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## **LIFEGUARD GROUP RAISING SUPPORT FOR HUMAN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS' SAFE HOUSE**

MISSOULA, MT—The LifeGuard Group is developing a new shelter in the Bitterroot Valley for human trafficking victims. The “LifeHouse” will house 6 women this spring, providing “healing and restoration,” according to Lifeguard Group Executive Director Lowell Hochhalter.

“This is the number one need we’ve seen—to have a place where human trafficking victims can be restored and find the healing they need to successfully rebuild their lives,” Hochhalter says. “LifeHouse will bring that peace.”

The 40-acre property includes a main lodge, house, and several outbuildings. Besides providing a safe haven it will offer equine, art, dance, and outdoor therapy; physical and mental healthcare; legal assistance; and advocacy. Staff will help survivors integrate into society, by providing a family-like setting, healthy social interaction, and job preparation. Eventually the property will accommodate 15 women.

The safe house is funded by a major grant from the Gianforte Family Foundation, and donations from other private foundations, churches, individuals, and families from as far away as Japan and Costa Rica. “We are well over halfway to our fundraising goal of \$1.6 million for the property, renovations, and two years of operations,” Hochhalter says.

According to Catherine Koenen, executive director of the Gianforte Family Foundation, “The LifeGuard Group has taken a lead in bringing awareness and solutions to Montana’s human trafficking issue, and we’re pleased to help them extend their work by providing a safe refuge for women who are victims of this horrible crime. We’re eager to see the peace and healing that will come from it.”

According to the LifeGuard Group, nearly 300,000 women and children each year are trafficking victims in the U.S., and only 1 percent of human trafficking victims are ever rescued. The vast majority of trafficking victims are women, and more than half are children.

The LifeGuard Group spearheaded a statewide human trafficking hotline (1-833-406-STOP) in 2020, working with human trafficking groups, law enforcement, businesses, and nonprofits throughout Montana. Last year, the hotline answered 86 calls for help; 89 percent of the victims were female. The LGG also assists in search and rescue efforts for missing persons, participating in 6 recoveries in 2021.

Those wanting to support the LifeGuard Group can “adopt a room” by providing donations and sweat equity for the renovations. “Several rooms have been adopted by area churches and families, and are already undergoing remodeling,” says Hochhalter. “You can bring a work team,” noting that electricians, plumbers, and welders are especially welcome.

Volunteers are also needed to staff the trafficking hotline and online donations are accepted at [thelifeguardgroup.org/donate](https://thelifeguardgroup.org/donate). The nonprofit is also planning two fundraising events later this year—a gala and a golf tournament. For more information, call 406-396-5053 or visit [thelifeguardgroup.org](https://thelifeguardgroup.org).