

ORANGE COUNTY  
**REGISTER**  
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# LOCAL



BRUCE CHAMBERS, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**Ronda Terrell and her son, Andrew Paul, both victims of abuse, volunteer together at Laura's House Resale Store in Lake Forest.**

# Laura's House marks 20 years of offering hope

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In 1992, just before her 38th birthday, Ellen Hills' daughter Laura died of "respiratory failure."

According to news reports, she had broken ribs, a collapsed lung and a head injury. Although no criminal charges were filed against Laura's husband, Hills and her family believed he was responsible.

After her daughter's death, Hills told Laura's story to anyone who would listen, advocating for stiffer penalties for batterers, providing information about shelters and restraining orders to mothers and daughters, and encouraging victims to press charges against their abusers.

One of those who listened was Beau Donegan, a domestic abuse survivor. Donegan and others were working at the time to open a shelter in south Orange

## Did you know?

- Victims don't have to suffer physical abuse to be accepted into the shelter. Laura's House is for survivors of all forms of intimate partner abuse, including emotional, psychological and financial abuse.

- Physical violence is not required to obtain a restraining order. Threats, harassment, stalking or destruction of property are all grounds for such an order.

- Domestic abuse victims leave their abusers an average of seven times before they get out for good.

Source: Laura's House

County. They decided to name the facility, which opened in 1994, in honor of Hills' daughter.

Two decades later, Laura's House continues Hills' fight. In that time, it has been a lifeline to abuse victims and their families, offering counseling, legal as-

sistance and a helping hand to more than 45,000 people. A celebration for the public is set for Thursday at the shelter's corporate office in Ladera Ranch. RSVP to 949-361-3775.

The Register spoke with Donegan, executive director Margaret Bayston and volunteer Ronda Terrell about the shelter, what it provides for domestic violence victims and what's next for Laura's House.

**Q. Who was behind Laura's House?**

**A.** Laura's House was founded by the South Orange County Domestic Violence Action Committee. The effort was spearheaded by Donegan, Sandy Condello and Helen Kendall with support from community groups such as the San Clemente Junior Women's Club. They spent about 18 months raising funds through bake sales, casino nights, selling food

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# LAURA'S

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at street fairs and teaming up with community groups for events.

**Q. Where does Laura's House get its funding today?**

**A.** It costs more than \$2.8 million annually to keep open the doors of Laura's House offices, resource center, emergency shelter and transitional housing, executive director Margaret Bayston said. About one-quarter of its revenue comes from government grants, and one-third comes from corporate donations and foundation grants.

The bulk of the remainder comes from individual donations, fundraisers, the organization's resale store and in-kind donations such as pro bono work and gardening services. Laura's House also has launched a program through which supporters can include Laura's House in their wills, Bayston said.

**Q. Laura's House is one of four shelters in the county to receive state funds. What are the requirements for that?**

**A.** Required services include: a 24-hour hotline, counseling for children and adults, walk-in centers, emergency shelter, emergency food and clothing, ability to respond to emergency calls from law enforcement, helping with hospital emergency room protocol, offering emergency transportation, legal assistance and court advocacy, being a community resource and referral service, helping out with establishing a new household and offering help in different languages.

Laura's House was first approved in 1994 and annually receives about \$200,000 in state grants for maintaining the requirements, Bayston said.

**Q. How are domestic abuse victims helped at Laura's**



MARIE EKBERG PADILLA,  
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Margaret Bayston, executive director of Laura's House, appears next to an undated childhood photo of Laura, for whom the nonprofit is named.

## Timeline

**1994:** A group of South County residents opens Laura's House, which includes a counseling center in San Clemente and an emergency shelter at an undisclosed location.

**1995:** Laura's House Thrift Store opens in San Clemente.

**1997:** Laura's House launches legal restraining order services, including a monthly legal clinic, with the Orange County Bar Association.

**2001:** Margaret Bayston is brought on as executive director of the nonprofit organization.

**2007:** Laura's House moves its corporate offices and counseling and resource center to Ladera Ranch.

**2009:** Thrift store is rebranded as Laura's House Resale Store and moved to Lake Forest. Laura's House receives \$2 million in seed funding from the Douglas Trust toward a \$4.5 million capital campaign to rebuild emergency shelter and construct transitional facility.

**2011:** Rebuilt shelter opens in December as a 10-bedroom residence that can house up to 55 women and children.

**2012:** Transitional facility opens in March with capacity for up to 25 people.

**2014:** Laura's House celebrates its 20th anniversary June 12, having helped more than 45,000 people since it opened.

Source: Andrea McCallister, Laura's House

## House?

**A.** Hotline callers are interviewed to determine if

they qualify for the shelter program. Callers can't be addicted to drugs or alcohol or have serious mental issues. For their safety, they need to be willing to not use any electronic communication devices for 72 hours. If they qualify, they are taken to a "safety net" location for one night before being brought to the shelter. At the shelter, where they can stay for up to 45 days, they must participate in counseling, do chores, enroll children in new schools and talk to legal advocates about their options, volunteer Ronda Terrell said.

Once they graduate from the shelter, their case managers help them apply to Laura's House transitional living facility or other facilities, where they can stay up to 12 months. They continue with counseling and becoming self-sufficient in a safe environment, but must pay rent and are responsible for their food and child care.

**Q. What's next for Laura's House?**

**A.** The nonprofit organization's five-year strategic plan includes adding long-term housing to its facilities so victims can work on goals such as completing their education, finding stable employment and building healthy home environments for their families, Bayston said. Such housing would allow victims to stay for one to two years to really break the cycle of violence, she said.