

CASA YOUTH SHELTER

A Safe Place for Youth in Crisis

By Veronica Vidal Praeger, Director of Marketing and Communications Photos Courtesy of Casa Youth Shelter

Emma (name changed) was 10 years old when she lost her mother to a fatal overdose. Emma's father worked hard to maintain stable housing for the two of them, but when he lost his job a few years later, he and Emma were evicted from their apartment. For several months, Emma and her father lived in various motels, but they eventually became homeless. Unwilling to let his daughter sleep in the car, Emma's father contacted Child Protective Services (CPS) for help. CPS referred them to Casa Youth Shelter.

Emma could safely stay with us, while her father looked for work and an apartment. Having a particularly close relationship, Emma and her father hugged for a long time when they parted. He promised to return the next day to see her, and as he left the shelter, he stood outside on the patio and wept.

This is just one story of many here at Casa Youth Shelter, where our mission is to provide safe shelter, counseling, and support services for teens in crisis and their families.

"Over the last year we surveyed current and former residents, and we asked them to describe Casa Youth Shelter in one word," says Executive Director Amy Lakin. "Two words came up over and over again. Two words that get to the heart of what we really are: 'respect' and 'safe'."

In spite of the challenges and regardless of the situation that brings them to our doorstep, teens at Casa Youth Shelter feel respected. These young people are scared and vulnerable, and many – some for the first time in their lives – now feel safe. Using individual and group counseling sessions, as well as supplemental care groups like art therapy, life skills classes, music, sewing, yoga, and pet therapy, teens learn healthier coping skills to work through their crises. They also receive meals and basic necessities

like hot showers, clean clothing, hygiene products, and fresh linens for their beds, in a warm, home-like environment.

Last year, nine out of 10 Casa Youth Shelter residents exited to a safe location, with the majority returning home to their families. Many of these families continued receiving counseling and case

management services, participated in parenting classes, and attended teen drop-in groups. These programs are also open to the community and allow the whole family to improve communication skills, gain tools to mitigate future crises, and begin to heal deep wounds.

"Casa Youth Shelter is a place where you see a difference being made for a population of kids that have so few options," says Greg Magnuson, member of the Casa Youth Shelter Board of Directors and a Naples resident. "Thanks to our staff, I regularly see troubled teenagers get pointed in the right direction to overcome life and family issues. It is an amazing thing. I'm thankful to be a part of the organization."

So what happened with Emma? Her father visited her at the shelter every day, and they both actively participated in all our counseling services. With the assistance of our case manager, he secured a job and found stable housing. Emma left Casa Youth Shelter with her father

and was excited to return to school and resume her extracurricular activities.

Casa Youth Shelter: a safe place to stay, a warm bed to sleep in, a hot meal, and someone to talk to.

Casa Youth Shelter provides emergency temporary shelter for youth ages 12-17. We are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. We serve youth of all races, ethnicities, genders, and religions. We affirm and welcome LGBTQ youth and any youth with a history of exploitation. For more information on how you can assist our mission, please visit CasaYouthShelter.org or call 562.594.6825. ■



Youth supervisor Anthony Wesley with the evening's nutritious meal



Youths are provided clean, bright living quarters