Frequently Asked Questions:
Lydia's House

What is the mission of LH?

Lydia's House works in faith to end domestic violence by being a place of healing and a voice of hope for abused women and their children.

What services do you provide?

Lydia's House is the only agency in St. Louis that provides

- Transitional housing in safe, confidentially located, furnished apartments,
- Up to 24 months to recover from abuse and build new lives, and
- Support services tailored specifically to the needs of domestic violence survivors

How many residents can LH support at any given time?

Lydia's House can house up to 35 families at any given time. (And up to 70 children).

Is LH a shelter?

Actually, no. LH is a long-term transitional housing agency. In St. Louis, we currently have four emergency shelters where women and children can stay for between 30 and 90 days. LH could be considered the "next step" after emergency shelter.

Where did LH get its name?

The name for Lydia's House comes from a passage in the Bible (Acts 16:11-15, 40). Lydia was a "dealer in purple cloth." She was an entrepreneur, part of a group of women who presumably gathered on a regular basis for teaching, preaching and interpretation of scripture. She was a woman who practiced hospitality.

Lydia's House feels connected to Lydia because we seek to offer hospitality to the women and children who enter our doors. We seek to empower women so they themselves may become independent, having a way to support themselves and their families. Our mission statement is significant in that it remind us of the importance of working in faith.

How did LH get started?

In 1994, Mary Albert, Martha Brunell, Doris Waggoner, and Dawn Stringfield were part of an ecumenical church that met in members' homes. The four women came together because they found a call, a sense of passion, to work with abused women and their children.

They spoke with formerly battered women, as well as advocates in the various domestic violence programs in the area. What they found was that if a woman had the courage to leave an abusive partner…and it takes tremendous courage…sometimes requiring 6 or 7 times of leaving and returning before she is able to stay away. If a woman, or a woman with children, finds thet courage to leave, she can go to one of four emergency domestic violence shelters in the area. Here she will find a safe place

and support, but only for ninety days. Imagine spending years being physically, sexually, and psychologically abused…leaving with nothing but the clothes on your back…and being expected to have a job, an apartment, everything, in ninety days. It's just not enough time.

That is why in 1995 we created Lydia's House as a bridge between the all-too-short ninety days in an emergency shelter, and a woman and her children being able to live independent, violence-free lives. We defined our mission as working in faith to end domestic violence by being a place of healing and a voice of hope for abused women and their children.

We bought our first two-family flat in 1996, with $500 in the bank, a dream, and an understanding lender, Ron Moser of Southern Commercial Bank.

We purchased a twelve-family apartment building in 1998 and renovated it to create 10 efficiency, one and two-bedroom apartments. We also created program space for counseling and support group meetings for the women and children. By 1999, we had the capacity to serve 12 families.

Shortly after this space was completed, an 80-year-old retired attorney, Marc Blow, came to us and told us that he had watched his mother stay in an abusive marriage for 50 years, living in fear and feeling that there was no place to go. He wanted to make sure that no other woman would suffer the kind of fear and abuse that his mother had. Mr. Blow gave us a seed gift of $500,000 to create another site in honor of his mother and late wife.

In 2005, we completed that site at a cost of over $2.5 million. The location is a ten-building campus, which we renovated to create 19 one-bedroom, and 6 three-bedroom, two-bath apartments. Two of the one-bedroom apartments are handicap-accessible. Additionally we converted two of the buildings into a Community and Learning Center complete with an elevator, counseling offices, support group rooms, computer labs for the women and children, and program space for training and activities. After this expansion, and with the sale of our first two family in 2006, we now have space for 35 women and up to 70 children.

How do residents get to LH?

Women are referred to LH by one of our four area emergency shelters. Our women's program director coordinates with each woman or family and her shelter advocate to see if LH is a good fit for them after their time in the shelter comes to a close.

How long can residents stay?

LH residents stay with us for an average of two years. Some women need less time, some a little more.

What are the criteria for becoming/staying a LH resident?

To stay at LH, each resident agrees to uphold the confidentiality of our location and work on self proclaimed goals such as furthering education or obtaining employment or sustainable housing.

What percentage of LH residents are women?

LH only serves women and children. Male children are welcome in our program until they reach adulthood.

How does LH compare to other transitional housing programs in the country?

LH is one of the longest established and largest transitional housing programs in the country.

Where to LH children go to school?

Many of our women choose to have their children go to school in the local school district in which LH is located due to safety concerns. However, because women and children living in shelter and transitional housing are considered a sub-set of the homeless population, children have the right to attend their school district of origin until the end of the school year in which they become homeless. If a family chooses this, transportation is provided by the state.

What type of programming do we have at LH?

At Lydia's House each woman, or woman with children, has her own confidentially-located furnished apartment for up to two years. During the two years, the family has access to the critical support services needed to heal from the abuse as well as complete self-defined education, employment, financial, and housing goals.

The program for the women is about healing from the long-term effects of the violence and working on practical goals. Broken bones and black eyes heal quickly; it takes much longer to recover from having one's self-esteem beaten down day-in and day-out. The women's program ensures that every woman has an advocate, with whom she meets on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to celebrate progress, address challenges and obstacles, and gain access to community resources to achieve her goals. Weekly support groups and optional spiritual support groups are facilitated by an advocate or chaplain and provide opportunities for the women to share their own experience and strength with each other, as well as discussing parenting, relationship, conflict management, and other challenges.

What do you do for the children while they are at LH?

The program for the children is about helping the children become children again. So often they have lived on the same eggshells as their mother, or had to grow up much more quickly than any child should. The children's program provides a children's advocate to work with each child, as well as the mother. She spends one-on-one time with the child on a weekly basis. Weekly age-appropriate support groups and optional spiritual support groups are facilitated by an advocate or chaplain and provide opportunities for the children to use creative ways to learn about feelings, healthy expression of anger, and to reinforce that abuse is wrong and they were not responsible. Four days a week, an afterschool program, staffed by volunteers, offers a safe space for the children where they can do homework, get tutoring assistance, work on computers, or play with other children at Lydia's House. Mothers know that their children will be safe while they are on their way home from school or work. During spring break and in the summer, an intensive children's program provides educational, social and recreational activities each week. The children's advocates also help the mothers get children enrolled in school or daycare, and provide non-violent parenting skills training.

Additional fun is available to the whole family in the form of biweekly community meals or movie/game nights and monthly outings. The families have been to see the zoo, Science Center, City Museum, Six Flags, Disney on Ice, and other events through the generosity of donors and the assistance of volunteers.