

Handmade Especially For You

BY NATASCHA GRIEF

knitting for good

Handmade Especially For You is the brainchild of Leslye Borden, a knitter who wanted to help women who have had the courage to leave an abusive environment. The non-profit's mission is to gift women entering a shelter with something made by the hands of someone who cares for their well-being and wishes them the very best, which can be a huge comfort during a very frightening time.

"Women come in to the shelters with very low self-esteem," says Leslye. "She comes in thinking things like, 'I'm worthless, I brought this on myself.' The scarf can be a spark to help them think, 'Maybe I am worth something.'"

"I've had shelter directors tell me that the women are so amazed to get something like this from someone they don't even know that it lifts their self-esteem, and this is used as a jumping off point for their counselors," she continues. "These scarves are a reward for these women, who sometimes have nothing but the clothes on their backs, for leaving an abusive situation."

Volunteers knit the scarves with yarn that is donated by several yarn companies, including Crystal Palace, Lion Brand and Knitting Fever. The experience of knitting the scarves is often just as meaningful to the knitters as it is to the women who will eventually receive their handiwork.

"It's incredible," says Leslye. "It makes a difference for the women who get the scarves as well as for the women who receive them. I have volunteers who make 11 scarves a week! They are so committed."

Once completed, each scarf is affixed with a handwritten tag containing a message from the knitter to the woman who is entering a shelter, a



human touch that really drives home the point that someone cares about them.

Handmade Especially For You has grown organically, with chapters being formed in several other cities in the United States. Lois Anderson of Madison, WI started a chapter in her community in March.

"I came across the [Handmade Especially For You] website," Lois recalls. "It touched a nerve, as I've witnessed abuse and no one

deserves to be treated that way. It sounded simple —just ask people to make a comfort scarf. I knew I could make it happen. Initially I didn't know how, but I just knew."

Founder Leslye Borden was more than happy to help Lois make the Madison chapter a reality.

"She sent me information about what needed to be done and suggestions of how to go about doing it," Lois says. "She provided everything I needed to begin. Most of all she sent encouragement and continues to do so."

Leslye Borden and her volunteers delivered 500 comfort scarves in the month of May to 25 different shelters in Southern California, and welcomed nine new chapters from across the U.S. into the fold.

"Doing this work has truly changed my life," says Leslye. "Doing this makes me feel wonderful every day."

For more information about Handmade Especially For You, please visit www.handmadeespecially.org or contact Leslye Borden directly at handmade.leslye@gmail.com.

To learn more about the Madison, WI chapter, please contact Lois Anderson at landerson@uwalumni.com.

