

## SafeSpace opens new domestic violence shelter in Indian River County

Mike Winkoff Mar 10, 2022



Dr. Albizu



Tara and Joseph Petito

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INDIAN RIVER COUNTY - SafeSpace, a state-certified domestic violence center serving the Treasure Coast, has opened a new shelter in Indian River County. Due to the nature of the shelter, its location remains confidential.

The organization held an opening ceremony in February that was attended by members of the Gabby Petito family. Through their Gabby Petito Foundation, the family had directed a donation of \$15,000 towards helping to open the new 19-bed facility.

"We want to honor Gabby's memory and life by ensuring that no one ever has to experience what she did," said Nichole Schmidt, Gabby Petito Foundation co-founder and Gabby's mother. "We want survivors to know that they aren't alone and that there are amazing organizations ready to help."

In addition to the SafeSpace donation, the Gabby Petito Foundation gave significant donations to the National Domestic Violence Hotline (The Hotline) and The AWARE Foundation.

"These three organizations are doing incredible work on the front lines of missing persons and responding to those impacted by abuse," said Joe Petito, Gabby Petito Foundation co-founder and Gabby's father. "Our foundation is honored to present them with this support."

The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey conducted in 2010 by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that one in four women and one in seven men aged 18 and older in the United States will experience severe physical violence in their lifetime. The CDC also found that nearly half of all female homicide victims are killed by a current or former dating partner.

SafeSpace's mission is to empower adult victims of domestic violence and their children through intervention, prevention, and advocacy services. Since its founding in 1979, SafeSpace has provided nearly half a million safe nights of shelter to more than 40,000 victims and children throughout the Treasure Coast.

"We are grateful to be partnering with the Gabby Petito Foundation in providing life-saving programs and services, and bringing heightened awareness to the worldwide epidemic of intimate partner violence," said SafeSpace CEO Dr. Teresa Albizu. "We will continue working to deliver quality programs and services to adult victims of domestic violence and their children on the Treasure Coast of Florida. The unfortunate reality is that COVID-19 continues to increase the risks for those impacted by domestic abuse."

In addition to emergency shelter, SafeSpace operates a 24-hour hotline, adult education and counseling programs, shelter support groups, children's shelter programs, youth outreach prevention programs, community and professional programs, outreach advocate services, a child protection program, an injunction for protection program, an economic justice empowerment program, and transportation.

SafeSpace also has an InVest, Intimate Violence Enhanced Service Team, a partnership of advocates and local law enforcement agencies that works to identify those who are at high risk and provide them with intensive service management and accountability.

Now based in Stuart, SafeSpace was founded in Indian River County, and it opened its first emergency shelter there in 1980. But that shelter, along with one founded in St. Lucie County in 1989, closed in 2004 due to hurricane destruction.

SafeSpace opened its first emergency shelter in Martin County in 1991. It opened a 24-bed emergency shelter in Indian River County in 2007, and one in Martin County in 2008. In 2014, SafeSpace opened a new 60-bed emergency shelter in Martin County, and a 12-bed supportive living residence in Indian River County to serve all three counties.

In 2021, the organization received grants of \$100,000 from Impact100 Martin for the Martin County Outreach Center, and from Impact100 Indian River for the Indian River County Emergency Shelter.

"SafeSpace was originally founded in Indian River County in 1979, and we are immensely grateful to the various community funders and donors who supported the expansion of our programs to now include a 19-bed emergency shelter to service area residents," said SafeSpace CEO Dr. Teresa Albizu. "The unfortunate reality is that the COVID pandemic is creating an insidious rise in the incidence of domestic violence, and SafeSpace is committed to providing both residential and non-residential services to the hundreds of victims of domestic violence and their children who deserve to live a life free from violence."

In addition to the Impact100 and Petito Foundation grants, the new shelter is made possible through support from the Johns Island Foundation, Indian River Community Foundation, Johns Island Community Service League, and the Indian River Club Community Association, along with donations from individuals.

The emergency shelter has many needs that can be donated. Among the items needed are personal care items like shampoo, deodorant, soap, razors, and feminine hygiene products; masks, hand sanitizer, and gloves; kitchen items like forks, spoons, can openers, pots and pans; food; children's highchairs and strollers; baby supplies; women's clothing; shower curtains and towels; cleaning supplies; and many other miscellaneous items such as pillows, DVD players, umbrellas, ponchos, bicycles, and gift cards.

Those wishing to make a donation should call SafeSpace at (772) 223-2399.

Need help? Call SafeSpace's hotline at (772) 288-7023. Staff will assess the situation by evaluating the caller's immediate safety and need for medical attention. Staff also help develop safety and escape plans, determine the need for law enforcement assistance, and determine eligibility for shelter and outreach services.

For more information, visit [www.SafeSpaceFL.org](http://www.SafeSpaceFL.org) or call (772) 223-2399.

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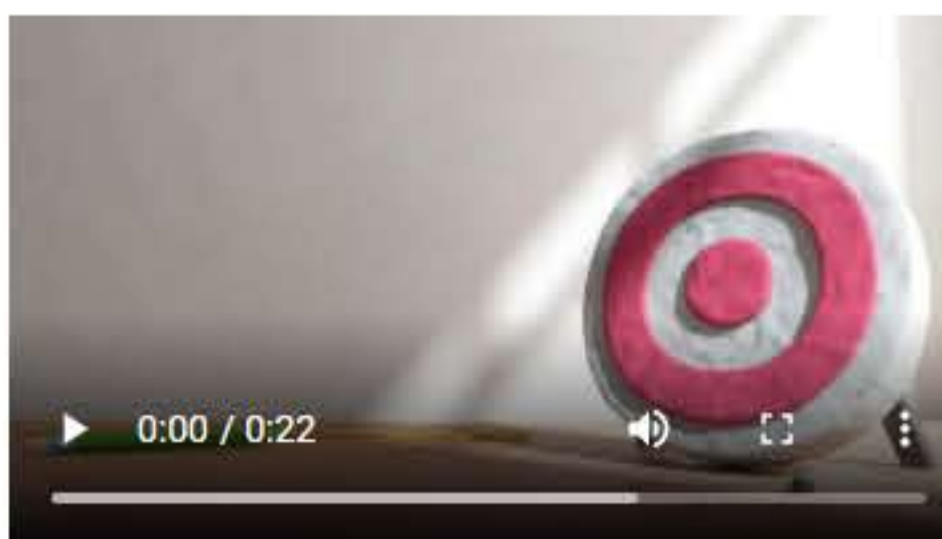
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