

Cece's Hope Center, AZFoothills Non-Profit of the Year

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CeCe's Hope Center honors the memory of a young woman who survived a traumatic childhood further impacted by sex trafficking. Founded in 2017 by Lea Benson and Rene Lopez, this organization seeks to bridge the gaps in community resources and services for young women who have been victims of sex trafficking and/or sexual exploitation. "For more than 10 years, I have sought to advocate for and identify resources, partnerships, opportunities, and a haven for hundreds of young women fighting for their right to live positive and meaningful lives," explains Ms. Benson, CEO. "During this time, I began noticing that a segment of this population falls through the cracks at a particularly vulnerable time in their lives. This reason is why we serve women ages 18-24 and make the extra effort to reach those that have aged out of the foster care or justice system or recently rescued by law enforcement."

CeCe's Hope Center's core programming centers on case management and mentorship. "We meet each young woman where she is in her journey and walk alongside her, providing resources, connecting her to services, and always being there when she needs support and guidance," says Case Manager Monica Ivy. "Half the battle is internal for them. My hope is that they feel that someone is on their side, maybe for the first time in their lives. I am most rewarded when I see them realize they are worth it."



As the organization has grown and more young women are connected to CHC, a prevalent gap exists which is not being met in the community. Short term or transitional housing is challenging to secure, especially on short notice. As a result, last year, the organization began the long process of identifying a large home that could serve as this place of respite and healing for eight women at a time. They were first seeking a rental property but have learned with the tight real estate market, and most property owners are hesitant to rent to an organization like CeCe's Hope Center. Therefore, at the time, they have begun to expand their fundraising efforts to purchase a home for their mission.

"When our community pulls together, I believe we can achieve great things. CeCe's Hope Center is about the opportunities and second chances that are available to each young woman when she is ready to take control of her life," says Board Chairman Rene Lopez. "When I was first exposed to the need for services for the survivors of sex trafficking and extreme trauma, I could not turn away. I hope that as more people become aware of this terrible crime and its effects on those who are exploited, we will attract the resources to help every young woman that comes our way."

If you would like to learn more about CeCe's Hope Center and help support their cause, please visit www.cecесcenter.org. CeCe's Hope Center is a Qualified Charitable Organization, and therefore, your contributions will qualify for an Arizona State Tax Credit!

