



HOUSE OF
CHERITH



*Your Access To Our
Fight for Freedom*

Quarterly Newsletter Volume 1.1

CONTENTS

1. KELSI'S CORNER

A message from our Executive Director

2. BREAKING NEWS

The latest news from HOC

4. IN THE RING

HOC program information

5. LEGENDS

Stories of Hope

6. RINGSIDE SEAT

Ways to get involved with HOC



A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Where there is darkness, there is an immense opportunity for light. Here at House of Cherith, we aim to spark light in these places of darkness and injustice by providing safety, stability and reintegration options for survivors. It is our goal, hope and desire that through our residential recovery programs survivors will have the opportunity to reclaim their dignity and self worth, will cultivate the desire to renew their faith in humanity and will begin to confidently rekindle their passion for a lifetime of success.

Welcome to our quarterly newsletter! What a joy and honor it is to share with you some of the exciting transformation stories, updates in this fight for freedom and ways you can get involved and make a difference. Thank you for joining with us – for joining hands, joining hearts and joining this fight for freedom so that together we can empower survivors to move from a victim's mindset to a victor's mentality.

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Kelsi O'Neil".

Executive Director

BREAKING NEWS

We hear the term “sex trafficking” often enough, unfortunately, but don’t necessarily have a clear understanding of what it is, how pervasive it is in our own community of Atlanta, and the long-term impact it has on its victims. The U.S. Congress has defined sex trafficking – one of two categories of Human Trafficking, the second being labor trafficking – as the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person forced to perform such an act is younger than age 18. A commercial sex act means any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person. Types of sex trafficking include prostitution, pornography, stripping, live-sex shows, mail-order brides, military prostitution, and sex tourism.

Although this somewhat sterile definition of sex trafficking is very clear, it only scratches the surface of the immense problem. For those lucky enough to escape and survive this form of modern-day slavery, the sexual exploitation itself is only one step in a lifelong journey of trauma and recovery. And make no mistake, this is not just a problem for our “neighbors” to suffer as we in Atlanta are left immune. As of 2018, Atlanta ranked #2 of the top five U.S. cities for reported human trafficking.

The topic of sex trafficking is often uncomfortable to contemplate and discuss with others. However, it cannot be ignored in our community of Atlanta. As an organization dedicated to helping women recover from the trauma of sexual exploitation, we will use this newsletter as one of several education and outreach vehicles to inform you on the subject. We will provide relevant stories and articles meant to provide insight and hope, spark honest conversation, and ignite action against sex trafficking in our community.

Find Out More At:

[HOCATL.org](https://www.HOCATL.org)



“Where there is darkness, there is an immense opportunity for light. As we join hands, join hearts, and join this fight for freedom, we are empowering survivors to take back the keys to their voice, their dreams, their story and their freedom.”

-Kelsi Deel

IN THE RING

To serve the women we refer to as “survivors” of sex trafficking, House of Cherith has adapted programming through a continuum of services that address safety (meeting urgent need to secure food, clothing, and safe housing), stability (begin lifetime recovery from the trauma of sexual exploitation), and reintegration (transition into a new environment of self-sufficient living). We currently provide this continuum of services through two programs: (Program I) Safe House and (Program II) Long-Term and Transitional Housing.

HOC’s Safe House offers secure and sustainable emergency housing and support services where women are able to make clear, conscious, and sober decisions about taking the next steps in their life beyond exploitation. The primary goal of the Safe House is to place women in a long-term recovery program (whether it be HOC Program II or another program). The stay is intended to be a time or respite, reflection, recovery, and restoration, providing a safe and comfortable environment coupled with activities to help guide residents through the process of determining healthy next steps for their journey to full recovery. Programming is designed so that women are placed, within 35 days of intake, in a long-term program substance/alcohol-free and emotionally stable.

The goal of HOC’s Long-Term and Transitional Housing is to deliver secure and sustainable housing and support services where women are able to recover from their trauma and prepare to live a self-sufficient lifestyle. In the 12-15 month Long-Term phase of Program II, women are provided case management and comprehensive support to become healthy emotionally and physically, maintain sobriety, and secure employment. When ready, women graduate to the 6-9 month Transitional phase of the program where their focus is to transition from program dependence to self-sufficiency. Programming is designed so that 12 months after discharge, women who graduate are: living independently in permanent housing; feel safe in their new environment; have access to reliable transportation; are employed and earning at least 250% of the Federal Poverty Level; have visited the dentist for an annual cleaning; have visited the doctor for an annual physical; are continuing to be treated for long-term mental health needs; are emotionally stable; are free of addictions; are reunified with family (living with or in good relationship); and have returned to HOC to volunteer or work as an employee.

In future newsletters we will use “In The Ring” to highlight various components of HOC programming and illustrate how we generate long-term impact. We will also feature new programming as it is implemented.

LEGENDS

MEET PAULA



Paula, a proud mother and grandmother, has been addicted to drugs and alcohol, on and off, for nearly 25 years. After losing an infant son and divorcing her first husband, she befriended some “unsavory” individuals with whom she began abusing drugs and alcohol. She eventually found herself in serious legal trouble and was sentenced to prison. After serving 2 sentences with the Department of Corrections, Paula met her second husband, a drug and alcohol counselor, who she thought was her perfect match. Not long after they were married, however, she found him to be a volatile, violent, and abusive addict. His abuse toward her became so excessive that he literally threw her out of their home by pushing her through a plate glass window.

Homeless, desperate, and estranged from her son and granddaughters, Paula begged God to build her a new life. Shortly after her plea, through a series of events, God led her to House of Cherith. Paula was somewhat “terrified” of her stay at HOC as she was told she would be living in a warehouse. Like many residents before her, however, Paula quickly felt welcome and comfortable in her new home.

Since her arrival last fall, Paula has made huge progress in her restoration by taking advantage of the trauma-informed counseling, addiction support, and medical services offered by HOC. She is already employed by both Bright Futures Academy and City of Refuge using the maintenance-engineering skills she learned while in prison. She has also reconnected with her son and his family. Paula’s long-term goal is to move across the street to the permanent-supportive housing being constructed by City of Refuge. Here she plans to make up for what she has lost in the past by spending time as a grandmother and rebuilding trust with her son.

From arriving at HOC “scared, terrified, broken, and hurt” to now feeling “confident, secure, respected, and safe”, Paula has hope for the life God intended for her. “God has opened doors that I never imagined. I have been loved, accepted, and encouraged by a God-filled family and now I have a life built around service to God on a daily basis. Thank you City of Refuge and House of Cherith, but mostly thank God!”

Paula is just one of many survivors, staff, volunteers, and donors we will highlight each quarter on our Open Door newsletter.

RINGSIDE SEAT

Now that House of Cherith is no longer a program of City of Refuge, but instead a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, we are establishing our own fundraising and operational practices enabling us, like the women we serve, to function as a self-sufficient organization. To sustain our programming and operations we rely on funds from government and foundation grants, churches, corporate partners, and last, but certainly not least, individual donors like you. Did you know that individuals are the largest source of charitable donations for nonprofit organizations? This is why individual supporters are so important to our mission.

Sustainer Giving is a fundraising “best practice” and a way for HOC to retain dedicated supporters, essential to meeting our fundraising goals. We will soon be launching a Sustainer Giving campaign to encourage monthly giving at various levels. Be on the lookout for emails that highlight this campaign where you have an opportunity to become a monthly supporter in our “fight for freedom”. Each quarter we will feature ways you can engage in various events and campaigns like this as a supporter of our important mission.

Visit www.HocAtl.org or click [HERE](#) to donate

A photograph of a woman with glasses and a green sweater looking through a chain-link fence at a dog. The dog is looking back at her. The scene is outdoors with some foliage in the background.

“Justice is doing for others what we would want done for us.”

- Gary Haugen



**HOUSE OF
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