

Harmonious Home Makes Meaningful Moves in the Community

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We've all heard the adage that "Home is where the heart is," but the comforts of home are unknown by many in the community who have survived domestic violence. For many families fleeing domestic violence, a sense of home is replaced by an ever-present state of survival mode, seeking to make it from one day to the next and many of these families have no place to go. For the families who are able to find sanctuary and allow them to rebuild their lives, heal from trauma, and work toward a future free of violence.

Harmonious Home is a grassroots Texas 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization created to prepare and design living spaces for families who are moving from transitional living centers or shelters to apartments or small houses. Volunteers from the organization work behind-the-scenes and on-the-ground before a family moves into their new home to assess the family's needs, acquire furniture and home accessories, design and plan each room, arrange furniture, and collect feedback. By the time the family arrives, the home is fully furnished and expertly designed to be as comfortable, functional, and hospitable as possible.

The organization was created by Janet Wechter, a professional interior designer who applied her professional skills to philanthropic work for vulnerable families to feel comforted by expertly-curated interior design after living in a shelter.

"I wanted to bring beauty and care to the people in this vulnerable position," she explains.

She is also a certified Kundalini Yoga instructor and has benefited from yoga and meditation for many years, so she places a yoga mat and kids book on yoga in every home Harmonious Home furnishes. She knows breathwork and meditation can positively affect their personal, work and school experiences.

She picks fresh flowers from her yard to place in a vase on their kitchen table to express that we care.

Harmonious Home's all-woman board of directors includes Wechter, Melissa Goldberg, Leslie Beckoff, Marisa Lipscher, Elisa Panetta, Shea Marcus, Judith Ross who meet regularly to discuss the needs and past living experiences of each family.

Many of the families have lived in situations where multiple members share one bed in a single room.

"Can you imagine a single mom or dad not having resources and then dealing with all of this while not having a bed or room to be alone in?" asks Wechter.

Luckily, a partnership between Harmonious Home and the Center Against Sexual and Family Violence (CASFV) is helping more families develop a sense of home that includes comfort, safety, and dignity. Harmonious Home is furnishing homes that are safe, functional, beautiful, and inspiring families to live their best lives for clients from CASFV, The YWCA Transitional Living Center, and the MacGuire Center.

CASFV refers families from its Transitional Living Center into their own apartments that are furnished and styled by Harmonious Homes, its dedicated board, and additional volunteers prior to the family's move-in date.

"The team assesses each family's needs and carefully designs each room of their future home as they collect the furniture



and household items needed to create a welcoming environment,” explains Yazmin Perez, Director of Client Services at CASFV. “Harmonious Home coordinates all the donations, volunteer time, and design to place everything together before the families arrive at their new homes – a safe space to continue a life free of violence.”

Perez explains that Wechter’s expertise as an interior designer enables her to design each space in the home with a purpose to ensure a sense of safety, comfort, and overall well being. She and the Harmonious Home team consider elements like color psychology, lighting, sensory elements, and functional design within the living space.

“We do it with tender love and care,” says Wechter. “Each room gets a bed (some rooms have two beds), a nightstand, a lamp, and a little rug. They get pretty bedding – whether it’s new or gently used – and we try to put books in the apartment. In the living room, they get a couch, a coffee table, rug,

an end table, and a lamp. The kitchens are designed with a table, four chairs, and a live plant,” she continues.

The attention and care to detail create spaces that facilitate healing, promote a sense of security, and also empowers families to rebuild their lives.

More than anything, Harmonious Home creates a space for hope in the household.

“Every element of the design contributes to these objectives, fostering an environment that supports survivors on their continued journey to recovery. In this environment, children can continue their education, parents can maintain employment, and everyone can establish routines that contribute to a sense of normalcy,” says Perez.

Harmonious Home acquires the furniture through purchase or generous donations, stores the items, then later facilitates the moving process to style the new living space.

“But what propelled us was Gator Tank,” says Wechter.

Harmonious Home was bolstered in 2022 after winning the Paso del Norte Community Foundation’s inaugural “Gator Tank” competition. Like the hit tv show “Shark Tank” where aspiring entrepreneurs pitch potential investors, non-profit organizations pitched their missions in the hope of winning first place that included a monetary prize. The win helped Harmonious Home gain momentum to help make vulnerable families’ dreams of a home become a reality.

For many of the families, the kindness seems too good to be true.

“Some of the clients don’t believe that we’re really giving all of this to them, because they can take all the furniture with them when they leave,” says Wechter. “But we explain what we’re doing, why we’re doing it, and what we hope to achieve – to change the trajectory of their lives.”

September 2023

Moving into a safe home that is stylishly and lovingly designed is emblematic of the hope of a new beginning where families can nest, set goals, make memories, follow dreams, and create a life free of violence.

"Moving into a safe home is a courageous step toward reclaiming one's life. It marks a transition from being a victim to becoming a survivor, fostering a sense of empowerment and self-determination," says Perez.

Harmonious Home is continuing its work with CASFV and will soon also start projects with new partners like The MacGuire Center to assist youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood.

"We're transforming lives by transforming living spaces," says Wechter. "We like to say, 'From Shelter to Home Sweet Home.'"

Maybe home is where the hope is.



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