

Thistle Farms: If You Want to Heal a Village, Heal the Women

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Editor's note: As members of WFWP, we are always looking to support and partner up with like-minded women's organizations that do incredible work, especially as we launch the Global Women's Peace Network around the country. Read the article below to find out how two WFWP members were inspired to connect to Thistle Farms, a nonprofit social enterprise.

After hearing Becca Stevens, author, speaker, Episcopal priest, social entrepreneur, founder, and president of Thistle Farms speak at a spirituality conference in Atlanta, GA, I knew that I had to visit the place in Nashville, Tennessee. Inspired by the model of Thistle Farms, a nonprofit social enterprise that is dedicated to helping women survivors recover and heal from prostitution, trafficking and addiction, Celeste Koshida (WFWP member and former chairwoman in Georgia) and I decided to go on a WFWP field trip and attend a one day seminar on April 30th, 2019.

A victim herself of sexual abuse, Becca Stevens had a vision of creating a community and homes that would provide the opportunity for women who have been bought, sold, abused and devalued to heal. In

1997, the first home opened with five women. On the wall was one of the Thistle Farms slogans: "Love says come in off the streets, here's a safe place to live."



Magdalene is the name of the two-year residential program that offers women a peaceful place to live and receive support while they focus on living sober, honest and self-sufficient lives. All services are provided without government assistance and are free of charge. The women work to gain financial independence through the social enterprises of Thistle Farms, producing candles and body-care products and operating a café and artisan studios. These are all under the motto "Love Heals," serving to remind everyone who uses the products that, deeper than all the scars women carry from childhood trauma, rape and whatever pain befalls them, there is healing.

Celeste and I met and heard from so many amazing women who are graduates of the program or current residents. The entire operation is staffed and run by these women.

We toured the bookstore and factories where the candles and body-care products are made. Our tour guide was the son of one of the early graduates of Thistle Farms. Both mother and son play important roles in continuing the legacy. He showed us the simple crockpot and pitcher from which the first candles were made. Now the factory is expanding and being automated.

Guided by 24 spiritual principles including Finding Your Place in the Circle, Let God Sort It Out, Forgive and Feel Freedom and Live in Gratitude, the organization has grown to serve more than 700 women yearly. In addition, Thistle Farms is creating a national network which includes sister organizations utilizing their model in cities across the country as well as many other partners, advocates and organizations united in the belief that love is the most powerful force for changing the world.

Becca Stevens says, "If you want to heal a village, heal the women...the community from the first five women was a powerful witness -- that acceptance, commitment, and love help women find healing from some of the oldest and deepest scars this world has ever known. After a couple years of meeting with survivors and witnessing miracles of healing love, I knew that I would be doing this work for the rest of my life. The survivor-leaders were living with a new power and grace that I knew could potentially bring healing throughout the world."

I introduced Becca Stevens to WFWP and our vision, and she referred me to an organization in Atlanta that uses the Thistle Farms model called Beloved Atlanta.

For more inspiring details about Thistle Farms and to support this worthy cause, visit thistlefarms.org and purchase some of their luxurious products.