



Renew, Restore, Restart – With Tender Loving Care

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WTLC – 35 Years With Tender Loving Care

By Bob Rhein

It started with a \$20,000 grant, one-and-a-half staff members and a dream.

WTLC is a registered, non-profit organization in Orange County dedicated to helping individuals and families escape the depths of domestic violence and exploitation. WTLC provides the tools and resources to build self-esteem and empower individuals for independent living, With Tender Loving Care. WTLC marks its 35th anniversary this month, on July 28.

The organization provides services to individuals and families who learn how to love themselves and restart their lives after facing severe personal punishment.

However, 35 years ago, domestic violence, not to mention human trafficking, were not subjects of conversation.

“It was risky business,” said Judith Kaluzny, a Fullerton-based attorney and marital mediator, who was one of the founders and sat on the first WTLC board of directors. “At that time, women’s projects were swept under the rug. Judges were unsympathetic – there were no programs, no awareness.”

That started to change in the mid 1970s when the National Organization for Women (NOW) Task Force for Domestic Violence appeared before the Orange County Board of Supervisors asking for a \$20,000 grant from the federal Community Action Council, for a shelter in Orange County. Kaluzny, then a law school student, was at that meeting.

“I recall that Harriet Weider, then a Huntington Beach council member, was also there on another issue,” Kaluzny said. “She noticed all of the women and children in the audience, and asked what we were there for. When she found out, she gave the Supervisors a ringing endorsement. That was a significant act for an elected official at the time.”

Kaluzny found herself on the Board of Directors of what was the third shelter for women in the United States. “The original Shelter for Battered Woman was established in England, and there were two others in Northern California – that’s all,” she said. “We wanted to soften the name a bit, so we called ourselves the ‘Women’s Transitional Living Center.’”

After three years on the Board, Kaluzny was elected Board Chair. WTLC, with only one full-time employee, and one part time employee, tried establishing a shelter in several different locations, but found it too difficult to find a suitable site with no hostility. “We looked at a very nice complex of houses in one city, but when neighboring residents found out – especially the men “they raised a stink,” Kaluzny said. “Not in our neighborhood!”

Finally in 1975, WTLC received funding through a Community Development Block Grant to purchase a large institutional site in Orange County that is now the shelter’s current site. Kaluzny says she likes to point out that the original grant and purchase

money were federal starter grants. “It shows what good things government, used properly, can do.”

Now, with a staff of 35 employees, WTLC has given new hope for more than 40,000 victims of domestic abuse and human trafficking. The shelter’s program has expanded to the point that the organization has rebranded and redefined itself.

“We want people to know that it is not just women we provide for,” said Kimberly Hall Barlow, Board Chair. “Our clients are women, men, and children from every type of background. We simply call the program With Tender Loving Care or WTLC, which is how we have always referred to ourselves.”

Minerva Hidrogo, WTLC executive director, with 15 years experience dealing with victims of violent crime, said the program offers a comprehensive approach to its services. “We provide emergency services,” she said. “All victims have to do is call our hot line, or check into any police department. They will be given a safe place to stay before we can check them into the shelter.”

Once at the shelter, the victim and their children enter a 45- or 90-day program where they have access to legal support, immigration assistance, job opportunities and counseling. “Overall, 96 percent of our shelter residents move on to live in safe environments,” Hidrogo said.

Survivors who complete the first step in their rehabilitation and education are transitioned into WTLC’s Second Step program where they are provided with a furnished one-bedroom apartment. There, they are provided with educational workshops from independent life skills and goal setting, to budgeting and time-management skills.

The third component of WTLC is the Little House children’s program. “This is designed to provide a safe and nurturing environment where child and parent can heal and grow,” Hidrogo said. “Our little ones are called ‘Froggies.’ All of our children receive education

in social skills, motor skills and nutrition. We have outdoor group activities to promote good health, positive self-image and teamwork.”

For teenagers, WTLC offers its ‘Super Stars’ group that helps teens address the complex struggles faced by all young people.

Denny Baron, 26, knows first hand how WTLC changed his life. “Twelve years ago, my mother, brother, little sister, and myself were in the shelter,” he said. “Without WTLC I could have never accomplished what I have done – something as simple as finishing high school. I joined the United States Marines for four years, was sent to Iraq, and came back.”

He said he came back thanking WTLC, but with actions, not words. “I am a man of action,” Baron said. “My mother is so happy now, she has learned to move on. I love her when she is happy. “

Baron is now the leading spokesperson for WTLC’s outreach efforts, bringing his story of renewal to service clubs and organizations throughout Southern California. “Oprah Winfrey said you can never stop giving,” he said. “I have taken that to a whole new level.”

Kimberly Hall Barlow says that while WTLC’s goal is to end domestic violence and human trafficking, she knows it will be a long road.

“We have to continue to help these families become sound and healthy members of the community,” she said. “We want them to see that their lives have value and to learn how to protect and teach their children how to live a life without violence.

“We are here to renew, restore and restart their lives – With Tender Loving Care.”

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