelter in honor or memory of someone special. Your tribute will not only celebrate their legacy but also provide hope and stability for the women and children who turn to Abby's House in their time of need. Leave a lasting mark on our community and show your dedication to ensuring a safe haven for those seeking a fresh start.

Contact Jennifer Spicer, Director of Development and Communications, to discuss the many ways your gift can have incredible meaning and impact, at jennifer@abbyshouse.org or (508)756-5486 x239.

Naming opportunities begin at \$10,000.



Join the Legacy Circle!

As a Legacy Circle member, you imagine your world beyond the present.

The Legacy Circle honors individuals who have included Abby's House in their will or trust. By including Abby's House in your estate plans, you will make a profound difference in the lives of women and children at risk of experiencing homelessness and leave a permanent legacy for your loved ones.

This flexible gift option can be revised at any time and can be made as a specific amount or a percentage of your estate—allowing you to also take care of your family. In addition, your gift may entitle your estate to estate tax charitable deductions.

To arrange a personal conversation or for more information on joining the Legacy Circle, contact Director of Development, Jennifer Spicer at Jennifer@abbyshouse.org or call (508)756-5486 x239.