

The VOICE



UNDERGROUND RAILROAD, INC.

Summer 2020



In April, we shared a story about Rhonda. Rhonda had called our crisis line while hidden away in an upstairs closet, desperate to make the call in secret. She spoke so quietly our responders struggled to hear her. Since lockdown, her boyfriend's abuse had been more violent and ruthless than ever before. He accused her of bringing COVID-19 into the house every time she stepped outside. He broke her toe, stomping her with heavy work boots when she went to get the mail. She had no money to pay bills. He was stealing everything to spend on alcohol - including the stimulus money that she was counting on to help. Rhonda was afraid of her boyfriend, but terrified of getting sick if she left. Entering emergency shelter meant living closely with dozens of strangers. Rhonda chose to stay with her abuser, but began receiving tele-advocacy through email and text message. Her advocate helped her safety plan, and provided resources to assist her in the coming months. When restrictions began to lift, Rhonda called again, ready to enter emergency shelter. She moved in two weeks ago. Rhonda plans to continue advocacy and file for a personal protection order against her boyfriend. Thanks to you, she's maintaining her health and putting a new focus on her safety.



A Note From the Executive Director



Dear Friends,

It has been an unusual few months. Sometimes scary, often overwhelming, but always presenting the opportunity to learn more about how to better serve survivors and our community.

Despite putting the rest of the world at a standstill, we learned quickly that COVID-19 would not pause or stop domestic violence. The calls we received on our helpline showed an increase in the frequency and intensity of abuse as the lockdown forced victims into close quarters with their abusers. The situation sometimes seemed hopeless, but I am incredibly proud of the strength and ingenuity our staff showed to continue reaching survivors while ensuring their health and safety. When the first confirmed COVID-19 cases reached Michigan, we quickly transitioned to tele-advocacy for survivors via conference calls, emails and text messaging. We increased sanitation procedures, and followed best practices to implement isolation and quarantine policies. We began offering Safeplace visitations via 3-way calling. Prevention staff began recording school presentations for teachers to use in distance learning. We closed Underground Railroad Resale to protect staff, customers, and volunteers. The human spirit is adaptable. It is also generous. Our response would not have been possible without your support. The number of foundations, business, and individuals who reached out unsolicited with requests to fill any and every need was nothing short of a miracle. Thanks to you our services continued at a time when survivors needed them the most. Thanks to you, Underground Railroad is still here now that they're able to leave for good.

Sincerely,

Christi Birchmeier, Executive Director

VOLUNTEER Spotlight



Gretchen & David Nall

"God has mightily blessed my family and me, and the Underground Railroad does such important work that I love helping and giving back. Whether it's using my organizing skills in the pantry or the donation areas in the basement, painting, cleaning and repairing at the shelter, or helping in various ways at Christmas, it is fun to gather a few friends and work together to help out this wonderful organization." - Gretchen Nall

To join our family of volunteers, email
Crystal Sanders at
csanders@undergroundrailroadinc.org

THANK YOU TO THE GREAT LAKES BAY REGION

We're taking our gala virtual!

Join us this October as we honor our Great Lakes Bay Region for the incredible support that saw us through the COVID-19 pandemic. We're excited for the opportunity to reach each of you to share our thanks - all from the comfort of your own home! Watch our website and Facebook page for more details coming soon!



Runner Highlight

Lily

Girls on the Run taught me to never give up. My favorite thing about Girls on the Run was getting to run with our friends of all ages. I loved to cheer others on and I felt so accomplished when I finished the 5K. It was great! If I could teach every girl one lesson from GOTR it would be the "Stop, Breathe, Think, Respond, Review" breather on peer pressure.

Parent Highlight

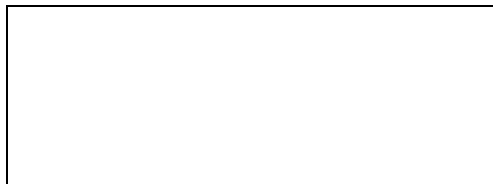
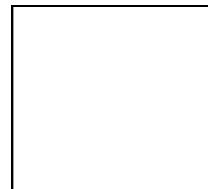
Christy

I really saw Lily learning and growing as she cared more about the progress of her friends than her own. During the 5K Lily wanted to run the fastest she could, but when a friend fell behind she decided to wait. She stayed with her friend the entire race and encouraged her. It made me very proud to see her experience such an exciting and encouraging program, and care so much about others. If I could tell my 9 year-old self anything, it would be, "Don't worry about what everyone else thinks. Be brave and true to yourself."



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