

MY REFUGE HOUSE



*“God dropped a spark down into everyone, and if we find and fan it to a blaze, It'll spring up and glow, like the sun,
And light the wandering out of stony ways.”*
~ John Masefield

SPARK JOY! Since my first trip to meet the girls and staff of My Refuge House in Cebu, this has been the phrase that keeps coming to me. My life experiences until April prepared me for many aspects of my trip...the one thing I was not prepared for was the Joy11. If you ever talk with me about My Refuge House, this will likely be something I say. It's all I can talk about. For the last ten years, I worked with a phenomenal team of people in Chicago who actively cultivated moments of Joy when facing adversity. My Refuge House goes beyond moments and is a community that inhabits Joy. It is an authentic Joy that glows through the fractures of adversity. Once you've been touched by the My Refuge House story, you cannot help but spark Joy yourself. I know this because our amazing volunteers welcomed me to the team at our first event in Los Angeles.

My Refuge House has been busy during the last six months. It has been a time of growth and transition, and all the while we've been making sure our foundation is solid. I laugh as I type this because I mean it both literally and metaphorically. Our campus is growing and changing...in addition to our aquaponic farm of tomatoes and tilapia, we have a huge eggplant garden. We've already sold tomatoes at the market, and we look forward to doing that more! We have new buildings, and there was a lot of fortifying of foundations to make sure they could sustain the expansion. We're in the middle of building another cottage, which will be completed by January 2016. By the time we move in, we will have room to house 30 girls on campus, including our transition program, which already has six college students living there. That's right, we had SIX HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES this year! Very exciting times.

You will see throughout this newsletter lots of information about the other growth and transition we've been embracing. It's a dynamic time. We're looking forward to all that 2016 will bring, and we hope that you will join us, give us feedback, and pray for us as we stay on this journey.

Wishing you JOY of the seasons,



Heather Bland

CEO of My Refuge House

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Movement For Freedom

Every time I walk out my front door, there is always someone jogging down my street. Even during the hot summer of Texas people love to get moving. As I looked around my surroundings I began to wonder, couldn't we turn that moving into helping My Refuge House? Movement for Freedom was born from that simple idea and was held during the entire month of May in 2015. We had people of all ages from California to Texas moving for our girls. These individuals found sponsors who gave money for their movement which included Zumba, Yoga, running, cycling, walking, & boot camps. If you could move, you could help! Our hope is to get Moving again in May of 2016 as Movement for Freedom is something everyone can do. I hope all supporters of My Refuge House will consider dedicating the month of May to My Refuge House and get moving. Restoring one life at a time can begin with simply walking out your front door. - Kim Jones

Women For Justice Tea

Last spring My Refuge House made a new friend in Southern California. Her name is Elizabeth Schreiber and she is feisty, energetic and passionate about justice! Elizabeth, self admitted, has "justice issues." She has felt deeply about injustice ever since her childhood days of playground bullies and this spread into her adult life. Elizabeth began to ask "how can I get involved with My Refuge House and how can I tell my friends about inequality?" So, she used what she had at her disposal and invited her wide network of friends, family and colleagues to a Tea Party at the Santa Ana Country Club. She invited My Refuge House to speak alongside International Justice Mission about our girls, our mission and how people can become involved! We were thrilled to see about 35 people in attendance and Elizabeth hopes to make the "Women of Justice Tea" an annual event. We can't wait to see who becomes involved with My Refuge House as a result! Elizabeth, we are so grateful to have friends like you who want to see justice prevail in the world. -Lauren Song

Enriching Your Life's Soil Conference

This August we had the amazing opportunity to partner with Eileen Rodriguez, a long-term supporter of MRH and owner of Couture Salon and Spa. For her 30th birthday it was Eileen's dream to host a Women's Conference to empower women while raising support and awareness for MRH. Heather, our CEO, spoke on inspiration to over 50 women; many were touched as they heard of MRH and the testimony of the girls for the first time. The silent auction was a success, and the whole event rounded off nicely with a dance party led by Eileen herself! We are so grateful for our friends who selflessly put the needs of others at the forefront! Thank you, Eileen, for all your support! - Kristi Zboncak

College Program

When did you know that you would be able to attend college? Did you grow up with the expectation that this would be the obvious next step after High School graduation? For many of the girls at My Refuge House, they never dreamed of the opportunity to attend college, let alone to graduate from High School. However, for the first time ever, this year My Refuge House is proud to announce that six of our girls are college-bound High School graduates! Imaginably, this is a huge transition for these six young ladies. Due to various family and personal circumstances they are not yet ready to live on their own in the community, but no longer need the 24-hour care that they have needed while undergoing rehabilitation in our long-term program. So, without further ado, we are pleased to announce the formation of our new **College/Transition Program!** This program is simply an extension of our long-term care initiative. The ladies in this program will live on campus at My Refuge House but will leave campus on their own to travel to and from University. They will receive care, guidance and support from staff, but will now have the opportunity to test out their skills as responsible young adults as they navigate friendships, decision-making and public transportation on their own. Please keep the six of them in your thoughts and prayers as this is a daunting transition for them! *My Refuge House has set up a Scholarship Fund to assist with school fees. For more information about the College/Transition Program or to contribute to the Scholarship Fund, please contact Lauren Song: Lauren@myrefugehouse.org*

Fashioned for Freedom



I was recently asked, “How did you put together Fashioned for Freedom?”

My response, “Not by myself!” And it got me thinking, shouldn’t we approach everything we do in life, with others?

I have some pretty amazing friends. When I first proposed the idea of Fashioned for Freedom, my friend Annie immediately offered to help. In a matter of a few days she connected me with Aubrey Mayo, a fashion stylist. Aubrey and I spoke via skype and within a few minutes she was offering her styling. Aubrey made a choice to join me on this wonderful journey, Annie chose to connect us and their choices have impacted the lives of our girls half way around the world. When I think of what my friends, and even acquaintances, did I am dumbfounded – I shouldn’t be. There are so many people in this world who love to give to others and it is a beautiful thing to use your gifts and talents to benefit those in need. Yes, we had a great need. There was a runway show that had to be produced. However, the biggest need was and is for our girls at My Refuge House; when there are more than 2 million children sold for sex throughout the world there must be people willing to help. Our 2nd annual Fashioned for Freedom fashion show was held in Dallas on November 5th and was a huge success! Thank you to all who supported this event!

-Kim Jones

Community Outreach in Cebu, Philippines

My Refuge House has seen the value of not only restoring survivors of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) and abuse, but also spreading awareness and educating the populace of said issues. Reaching out to the masses and empowering them to become involved, increase knowledge, and equip bystanders were goals that MRH deemed necessary to be undertaken. With these objectives in mind the community outreach program was born with the gracious help of Leadership Worth Following, who donated \$20,000 for the next two years of operation to make the dream of reaching out to the community come into fruition.

We began our preparation efforts to combat the injustices of CSE and abuse by conducting ongoing research through surveys and interviews to assess respondents’ knowledge of and attitudes towards CSE, abuse, and community resources. The data that we can extract from this research will be beneficial to determine how to empower students, parent leaders, and other community volunteers. Results of our study will also become part of the training manual, devised to serve as a vital tool in equipping community trainers to become the new voices for the fight against CSE and abuse.

We have incorporated the shadowing of other Non Profits in our plan to figure out how other organizations with community outreach programs operate in the field and what target populations they cater to. Insights from the shadowing activities will be utilized in planning for future MRH outreach to avoid duplication of services rendered to the community by our partners.

-Rose Ann P. Obenque



Staff Highlight: Patricia Velasco

Patricia has faithfully served as a dedicated house parent and spiritual mentor at My Refuge House since it first opened in 2008, fondly called both by the staff and girls “Nanay Pat.” Patricia is a reminder of how to live humbly and dedicated to God’s Word. She is welcoming, comforting, gentle, kind and exhibits warmth and empathy to all around her. She lives her life in an intentional manner and imparts traditional Filipino values and culture on the girls. One of the girls described her as a “spiritual mother” and as someone who brings out the best in others. The staff and girls admire her patience and calm spirit and seek her out for prayer and guidance. She is appreciated by all and is a significant asset to the organization with her years of experience, valued wisdom, and professional manner.



Ohana Pavilion

The Ohana Pavilion was a 30 week construction project. We are so thankful to our partners at Irving Bible Church for making this project possible! It provides much needed space for our home-schooling and other activities for the My Refuge House community now take place here. Our meals are now cooked on either the outdoor or indoor kitchen of the Pavilion. We have an expanded computer lab, library, classroom and a dedicated education team office. The porch also provides an additional shady spot for the dogs and cats our girls have rescued.



Girl Highlight: Jessica

Jessica is twelve years old and the youngest girl at My Refuge House, though she is mature beyond her years and has a strong desire to learn. She loves her mother and siblings and is a positive support for her family. During difficult times she shares the love of God with them, telling of His faithfulness and support. While at home, she took on a lot of responsibility as the eldest daughter and has a great desire to care of them through their struggles. Jessica is also extremely diligent in her studies, has considerably improved her reading skills, and is the top student in her class. Jessica is an inspiration for the girls because she has overcome many personal challenges. Just recently her family lost their house to a fire but she remained hopeful and prayerful that God will provide a way for them to overcome it. Thank you again to all who made the rebuilding of her house possible, it is nearly complete! She is precious to those at My Refuge House and has embraced the popular song “Let it Go” as her life motto.



Give College for Christmas



We are excited to announce that we have partnered with Solid Coffee, a coffee roaster in Southern California. Beginning December 5th, we will be selling 3 different blends and a cold brew to benefit My Refuge House. Join us in our coffee campaign to help prepare our girls for university and support those who are

currently earning their college degree! Check our website for more details or to purchase beans for college!