

Julia Spann Settling Into Role as New Executive Director of SafePlace

By: Kerri Thompson



On July 25, 2005, Julia Spann began her role as the new Executive Director of SafePlace. She was chosen by SafePlace not only because of her extensive background in the human services field, but also because she possesses a relentless fervor to make our community a better place. She has an innate passion for helping people that seems to infect anyone who comes in contact with her and has truly contributed her life to helping others.

Ms. Spann graduated from Texas A&M University with a Bachelors degree in Social Work and went on to receive her Masters degree in the same field from the University of Texas at Arlington. However, her love for social work began long before college. In fact, Ms. Spann claims that she was "born a social worker." As a teenager, she began volunteering in school as she had an interest in the ways people were segregated. After college, Ms. Spann went on to work in various social service organizations. For example, she served as the Director of Social Services for the Salvation Army and as the Associate Vice President of Allocations for the United Way of Metropolitan Tarrant County.

In 1995, Ms. Spann joined SafePlace, the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survival Center in Austin, and served as their Chief Program Officer for seven years. She played a very important role in the initial development of the organization, as she was present for its inception. In 1998, the Austin Rape Crisis Center (ARCC) and the Center for Battered Women (CBW) merged to create SafePlace. The history and experience that the ARCC and the CBW contributed to SafePlace made Ms. Spann's job less daunting, because they had already been locally and nationally recognized for helping people to stay safe and for preventing violence. In 2002, Ms. Spann left SafePlace to pursue a position as Executive Director at Caritas of Austin, an organization that works to prevent poverty, hunger, and homelessness. Although the mission of Caritas is different from that of SafePlace, community-based services and helping others who have historically been oppressed remained her top priority.

There are many similarities between Caritas of Austin and SafePlace. Both have long histories in the community, are providing exceptional service and are well regarded. Compared to Caritas of Austin, SafePlace is a considerably larger organization. It consists of 120 staff members, an 8.5 million dollar budget, and multiple buildings, and in 2005, Ms. Spann was chosen to lead this highly respected agency. In her opinion, the most important job of any Executive Director is to help the agency meet its mission, no matter what it may be. For SafePlace, the mission is to end rape, sexual abuse, and domestic violence by providing programs and services that help create safety, healing, and prevention from these types of abuses. Some programs and services that SafePlace

provides include: emergency shelter, community education, disability services, school based services and transitional housing. Ms. Spann especially loves the collaborative services the agency participates in because working with like-minded friends to create real and substantive change is exciting and meaningful.

In addition to upholding the agency's mission, Ms. Spann indicated that an Executive Director has an essential responsibility to the clients and the community. In other words, she is responsible for creating community changes/improvements in response to client needs. After all, SafePlace exists for its clients; not the other way around.

Ms. Spann has administrative responsibilities to SafePlace, as well. She must monitor the systems and processes in order to be accountable for the funds that the organization receives. Due to a limited amount of resources, Ms. Spann and her organization have learned not to waste. She has learned that every dollar counts, because that one dollar could make a difference in someone's life.

Throughout the years, SafePlace has undeniably experienced massive expansion, and Ms. Spann is truly proud of the part she played in it.

Contact Information:

The 24 Hotline number is: 512/267-SAFE

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