



Stepping Stones Board of Directors and co-CEO team (L to R): Cori Burke, Ernie Roy, Shenda Fink, Alva Sanchez, Bob Moore, Robin Burke, Dee Miller, Denise Merritt, Ginger Johnson, and Alexis Miller. Not pictured: Patti Robison.

## STEPPING STONES USHERING IN A NEW ERA OF LEADERSHIP

In 2025, Stepping Stones Agencies celebrates 45 years of providing 24/7/365 advocacy services for families experiencing domestic violence in West Yavapai County. Stepping Stones' Board of Directors is excited to announce the new dynamic leadership of our co-CEO team. Founder and CEO, Robin Burke, is retiring after 45 years of extraordinary leadership, building the organization to what it is today. Her hard work and tireless support for local families finding freedom from domestic violence and abuse established best practices and ensures that even 45 years later, families can always call the 24/7/365 helpline and get help immediately.

### WHY CO-CEO?

The co-CEO leadership model allows for a framework where shared goals and collaborative decision-making sets the future of the organization. A 2024 Forbes article by Dean DeBiase puts it best: *"...the adoption of the co-CEO model is more than a strategic decision; it's a reflection of the changing face of corporate leadership in a world where agility, diversity of perspectives, and collaborative decision-making are not just valuable, but essential."* Stepping Stones' move to a Co-CEO model allows for a strategic and flexible approach to not-for-profit leadership.

Through Robin's mentorship and guidance, four extraordinary organization leaders are joining together as co-CEOs to lead Stepping Stones: Alva Sanchez, Director of Operations, Cori Burke, Director of Services, Denise Merritt, Director of Human Resources, and Alexis Miller, Director of Community Outreach. This co-CEO team brings 63 years of collective experience and expertise to ensure the agency remains committed to serving local families experiencing domestic violence and other forms of victimization, growing and sustaining operations, and investing in our associates and the community.

While a co-CEO model may not work everywhere, Stepping Stones' Board of Directors is optimistic that these four minds thinking strategically together will allow for the organization to have a dynamic and strategic best practices approach to meeting this critical need in our community.

"A co-CEO model works for our organization because it allows us to oversee the core areas of our work while collectively making decisions and sharing the ever expanding responsibilities and expectations of not-for-profit leadership roles," said Cori Burke.

Stepping Stones is excited for what the future holds for the organization's services to the community, the social enterprises developed to sustain services, and the families finding freedom from abuse.

## TERESA'S STORY: "I'M CONFIDENT I CAN CONTINUE TO BE AN AMAZING MOM"

A note from Stepping Stones: Teresa's story is a special feature that exemplifies the hard work and dedication we see everyday in the adults who work with our advocates.

*"I always thought that abuse was someone hitting you, someone pushing you. I didn't realize there were so many types of abuse and that I was living them."*

Teresa had a good childhood with loving parents and siblings, but she always felt like the "black sheep" of the family. "I didn't like school. I got involved with drugs and alcohol when I was 12. I met all the wrong people in high school."

Then when Teresa was 16, she met her husband. "He was six years older than me, and I thought he was everything because he was older and he had a house. We did a lot of drinking together. I don't think I really got to know him though because I just thought I was in love."

Soon they had packed their bags and moved away together. They partied and enjoyed the "honeymoon" of their new relationship. Unfortunately, things began changing when they started fighting. After a few years, they moved to help take care of his children from a previous relationship.

"I'm 22, living with his two kids, taking on a mom role, and it was ok for a little bit. Then things kept getting harder and we fought a lot. Finally, at one

point, he actually asked me to marry him, and I thought everything was going to be great."

Their relationship wasn't improving so they called off the wedding, but they stayed together and she became pregnant. "I thought this was a sign. At the very end of my pregnancy, we eloped." Teresa loved being a mom and it seemed like her situation was getting better. "We both completely stopped drinking. Everything felt perfect."

A few years later, her relationship took a turn for the worse. "After my second child was born, he started drinking, going out a lot, and using. It was a nightmare. I never knew where he was at night. I didn't even speak to my family because he didn't want me to have any contact with them." Devastated by what her life had become, Teresa decided to leave her husband. She tried to get away, "But, I didn't know he had put a device on my car to track me." She ended up staying and they continued down their destructive path. He was using drugs and bringing strangers into their home, while she continued drinking to try to feel in control of something in her life.

*continued on page 2*



Stepping Stones Advocates work with adults and children in need of safety support and hope 24/7/365.

If you have questions or want to learn more about our advocacy services and agency, please contact us at:

Stepping Stones Agencies  
2651 N. Industrial Way, Suite A  
Prescott Valley, AZ 86314 | 928.772.4184  
info@steppingstonesaz.org

24/7/365 Advocacy, Emergency Shelter, and Support Programs  
www.SteppingStonesAZ.org

**24/7/365 HELPLINE:**  
**928.445.HOPE**



## TERESA'S STORY CONTINUED

*continued from page 1*

Teresa decided to leave again for the safety of her children. Feeling safe enough to pick up some belongings, she went there and he gave her restraining order paperwork. Law enforcement removed the children from her custody because of her alcohol use, ignoring their father's own drug abuse.

"After they took the kids away from me, I remember going to a store and buying a couple bottles of whiskey. I didn't want to get out of bed, I didn't want to do anything."

Her family attempted to get her help, but she continued to struggle. "I didn't have any contact with my kids. I had to do a program, I had to be tested, I needed to see a therapist. In the meantime he's got strange people coming in the house and is using drugs. Everyone believed him over me."

**"He began tracking my car again. I started parking directly in front of the store, and I had to keep time, like, 'Okay, I got there at 2:00 and I have to be out of there by 2:20.'"**

Eventually, their divorce was finalized and she was able to have visitation with her kids again. But they continued to see each other because of her hope that they would be able to work through things.

"We started going to church together as a family. We started

going to AA together. We were going to fix each other. We were going to make our family work. I forgot about everything."

When a family tragedy happened, they both fell back into unhealthy behaviors and substance abuse. "We were fighting and I couldn't take it anymore. I was drinking every single day. He started hanging out with his old friends and using. I never knew what he was going to do or say. He began tracking my car again. I started parking directly in front of the store, and I had to keep time, like, 'Okay, I got there at 2:00 and I have to be out of there by 2:20.'"

"I stopped volunteering at school because if I was there too long, he would accuse me. The name calling and put downs were the worst. I felt worthless and had absolutely no self-esteem." After many threats, he kicked Teresa out of their home. She ended up coming to Stepping Stones.

"I had no car and no money. Everything was gone. I didn't have my kids. I didn't really get out of bed and wasn't used to a routine. I didn't want to go to support groups. I really thought I was just going to wake up and get a call from him and I was going to go back home. I felt all alone. I was really scared."

"I started learning things in the support groups at the shelter. I always thought that abuse was someone hitting you, someone pushing you. I didn't realize there were so many types of abuse and that I was living them. I was sick of the mental abuse.

I was tired of feeling horrible. I always thought if I could fix my appearance, he would be happier. I realized being in this program that there's nothing wrong with me."

**"I never thought I was smart enough to do this on my own. It's been an eye opener for me. I realize I can do it."**

While living at the shelter, Teresa worked on her own recovery and addressed the parts of her life that she *could* control. "I've learned so much. It's been really hard to let go of my home and old life, even the bad parts of it. I look back and remember what he has put me through. I admit

I'm an alcoholic. I do turn to alcohol when I get really upset. But, I've gotten my own car, insurance, I pay for everything of my own now. I always thought I needed him. I'd been a stay at home mom. I never thought I was smart enough to do this on my own. It's been an eye opener for me. I realize I can do it."

Today, Teresa continues working hard to stay sober and heal from the abuse she experienced. "I have so many blessings. I'm thankful for all the advocates at the shelter. Now, I am responsible for everything I do. I want to continue to be independent. I look back at all these things I've been able to do with my kids, and I'm confident I can continue to be an amazing mom. It's a little scary, but it's ok."



Advocates lead educational support groups daily at the shelter.

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ADVOCATE



Stepping Stones advocate answering 24/7/365 Helpline on our safe campus.

### DID YOU KNOW...?

**Stepping Stones Advocates are available day and night on our 24/7/365 Helpline. Call 928-445-HOPE (4673) to speak to someone if you need safety and support.**

An essential piece of serving the people who come into the shelter at Stepping Stones are the advocates. Advocates are on site every single day of the week, whether it's a regular business day, a weekend, or even a holiday. AND advocates answer the helpline 24/7! But what does a typical day at shelter look like?

#### 6 AM

Each day at the shelter begins with an advocate bringing the residents together for morning meeting. This meeting sets the tone for the day with residents reading a 12-step inspired meditation, discussing needs and schedules for the day, and ending with individual affirmations.

#### 9 AM

After making sure the residents have what they need for the day, the advocates can be found taking on many roles. One person may be answering a crisis call from the helpline while another is meeting with

a resident to go through their individualized service plan. Some days, the advocates assist residents or members of the community with filing Orders of Protection, scheduling appointments, and other one-on-one support like safety planning. Advocates also regularly attend court hearings. Often times an advocate is simply needed for a one-on-one conversation to support a resident through their challenges or celebrate with them in their triumphs.

#### 1 PM

Almost every day, advocates lead educational support group. Groups cover topics such as Childhood Trauma, Domestic Violence, Codependency, and the 12-Steps. Each of these sessions help adults grow in understanding of the trauma and challenges they experience in their lives and empower them to do the hard work to address things in their

lives that they have the power to control.

#### 3 PM

Advocates support the adults by caring for children in the shelter when they need to attend groups or other important meetings. Advocates also spend time with these children individually throughout the week to help foster loving, stable relationships in their lives.

#### 6PM

Families often return to shelter around dinner time when they enjoy meals together, play with their children, and rest. Mentor advocates who live on site are available for emergencies and provide support for families in the evening hours.

Every day is an adventure for our advocates, and we are extremely grateful for the various positions they assume each day to support our mission.



## MEETING THEM WITH LOVE: CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY



Stepping Stones advocate looks for children's pajamas for a new family who moved into shelter.

At Stepping Stones, we view children as primary victims of abuse when they experience, witness, or are in the same home when violence occurs. Research continues to show the devastating effects of domestic violence in children, whether or not they are in the same room when it occurs. From our 44 years of experience, we often see developmental delays, attachment issues, school struggles, and inability to regulate emotions in the children that come through our doors. It is no wonder that outbursts, fear, or aggression are expressed when that behavior has been modeled in a child's formative years.

At the shelter, our team is dedicated to providing a safe space for all who walk through our doors including our smallest victims. Stepping Stones' Children's Advocacy is focused on building trust, showing children that they are no longer in harm's way, teaching them that their voice matters, and providing tools for safety that they can carry with them. We work alongside parents to create healthy boundaries and consistency in parenting. We empower parents to find resources that will ensure their child's educational and therapeutic needs are met.

Older children can participate in groups that cover a range of topics from self-esteem to understanding emotions. Younger children benefit from one-on-one interactions and play.

What does growth look like when a child works with advocates? A toddler may enter the program with severe attachment and protective tendencies toward their mother. With time, that same child will happily leave their mother's side to spend time with an advocate while their mother attends an educational support group. A younger child may get upset and cry or scream for an extended period of time, but we know that this may be the first situation in which they've felt safe enough to express their feelings without the fear of damaging punishment. Meeting the child with love and understanding rather than anger or forcefulness results in healthy behavior change from within. Finally, a child may learn about calling 911 when they are scared and one day make the phone call that saves a parent's life.

Children's Advocacy takes many forms based on the different needs that arise each day, but each and every day is a critical investment in that child's ability to grow and thrive in the future.



Stepping Stones safe campus offers space for children to play, heal, and grow while their parent receives supportive services from advocates.

## SERVICE OUTCOMES AND MORE

When people come to Stepping Stones and begin to do the hard work of healing, they see amazing changes in their lives. It doesn't happen overnight, but with consistent work and determination, they build their confidence, self-worth, and begin to live a life free from abuse. Take a look at a few statistics and outcomes we've seen over the last 12 months:



**Nearly 2,000**

Helpline Crisis & Referral Calls Answered

**182**

Adult & Children Received Face-to-Face Services



Of the Adults we served:

**73%** experienced some type of abuse as a child (physical, sexual, or emotional)

Average number of abusive relationships as an adult: **3**

*What does this tell us? It highlights that underlying trauma or behaviors may be keeping someone vulnerable to abuse.*

Advocates provided over

**5,829 HOURS**

of Face-to-Face Advocacy services including educational support groups



**THAT'S 16 HOURS PER DAY!**

## STEPPING STONES SERVICE OUTCOMES

*Upon completing services with our advocates, adults anonymously reported these outcomes about their lives:*

**100%** said they have an increased knowledge of domestic violence and its effect on their life

**97%** felt they are (re)gaining control of their life

**100%** said their safety has improved, even after leaving the program

**100%** said they are completing their goals

**100%** said they have increased knowledge and understanding of violence, abuse, and neglect's effect on their child's life

**100%** said their child demonstrates improved emotional/behavioral status during their time at SSA

## BUT THERE IS MORE WORK TO DO...

**5%** upon program completion at Stepping Stones, only 5% had permanent housing established (their own apartment, etc.). Most moved in with supportive family or friends, left the area, or found additional supportive services because they are unable to secure affordable housing in our community.

In response to the shortage of affordable housing, Stepping Stones has doubled our transitional housing units in order to help families live safely! We will continue to identify, acquire, and provide more affordable housing for families to live free from abuse.

**"I am amazed and blessed. So grateful for everything! My children and I are better humans because of the guidance and support. The children loved having the one-on-one time with the advocates."**

**- Sharon, former resident**



# SHOP LOCAL • DONATE LOCAL • SERVE LOCAL



Stepping Stones Thrift Store associates accept donations, sort and price items, and fill the shelves for you to shop.

Since 1998, Stepping Stones Thrift Store has been a special part of the community providing unique treasures, great prices, and awesome customer service.

When you shop and donate at Stepping Stones Thrift Store, you help us ensure that the lights stay on and the doors open for our 24/7/365 advocacy services. Proceeds stay right here in our community and support our mission for families who are working hard to find freedom from all forms of abuse.

Beyond that, our thrift store also provides emergency clothing for those in need and paid on-the-job training for adults in our advocacy services and others in our community who need a second chance to get back on their feet.

Gratitude is our focus - each of our associates loves to show gratitude for our customers, donors, and friends who come by the store daily. Stepping Stones Thrift is more than just a great place to shop for a deal, it's a place to learn and grow.

Stop by Tuesday - Saturday from 9 am to 5 pm for shopping and Tuesday - Saturday from 9 am - 4 pm for donation drop offs (store is closed Sunday and Monday).

It's because of our amazing community that Stepping Stones Thrift Store has been recognized for the 7th year in a row as Best Thrift Store in The Daily Courier's Readers' Choice Awards!

Thank you for shopping, donating, and making a difference in our community!



## VISIT OUR HUGE THRIFT STORE IN PV!



**WE PICK UP FURNITURE IN THE QUAD-CITIES!**

**CALL OUR DONATION CENTER: 928.759.0225**

Call to learn more about our current schedule and what we can pick up. Schedule can be up to two weeks out during busy seasons.

### STEPPING STONES THRIFT STORE

2651 N. Industrial Way, Prescott Valley | 928.499.3206

**STORE HOURS:** Tues - Sat 9 am - 5 pm

**DONATION DROP OFFS:** Tues - Sat 9 am - 4 pm

**CLOSED SUNDAYS & MONDAYS**

## SUPPORT LOCAL FAMILIES WITH A TAX CREDIT DONATION



*"Stepping Stones has saved my life, taught me more in the last 2 years than my entire 58 years, and has loved me while I learned to love myself. I have learned boundaries and my worth. No abuser will influence my life again. You guys are pretty amazing. Thank you." - Jenny (name changed)*

Because of you and the Arizona Qualifying Charitable Tax Credit program, Jenny has discovered the support she needed find freedom from abuse and learn to love herself again. Thank you for helping Stepping Stones provide

that safe place for her and other local families in West Yavapai County.

Arizona offers a dollar-for-dollar tax credit on your AZ state return by making a monetary donation to a qualified charitable organization of any amount (new for 2024 - up to \$470 filing single or \$938 filing joint). When you claim the credit, you will reduce your tax liability or increase the amount you receive in a refund. To take advantage of the tax credit, make your donation by April 15, 2025.

**DONATE ONLINE AT: STEPPINGSTONESAZ.ORG/DONATE OR FILL OUT & MAIL WITH DONATION TO:**

**STEPPING STONES AGENCIES  
2651 N. INDUSTRIAL WAY, STE A  
PRESCOTT VALLEY, AZ 86314**

### I AM EXCITED TO SUPPORT FAMILIES BY DONATING:

- \$470 tax credit (filing single)       \$100
- \$938 tax credit (filing joint)       \$50
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- Please send me information on how I can help local families for years to come through a Charitable Legacy Gift.

Please send acknowledgment & tax receipt to:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

*Please check with your tax professional for information regarding donations and your specific tax situation.*

*Stepping Stones' official Qualifying Charitable Tax Credit code from the State of Arizona is: 20034.*

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT DONATIONS OR OTHER WAYS TO HELP, CALL ALEXIS AT 928.772.4184. READY TO GIVE? SCAN QR CODE!**

