

Summer 2024

Finding My Freedom

How Abby's House Helped Angelina Overcome Abuse



At ROTC I learned about military tactics, teamwork, and survival skills, but it took more life experience for me to discover that sometimes the most significant threat to self is hidden in plain sight.

The ROTC program was steering my life in the right direction when I met my boyfriend at 16. Being so young, we were still learning about life, ourselves, and each other. Our relationship was on and off and when he asked me to marry him, I reluctantly said yes.

Our relationship became rocky. Everything I did felt like it was a problem for him. If I was washing the dishes, I was doing it wrong. If it was snowing and I tried to help shovel, I did it wrong. It got to the point where even if I was just walking, he would let me know that I was walking wrong.

He seemed to notice every move I made, and was constantly criticizing me. I felt like I could never do anything right and my confidence began to wear down. I wasn't truly "living" while I was with him. I started shifting my focus on trying to please him in hopes of getting our marriage back on track, but it would always lead to more arguments.

One day, while walking at a downtown fair, I started talking to a human services agency vendor and poured out my whole story to her. I saw he was growing angrier and needed to find a way out. She kindly provided me

with a list of resources that might be able to help—one of them being Abby's House.

I called every place on the list. I filled out request forms, giving myself any sense of hope and knowing I was finally taking steps to leave the relationship. Just one day later, I got a call from Abby's House. The Director of Housing told me she had a unit available for me right then. I was in shock. I thought I would be waiting for years, but a unit was available to me now, which meant I had to act fast! Could I really make it on my own?

A voice inside me told me it was now or never. I called up my four best friends and asked them to help me pack up my things. I didn't realize that I had been living life in the shell of my former self, but that day when my friends helped me pack, I could see a bit of the old me showing again. I told him I needed a break, but I knew in my heart that day that I was never going back.

When I walked into Abby's House for the first time, I felt a sense of freedom wash over me. I immediately felt supported. The compassionate and dedicated staff at Abby's House work tirelessly to create a community of support and healing. From the front desk staff to the Food and Nutrition Manager, the Director of Housing, and my advocates, each person was genuinely there to help ME. Every person deserves to be treated with love and respect, and I was able to find that at Abby's House.

Abby's House saved my life. I had lost myself to manipulation and verbal abuse – I was a shy, scared girl. Now, I feel like the woman I always have been in my heart. I am now happily divorced and have cut ties with my ex-husband. I am still learning to stand up for myself and not letting the past consume me, but I am proud that I stood up for the scared girl in an abusive relationship. My journey has taught me to never settle. I am forever grateful to Abby's House for helping me reclaim my life.



Annette Rafferty
Founder

Julie Orozco
Executive Director

Board of Directors

- Jennifer Dragon, *President*
- Tyrenna Gaines, *Vice President*
- Samantha Jepson, *Treasurer*
- Eva Akese, *Assistant Treasurer*
- Rosibel Perez Torres, *Clerk*
- Jennifer Romeo-Porcuro, *Assistant Clerk*
- Laurie Matosky, *Past President*
- Dr. Adriana DiPasquale
- Terry M. Dorsey
- Gerri Lorusso
- Julie McGown
- Erin Rogers
- Paula J. Sasso
- Eldira Stefani
- Tracey Weedens

Bright Spot

Vol. 43, Issue 2
August 2024
Published three times per year

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 celebrate 48 years of Abby's House, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude for the remarkable journey we have shared. After nearly five decades, Abby's House remains a beacon of hope and resilience, for countless women and children in our community.

Reflecting on my first year as Executive Director, I am deeply inspired by the strength and spirit of the women we serve and the unwavering support from our community. This year has been one of learning, growth, and profound appreciation for the dedication and passion that define Abby's House.

Every day, I get to witness incredible moments that reaffirm the reasons Abby's House exists. There's the woman who found the courage to leave an unsafe relationship and came to us seeking safety and support. Today, she's a thriving entrepreneur, running her own small business and mentoring others who have faced similar hardships. Her journey from fear to empowerment is a powerful reminder of the impact Abby's House can have.

Then there's the dedicated volunteer who goes above and beyond to make everyone feel welcome. Greeting every person who comes into the Thrift Shop, she creates a welcoming atmosphere where shoppers and volunteers alike feel valued and supported. Her commitment to our mission extends beyond the shop, as she actively engages with our residents and guests, offering them encouragement and support.

I also think of our generous donors, like the local business owner who, despite a tough year, continued to support us with both financial contributions and volunteer time. Their selflessness ensures that we can keep our doors open and continue to provide vital services to those in need.

These stories, and countless others, are what make Abby's House a place of hope and healing. It's the collective spirit of our residents, guests, volunteers, donors, and staff that creates a nurturing environment where women and children can thrive.

Thank you for being an integral part of our journey. Here's to 48 years of making a difference and to many more years of transforming lives.

With heartfelt gratitude,



Julie Orozco
Executive Director



In loving memory of resident Junie St. Fleur, who passed away July 2, 2024. Her courage and kindness touched us deeply. Junie wished to remain at Abby's House until her passing, and we are honored to have been her soft landing as she crossed over.

The Porch Light is On!

Celebrating the Reopening of Abby's House Shelter

On the evening of June 7, 1976, Abby's House first opened its doors as an overnight shelter. The porch light at 21-23 Crown Street was turned on, symbolizing a beacon of hope, ready to welcome any woman or child in need. Over the years, homelessness continued to rise, and the need for beds became increasingly urgent. Recognizing this, Abby's House embarked on a mission to expand and modernize its facilities. In 2021, the renovation process began, culminating in a groundbreaking ceremony in 2023. As of June 2024, the renovations at the shelter have been completed.

Abby's House commemorated this momentous occasion with a ribbon cutting ceremony on June 20, 2024. The renovations brought significant improvements and additions:

- An ADA-accessible bedroom, accommodating a mother and her child, with an ADA bathroom and accessible laundry facilities on the first floor.
- A children's enrichment room with social-emotional learning tools, games, and activities to support the development and well-being of children.
- A staff bedroom and bathroom for overnight volunteers and staff.
- Meeting spaces to facilitate support services and community activities.
- Two basement apartments designated for dedicated live-in staff, providing on-site support and stability.
- A state-of-the-art bed bug/decontamination room to ensure the health and safety of all residents.
- Increased capacity with more privacy and private rooms for guests, offering a sense of dignity and personal space.
- An expanded kitchen space designed to facilitate community and family meal preparation, fostering a sense of togetherness and communal support.

Reflecting on how these renovations will impact the community, Abby's House Executive Director Julie Orozco said, "Hardship does not mean that we should exist without dignity and our struggle has no bearing on our worth! This is a foundational belief established by our founders. Every woman and child, regardless of the circumstances, is inherently valuable and as such, deserves the same amount of access as anyone else!"

The improvements at Abby's House not only enhances the physical space but also reinforces its commitment to dignity and respect. For many, the shelter is more than a place to stay; it is a symbol of hope and renewal.

"Every act of kindness, every gesture of hospitality, every resource we provide, and every moment of support and compassion is a testament to our commitment to fostering dignity and hope," Chelsea, Director of Women Services at Abby's House, shared. "This shelter has been and continues to be a cornerstone of that commitment, serving as a safe haven and a launchpad for new beginnings of self-directed lives."

Senator Robyn Kennedy highlighted the broader societal impact of such efforts. "Every member of our community deserves a dignified place to lay their head at night," she says, acknowledging the pressing need for more support and resources. "We know that we are at a crisis point and we have so much work to do. And that's why organizations like Abby's House are so critical to that work."

As the ribbon was cut and the renovated shelter officially reopened, there was a palpable sense of renewal and anticipation. Julie looked to the future with optimism. "As new guests move in, new logs will be written, new volunteers and staff members will help with the dishes and daily chores, and most importantly, the timeless spirit of Abby's House will live on."

The ceremony concluded with a tour of the new facilities, showcasing the thoughtful enhancements and the warm, welcoming atmosphere that Abby's House continues to offer. The porch light remains on, a steadfast beacon of hope for those in need.



*View renovation photos at abbyshouse.org/shelter-ribboncutting
Photo by Joel Howe*

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.



Register for the 5K!

Virtual: October 12 - October 19, 2024
In-Person: October 19, 2024
West Boylston, MA

Learn more & register your team today
at abbyshouse.org/abbyshouse5k



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 Associate Director of Development and communications, Larissa Swenson at larissa@abbyshouse.org or call (508)756-5486 x214.

Learn more at abbyshouse.org/ways-to-give

Honor Those You Love

with naming opportunities at 21-23 Crown Street

Provide a gift that will live on by naming a space at the newly renovated shelter in honor or in memory of a loved one. By naming a room, you will leave an indelible mark on our community and commemorate your dedication to Abby's House while leaving a legacy and directly influencing the lives of the women and children who seek hope within our walls.

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.

