



Published: May 20, 2010

Miriam's House reflects on success after 11 years

By Alicia Petska

Nichole Bradley didn't make it very far the first time she came to Miriam's House, but on Wednesday she stood as an example of what the Lynchburg nonprofit, which works to help homeless women transition to self-sufficiency, could help someone achieve.

Bradley, who delivered the keynote speech during the 11th annual Miriam's House luncheon, recalled first coming to the program as a stubborn 18-year-old who couldn't abide "someone else telling me what to do." She ended up taking off after less than two months.

"Although I would never have admitted it then, I was my own worst enemy," she said.

But not long afterward, Bradley learned she was pregnant and her perspective changed. She went back to Miriam's House and began attending college with help from one of its donors.

In 1998, just a few weeks after her daughter's first birthday, she successfully graduated from the program. She continues to work with it today as one of its most ardent board members.

Her daughter, now the oldest of three children, is in seventh grade and has her mother's laugh.

"Were it not for Miriam's House, I would not have had the opportunity to know and love and cherish this young girl who amazes me every day," Bradley, fighting back tears and inspiring more than a few dewy eyes in the audience, said.

The annual Miriam's House luncheon, held at Lynchburg College and attended by more than 300 women, serves as the organization's major fundraiser.

Miriam's House, which helped 27 women and 17 children last year, is currently working to expand its donor base. Toward that end, it has brought on a D.C.-based consultant, Mary Alex, to serve as its interim executive director and help it develop a new fundraising plan.

Like many nonprofits, Miriam's House has been under some financial pressure lately. Last year, it announced it was closing its in-house daycare facility due to the "challenging" climate.

“We do have many generous donors, but we want to try and make more people aware of what we do,” Anne Gibbons, president of the board of directors, said Wednesday. “We don’t want Miriam’s House to be a best-kept secret.”

Alex, who started work last week, has been in the nonprofit arena for 19 years with a focus on causes related to women and children. She was last in Nigeria working with nongovernmental organizations to rescue commercial sex workers and combat the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Although she’s only been in Lynchburg for a short time, she said she was “blown away” by the community and Miriam’s House.

During Wednesday’s event, Miriam’s House also presented Shannon Valentine with the 2010 Elizabeth M. Forsyth Community Service Award, which is named after the organization’s founder.

Valentine, referencing her long history volunteering with Habitat for Humanity, said she had seen firsthand “how precious and how powerful” it was for a family to have a secure home. She praised Miriam’s House for giving women a chance to build a new life.