

Omaha recently delivered 100 purses to Catholic Charities Shelter for Abused Women in Council Bluffs, Iowa. In checking our records, we have been supporting their work since 2012. During those 8 years we have donated over 1400 purses. The charity was originally named the Phoenix House. They helped one of our members out of an abusive relationship and she wanted to give back. Our Pass the Purse project was created.

To many women, our purse is an organization tool, a repository of the items necessary to get us through the day. When you are walking away from abuse, you can be counseled to leave your purse (a signal that you are leaving). When you arrived at the shelter, they would present you with a purse. This was the start of your new normal. We decided to “pass our purses” to help support these women.

We cleaned our closets of purses we were no longer using. We cleaned them up and made sure all zippers worked, etc. Then we started buying the items to fill them. Most important an emergency contacts card. Numbers of the shelters in Council Bluffs and Omaha, hospitals, cab companies and a \$5 bill to cover the cab ride. We added wallets, key chains, pen and notepads, kleenex, manicure sets, hand lotion, key chains, combs, hand sanitizer, lip balm, etc. I sure this is a familiar list to women. These are the tools to help us organize our lives; that we reach for when we open our purses.

We have cleared our own closets of purses and reached out to friends, family, neighbors and co-workers to clean their closets of purses. I understand the purses are now used as a graduation gift when women complete classes (finance; personal safety; etc) offered by the shelter.

There is a reward for us too, knowing that we are showing these women that we believe in them and are invested in their future. We want them to survive and flourish and know other women believe they can succeed, and want them to be safe.

I have to admit, we like to “shop” the purses as we stuff them. There is such a selection, small, large, every color and style imaginable. There are lots of comments “This purse needs a pink wallet; How could you lift this purse when it is full, How can you keep straight which pocket has what? I have this purse in blue, etc. There is laughter, ooohs and awww’s as we select a purse, add a wallet and fill the purses to line them up to reach the 100 purse goal.

This picture is 8 of the 10 members who helped fill the purses for this falls “Pass the Purse”. From left to right: Jay Nelsen, Connie Prokupek, Julie Nelson, Diane Ballinger, Kayde Leslie, Kathy DuVall, Anne Menichetti, and Molly Fraser. Not shown Casey Zahner and Ruth Zahner. We have a good start on the purses needed for our Spring donation!