

extraordinary WOMEN

presented by

THOMAS J HENRY

Extraordinary Women Award Winner

HANNAH DURRANCE

Founder of the H.O.M.E. Center of Central Texas

The founder and program director of the H.O.M.E. Center of Central Texas – which provides vital assistance to individuals and families experiencing homelessness – has been named an Extraordinary Woman by the Austin Statesman and Thomas J. Henry Extraordinary Woman program. Hannah Durrance has been developing the H.O.M.E. (Homeless Outreach Mitigation and Emergency) Center since 2012, guiding the organization through some of its most challenging times amid the COVID-19 pandemic. “We work with unhoused individuals, but it’s also about community outreach and educating the community about the issues related to unhoused individuals,” Durrance said. “Because every individual has their own experience.”

Durrance earns praise, admiration and gratitude from fellow advocates and the people whose lives she helps change.

Her inspiration to start the H.O.M.E. Center came from personal experience.

“I was unhoused off and on for several years after I moved to San Marcos, and I was a single mom with children and I couldn’t find resources in the area to be able to maintain housing,” Durrance said. “Housing costs were continuing to rise, and there were just really limited resources for a single mother with children. I was frustrated by the lack of resources in the area, the struggles that I had had to endure to survive getting through college, while being unhoused off and on throughout my college time. “And so, facing all these obstacles, I started looking at ways that maybe I could make a difference,” Durrance said. “I started a nonprofit to try to just bring some help and resources to the area.”

She initially contacted the Texas Homeless Network in Austin to see how to create a homeless coalition, and eventually founded the H.O.M.E. Center as a means of having a 501(c)(3) that could do some of the work through the homeless coalition.

The key goal was to identify people’s needs and get them to the correct resources.

“Instead of handing them a sheet that just directed them to a multitude of resources that may or may not actually work for them, instead I connect people with resources by making direct contact with other nonprofits to find



Hannah Durrance

out what resources they have available,” Durrance said.

H.O.M.E., which became a 501(c)(3) in 2019, also can help people with applications to apply for disability or Social Security, and provide advice if they’re having issues with their food stamps.

“To get them connected to the right people that can help them with that process, and even have some of those people come to meet them at our shelter location,” Durrance said.

Through these processes and as H.O.M.E. began to grow, they were looked too for assistance in cases of people facing ongoing housing insecurity.

“Once a person became unhoused, they often didn’t get rehoused for very long period of time,” Durrance said.

“And so we began sheltering a few people, and then during the pandemic realized that there was a bigger crisis and we decided to start doing much more.”

This work included working with the city and county Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) programs to get people off the streets and into motel rooms.

“Their emergency assistance program pays for the motel rooms, and we provide the case management referrals for the individuals and work closely to make sure that they get into housing,” Durrance said.

H.O.M.E. has an agreement with the municipal agencies and the Texas Homeless Coalition so they can work directly with clients.

“To help them get a referral for the housing authority’s Section 8 program through the emergency housing



Ms. Diana (in red shirt) moved into a new apartment. We delivered bed, box spring and frame, a coffee table, a love seat, and other items to the family. The volunteers are Kathy and Bruce. Diana is in the middle.

voucher program,” Durrance said. “So we’ve really worked hard to just unite a lot of different resources in the area connected with Texas Homeless Network to try to get things accomplished that hadn’t been accomplished before in our area.”

Durrance has four children; the youngest was 5-months-old when she came here almost 10 years ago. She had left an abusive situation in Georgia and moved to San Marcos to attend Texas State University. They ended up having to live in the car for several weeks until she could establish residency.

“I had a friend here who recommended that I come to college here, because I was a student at a small community college in Georgia, and that I transfer to Texas State to go to college,” Durrance said. “And then when I arrived, we were under the impression that I would be able to stay at the women’s shelter since I was fleeing domestic abuse and that that would be a big help, but when we arrived, the shelter was full.”

After contacting multiple other shelters, Durrance was told they were also full.

“And so there was no place, and then the only local shelter also was not accepting anyone to stay there, and so it left me with no other recourse except to sleep in the car with the children,” Durrance said.

During the day she would take the children to the park, and try to get them enrolled in school. She would bring them with her as she was enrolling in college. Once she started her classes, she also worked several jobs in the fast-food industry, which helped provide meals for her family, and they continued to look for permanent housing.

“I mean I just remember the struggle of trying to navigate all of this without the resources in place to help me navigate it,” Durrance said. “And the only resource guide I was provided was a sheet of paper that just told where to go to get groceries assistance or where to go to get utilities assistance. There just weren’t the resources here.”

Durrance and her children eventually were able to move into public housing, and she has continued to grow the H.O.M.E. organization, helping many



Hannah Durrance and her son Bryson, now 9; he was 5-months-old when the family came to Texas.

people find those resources.

“We have over 60 rooms occupied in motels currently with the people who’ve been impacted by Covid who have lost their housing, or not been able to afford to get housing,” Durrance said.

And whether through grant funding or other donations, H.O.M.E. continues to help people navigate difficult and fearful circumstances.

“I think a lot of people assumed that the resources were here, that it wasn’t really so much of a Hays County problem, that it was more of an Austin or a San Antonio problem that there were a lot of unhoused individuals who couldn’t pay their rent,” Durrance said. “The reality is we’ve had this issue for a very long time, but there just wasn’t anyone collecting the data to demonstrate the need.”

The H.O.M.E. Center is now doing the HMIS (Homeless Management Information Systems) data collection in Hays County for the Texas Homeless Network, which allows them to see which services are most needed, in addition to regular case management when people get to H.O.M.E.

“We do intake to assess individuals, to determine what their needs are,” Durrance said. “They work with a case manager to try to get those needs met. They get referrals to various agencies that are able to assist them, and then we assist them with trying to get their deposits paid so they can

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Extraordinary Women Award Winner: Hannah Durrance

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move into housing.”

Durrance noted that one of the biggest obstacles is lack of low-income housing in the area.

“And so, we’ve been having discussions with city council members and others about some of the issues and the obstacles that people face with trying to get into housing, because we don’t have more incentives to bring low-income housing to the area,” Durrance said.

Her four children now range in age from 9 to 24. The two youngest live here; her 22-year-old lives in Florida, and her 24-year-old is in Pennsylvania.

Durrance graduated from Texas State in 2017 with a bachelor’s in History and a minor in Sociology and is currently studying for her master’s in History. She also works in a customer service job in addition to her work with H.O.M.E.

The colleague who sent Durrance’s Extraordinary Woman nomination highlighted her dedication to the community: “Witnessing the success stories of people being helped



Briana moved into housing last week. She received a welcome home basket that can be sponsored with a \$35 donation or donors can make a basket for us to hand out to people moving into their new homes.

through H.O.M.E. Center of Central Texas has been a rewarding experience. Hannah is grateful to be a part of a community of people who work hard to help others going through a difficult time in their lives, just as others helped her.”

Durrance said all the volunteers and the people who come to H.O.M.E. for help inspire her on a daily basis. “I go into the office, and they’re so grateful for being in the motel, and not being on the streets or sleeping on somebody’s sofa with their children, or being in an unsafe setting,”



Volunteer Kathy (left) helping Diana move into a new apartment.

Durrance said. “Whenever they come in, you can just see the look on their face – you can see that they feel more at ease than when they first arrived.” Durrance also likes to see the clients connect with one another when they come into the office.

“And laughing and smiling, instead of feeling overwhelmed and so stressed about their current circumstances,” Durrance said. “Because they feel like they’re safe.”

Durrance said she is grateful for and humbled by the Extraordinary Wom-

an recognition.

“I don’t think of myself that way in any way so it’s a little surprising,” Durrance said. “But to me, I just feel like I’m doing what everybody should be doing, and that’s looking out for our community and making our community a better place. I see it as I want a better future for my children. I’m not doing this because I want to be extraordinary in any way – I am doing this because I feel like our community needs this, and our children shouldn’t have to suffer.”

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statesman.com/ExtraordinaryWomen

All nominees will be showcased in our online gallery and our monthly spotlights will be invited to our Celebration Luncheon next January to be recognized for their inspiring leadership and community contributions.

Each month we will feature more extraordinary women in different professional categories in our community.

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