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The Spirit of St. Louis Women's Fund is a component fund of The Greater St. Louis Community Foundation and a member of the Women's Collective Giving Grantmakers Network, a growing, nationwide group of more than 30 organizations similar to our Fund and with more than 6,000 members altogether.

Why We Give - ALIVE Inc.



**Why We Give - Grantee Profiles**

Because giving is at the very heart of Spirit of St. Louis Women's Fund, we felt it was important to share stories about those who are impacted most by the generosity of our members.

Because October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, we selected agencies who help victims of domestic violence. We hope you enjoy the piece, and are inspired by these real life impact stories.

**In the Darkest of Moments, There is Hope**



ALIVE Inc.

### It's past midnight.

Doctors and nurses are scurrying past your hospital bed, but you feel horribly, terrifyingly alone.

Your face is bruised; your ribs are broken. Your arm is bandaged and your neck is turning purple.

Every inch of your body screams in pain at the slightest movement. Pain you can handle. Terror you cannot.



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### You can't go home. It's not safe. Not for you; not for your children.

The police officer who took your statement looked sympathetic when she told you the shelter was full. But sympathy can't fix this. You feel your chest tighten as panic begins to set in.

Where will I go? How will I take care of the kids? How will I keep them safe?

This terrifying and very real scenario is the reason [ALIVE Inc.](#) exists. When the domestic violence shelters are full and there is nowhere for victims to turn for safety, ALIVE provides them with safe shelter, transportation and most importantly - hope.

In 1983, two female graduates of Washington University recognized a gap in services in the St. Louis region. They realized there were not enough shelter beds for those in need of safety.

For the first 10 years, the nonprofit relied on gracious individuals who discreetly offered up their homes as a confidential place for domestic violence victims to stay until they could be placed in a shelter.

But after the first decade, the organization had grown to the point that they had to look for solutions beyond private homes for temporary, emergency placement.



Today, when shelters are full, ALIVE takes victims into their Nights of Safety program.

Through this program, domestic violence victims are placed in local undisclosed motels until a shelter bed becomes available, said Maggie Menefee, executive director of ALIVE Inc.

"The average is three to four nights, but that can vary," Menefee said. "We try to move people into a shelter because they have many more safeguards. But the motel still fills the gap in meeting those needs to keep an individual safe."

The \$25,000 grant ALIVE received from Spirit of St. Louis Women's Fund went toward providing motel rooms through the Nights of Safety program.

"Our funding from St. Louis County does not allow us to cover any other resident from the other four counties we serve," Menefee said.

The SOS funds went directly toward keeping victims safe, Menefee said.

And there were many victims to protect.

In fiscal year 2015-2016, which ended in March, the nonprofit placed 1,042 people in temporary, emergency overnight stays for 6,941 nights.

It's more than just a safe night's sleep that ALIVE provides.

Because victims are often unable to return home or had to leave without their personal affects, ALIVE brings them whatever is necessary to survive during their temporary placement.

"These are not five star motels," Menefee said. "They don't have restaurants or refrigerators so we're providing meals to them. We give them quarters to do their laundry. We can give them Walgreens cards to get their prescriptions filled. We're meeting all of their needs while they're in our program. That's what those dollars are supporting - the cost of keeping somebody safe."

While many domestic violence shelters can only take women and children, ALIVE is unique because they serve men and boys of all ages.

This is especially important because there is a demographic of male domestic violence victims who are from LGBTQ community.



"Those were victims who were often not permitted into the shelter," Menefee said. "We could take them. ALIVE has always been inclusive of anyone regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation. If you are a victim of domestic violence, in immediate danger, and the shelters are full, then we are the entity that is going to be able to provide a safety net."

ALIVE, whose name stands for Alternatives to Living In Violent Environments, is also capable of helping larger families, which are often unable to get into shelter right away.

"Shelters are set up to accommodate smaller-size families," Menefee said. "Where does a mom go with five children?"

Though ALIVE does not operate a shelter directly, they must still comply with all domestic violence shelter standards for confidentiality.

Beyond emergency placement through Nights of Safety, ALIVE provides a myriad of other services to their clients. They operate a crisis line that is answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In-house therapists provide counseling services free of charge for adults and children for as long as they need it.

ALIVE has court advocates who regularly visit court in St. Louis city and county and in Franklin County. While the advocates are not legal

advisors, they are able to offer victims support and explain legal proceedings like orders of protection.

Clients are referred to ALIVE by law enforcement, hospital emergency rooms, their own crisis line and the United Way 211 line.

"Shelters refer to us because they're getting calls for help and they can't accommodate the person," Menefee said "Law enforcement call us because we can provide transportation."

While shelters often have a very limited capability for transportation, ALIVE provides transportation services for victims from the hospital to the motel. Victims often flee with no money and few personal items, so this transportation is invaluable.

"We had a woman last night, she was in the ER because she's been physically assaulted," Menefee said. "We're always in contact with shelters and we know they're full so we'll arrange for a cab to go get the person and get them to the hotel."

If necessary, ALIVE can also arrange for a victim to be transported out of the area by Greyhound bus if it really not safe for them to be in the city and the agency can verify they have safe shelter out of town.

"Transportation is another huge piece of what we can provide for assistance in keeping somebody safe," Menefee said.

Unfortunately, Menefee said the level of violence has been increasing since she became ALIVE's executive director three years ago. So much so that her staff had to undergo special training on strangulation so they would know the residual impact on a victim.

"Physical trauma and injuries are more severe and it's just been an increase in the number of people that we've seen," Menefee said.

While Menefee admits it is not always easy because victims do sometimes go back to their abuser; but the nonprofit's only role is to be there for the clients when they are needed.

"You're empowering somebody to make a decision," Menefee said. "They may not make the best decision the first or second time, but we're not going to condemn them. If you change your mind we'll be here."

There are success stories of those who have broken the cycle, including a mother of five who walked away from her abuser.

"She left her abuser because sister who had also been in an abusive relationship was murdered by her abuser," Menefee said. "That was her wake up call. She contacted us. She had been threatened and abused and finally that was it."

This mother and her children were enrolled in the Nights of Safety program.

"It was at Christmas time - not a time to be in a hotel room with five children," Menefee said. "Because of additional funding we receive, and because she had a job, we were able to pay for her first month's lease on a house."

ALIVE worked with other organizations to secure furniture, a small Christmas tree and gifts for the children.

"These five children had a Christmas," Menefee said. "She is away from the abuser and in her own residence and that would not have happened if she hadn't connected with us. We're providing hope."

The ALIVE crisis line number is 314-993-2777.



*Written by Bethany Prange of 618 Creative for Spirit of St. Louis Women's Fund. Due to the confidential nature of the subject matter, no real images of clients were used. Images courtesy of Shutterstock.*