



by rhea maze

*A woman relaxes* in the shade of a gazebo and watches her young daughter dig in the playground's sand box. The sun is shining and they look happy. Most important, they're safe. "Kids could never play out in front of our old facility," says Pat Parker, director of operations and programs at Crossroads Safehouse domestic violence shelter in Fort Collins.

Since moving to a new building in 2011, they are protected by seven levels of security and able to offer abused individuals expanded, best-practice services and increased access to resources for living a violence-free life. "It's quite an improvement," Parker says. "And everything we offer is free, including our legal services."

**“The poster child of domestic violence is someone with a black eye and a broken arm. That really doesn't describe the scope of the problem.”**

~ John McGee, Crossroads Safehouse outgoing executive director

**Domestic violence** is defined as a set of behaviors used to exert control or establish power over an intimate partner or family member. This encompasses psychological, emotional, physical, verbal, spiritual, financial, and sexual abuse as well as stalking and threatening. Because not all forms of domestic violence are physical, it's important to learn to recognize the coercive and controlling behaviors abusers utilize.

Most individuals come to Crossroads Safehouse via a call to the 24/7 crisis line. "We immediately focus on getting that person safe and stable and then we give them options," Parker says.

The mother and daughter stay in one of the facility's four 'neighborhoods' of housing units joined by a shared living room, laundry room and full kitchen where they can cook meals for them-

selves with food donated by the Food Bank for Larimer County and local farms. A medical unit staffed by volunteer physicians allows residents to be seen and treated. When the mother needs shoes for her daughter, or clothing and jewelry for a job interview or court date, the confidential staff advocate she's been paired with will guide her through the shelter's upscale boutique.

"The advocates we provide focus on helping residents identify their goals, which often include finding housing, income and reconnecting with health and mental health support," says Susie Martinez, shelter manager.

Crossroads Safehouse partners with over 30 agencies and can help anyone experiencing any form of domestic violence find a supportive and safe place to go. Animals can also be accommodated through their volunteer-run pet foster program.

The organization's most important prevention work includes classes on healthy relationships and dating violence intervention at Poudre and

Thompson Valley Schools. "If you can educate youth and get them to start thinking about what a healthy relationship looks like at an early age, the likelihood of them engaging in an abusive relationship down the road is greatly reduced," says John McGee, outgoing executive director.

"The victim of domestic violence knows there's something wrong," Martinez says. "Yet often there are barriers preventing them from accessing support. One of the biggest challenges we face is dispelling myths about domestic violence in order to take down some of those barriers." One key myth to shatter is that it is uncommon. Domestic violence happens in all kinds of families, in every part of the country, in every racial, religious and age group, and is the leading cause of injury to women.

With an advocate helping her create a safety plan, set and achieve goals, and access services and resources, the mother and daughter have the space they need to heal and a new lease on life. "The most rewarding aspect of my work is watching people move from victim to survivor—watching them become empowered and safe," Martinez says.

*Since 1980, Crossroads Safehouse has been dedicated to ending domestic violence through round-the-clock shelter, education for adults and children, and services that help survivors and their children live independent, happy and violence-free lives. All services are free, confidential, bilingual, and available to men, women and children regardless of race or sexual orientation.* ★

**crossroads**  
safehouse



**crossroadssafehouse.org** • 421 Parker St., Fort Collins  
(970) 482-3535 • **24/7 helpline: (970) 482-3502**

Those interested in volunteering or making donations should call during normal business hours.

*Join the celebration:*

**Crossroads Safehouse 33rd Anniversary Gala**

**Nov. 9, 2013**

**Hilton Fort Collins • 5:30 pm**

\$100 per ticket includes program, silent and live auctions, cocktail hour, seated dinner, dessert bar and entertainment. Tickets available online or by phone.