

or the most of us, domestic violence is an issue isolated to the month of October – the nationally recognized month for awareness. For the survivors, it's all day, every day. Whether they're in the depths of abuse or on their way to recovery, domestic violence doesn't stop once October does.

And neither does Micah's **Place** – Nassau County's unsung hero for the men and women coping with domestic violence.

"We've kind of steered away with just shoving one month out there," said Heather Jones, executive director of Micah's **Place**. "We're often overshadowed by Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, so we've really put a hard focus on making sure we're out there all year long."

Before Micah's **Place** was founded in 1999, there was nowhere for domestic violence survivors to go in Nassau County if they needed help. The nearest domestic violence shelter was out-of-county at the Hubbard House in Duval County. After noticing the perilous reality local survivors faced, a group of concerned residents banded together to provide outreach services, information and referrals with a 24/7 hotline.

Micah's **Place** was officially registered as a nonprofit organization, which enabled the group to open Nassau County's first domestic violence shelter in December 2003.

"Our overall mission is to assist domestic violence survivors," Jones said. "We're survivor-centered, so we meet them where they are."

Currently, Micah's **Place** provides every service imaginable to help domestic violence survivors, their children and the community. No matter if it's 2 p.m. or 2 a.m., someone will be at the ready to answer any call or text sent to their 24/7 hotline.

"We added texting to the hotline so people can text if they're not comfortable picking up the phone, or maybe their abuser is nearby. We can launch a secure chat from there so we can do a video conference, which will be deleted from their phone when we're done," Jones said.

The hotline is far from the only way a survivor can get in touch with Micah's **Place**. In 2008, the organization opened a resale store, Purple Dove, in Fernandina Beach to raise funds by selling lightly used clothing, furniture, houseware, small appliances and home decor generously donated by locals.

"Regardless if they drive a truck for the Purple Dove or work in the shelter or are the finance director, everybody on our staff takes the same training as far as assisting domestic violence survivors," Jones said.

Eight years later, Micah's **Place** opened a second Purple Dove center in Callahan, providing easier access to resources and assistance for survivors on the west side.

"We hope that the Purple Dove and the things we do in the community can not only raise money and awareness, but also to make people aware that others are affected and how they can help," said Cassie Ott, outreach director for Micah's **Place**. "It can be donating clothes to the Purple Dove. It can be sponsoring one night of safety in the shelter. One night can change everything."

Micah's **Place** also offers legal aid, counseling, financial assistance and educational training a survivor might need to escape an abusive environment and, hopefully, never return. During a stay at the shelter – which can be sponsored for \$46.22 per night – the organization provides all basic needs, including food, toiletries, advocate support and security for survivors and their children.

In just this last year alone, Micah's **Place** assisted more than 1,100 domestic violence survivors from Nassau

County.

“We’re never empty. The phone’s never not ringing. We work so hard in the community to raise awareness, and part of our mission is to hopefully end domestic violence,” Ott said. “If a **place** like us doesn’t exist, do people realize that the issue exists?”

And exist, it does. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, about 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men experience domestic violence in the form of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, as well as stalking. However, the true scope of this issue is impossible to determine due to rampant underreporting out of fear or embarrassment.

“Inevitably, you know someone at that number,” Ott said.

In recent years, Micah’s **Place** added an attorney on staff to help survivors apply for an Injunction for Protection, which provides legal protection against an abuser. The organization also assists with criminal court proceedings. This legal aid is offered to survivors free of charge.

“We’re always coming up with new ideas of how we can help survivors,” Ott said. “We’re empowerment-based and survivor-led. We guide them through figuring out what their goals are.”

Ott adds that since survivors leave heavily controlled environments often enforced through physical violence, Micah’s **Place** never tries to control a path to recovery. Whether it’s to hold their hand in a courtroom or navigate the tricky waters of legal protection, there will always be an unbiased advocate ready to help.

“No matter what you do, no one deserves to be abused,” Ott said. “We believe you and someone is here to help you. There is hope out there. You’re not alone.”

If you or a loved one is struggling with domestic violence, the 24-hour hotline can be reached via phone or text at 904-225-9979. For more information about their services, visit [micahsplace.org](http://micahsplace.org).