**HC chapter of Abby’s House holds fundraiser to benefit battered women**

**BY RACHEL COLL  CRUSADER NEWS STAFF**

“We believe in empowering women to lead self-directed lives filled with dignity and hope. By offering warm hospitality, we seek to be in relationships of caring and support. In naming the oppression that exists in women’s lives, we strive to create change.”

So begins the mission statement of Abby’s House, one of the cornerstones of the widely known women’s abuse centers. Abigail Foster was a feminist and abolitionist who lived during the mid-1800s and sought to spread the word on women’s rights. She spent almost fifteen years speaking out against the tolerance of violence on the home front and empowering women with the knowledge to recognize such situations and escape them.

Today, Abby’s House has become a haven to women with troubles of all sorts, ranging from domestic violence issues to drug addictions. Its overall goal is to end homelessness one family and one woman at a time.

Abby’s House brings a feeling of home to every woman that enters the door; there is a warm sense of safety present within its walls. Its staff encourages the improvement of their visitors’ lives by fostering a sisterhood of women supporting one another. All of the approximately 10,000 homeless women that pass through its doors each year find hope, friends and food in a place where they feel comfortable to express their views and feelings on the experiences that they have been through.

She was something that began to flourish after Abigail’s time. Before her time, battered women were generally blamed for being too weak to stand up for themselves in abusive situations. By advocating women’s rights, she changed the public’s perception of domestic abuse. However, even today, many people struggle with the question of whether or not to view batterers as criminals. Since 1976, Abby’s House has continued to grow and be a place for women to gather together and help one another combat such problems.

Today, Abby’s guests consist of women with all types of problems seeking an alternative to their unhappy lifestyles. In cooperation with Abby’s House, the Neighborhood Programs for Urban Development (SPUDP) sends an all-female group of students to come and stay over a night as a way of helping the women with household matters. It provides students with a way of giving back to the Worcester community as well as to learn more about problems that may be completely foreign to their own lives, or, on the other hand, may be so prevalent that volunteering presents an opportunity to help. They serve as friends and confidants to the guests, and are available anytime of night or day, just to talk.

Heidi O’Donnell, ‘02, co-chair of Holy Cross’ chapter of Abby’s House, explained how the system works. Abby’s House’s Worcester branch provides eight beds in a comfortable city house for women to have their own rooms around a common area. She described the experience of staying over as both uplifting and upsetting. The women share their hopes and their dreams with the Holy Cross girls, and admire their ethic and dedication to their education. Heidi sees the work she does as difficult to adjust to, but once she adjusted, she found it to be fully gratifying and completely rewarding.

Heidi noted that her dedication to the project entails fundraising efforts. Last Sunday, from 3 to 6 pm in the Hogan Ballroom, an auction was held to raise money for Abby’s House. Artists from the Worcester area donated their works to support the event. The paintings on display were sold to raise money for the development and construction of larger and more modern homes for women in need.

Heidi felt the event was successful and was inspired by the support demonstrated by the Worcester community. The generosity that was displayed on Sunday made her realize that there is no longer a struggle to find support for such women and the entire community is willing to gather together to support them in their struggle to live with their families and themselves.

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