

# SOUTH FLORIDA Parenting

## south florida NEWS

# Shelter a refuge for homeless moms, children

By Nadia Sorocka

MIAMI-DADE COUNTY — Being pregnant, raising a toddler and maintaining a healthy life can be challenges for women in the best of situations. Facing these challenges as one of the many homeless Floridians living on the streets of Miami-

Dade County is even more daunting.

Constance Collins Margulies, director and founder of the Sundari Foundation, was inspired to start the Lotus House Women's Shelter, 217 NW 15th St. in Miami's Overtown neighborhood, after she witnessed the struggles of homeless women in Miami. Along with volunteers and the community at large, Margulies created a transition shelter that would provide free housing and a wide range of support services and resources to homeless women.

"Women living on the streets are very physically vulnerable," Margulies said. "They survive by staying invisible. We help get the help they need."

The Lotus House, a shelter of last resort, opened in 2006 and provides a stable home for almost 60 homeless women, ranging in age from 18 to 80, and their infants and toddlers.

"We have created an oasis with two apartment buildings, a community resource building and lush gardens," Margulies said.

The shelter acts as an oasis from the streets, creating a safe family-like environment where women can spend up to a



The Lotus House in Miami provides free shelter in a family-like environment for homeless mothers.

year transitioning from homelessness to a permanent residence. During her time at the shelter, a woman may give birth, raise an infant or toddler and end the cycle of domestic violence, untreated mental illness and unemployment, as the shelter offers a maternity ward, medical facility and job training.

"We take a holistic approach with women healing the body, mind and spirit," Margulies said. "We provide access to women's health, classes to heal the body and mind, as well as empower the women [with] job training and placement."

To improve quality of life, women at Lotus House are exposed to the arts as well as job training and preparation. They can also take advantage of practice interviews and transportation and day care assistance. The women also get retail training by working in the shelter's thrift store, Lotus House Thrift, 203 NW 36th St., in Miami's Design District.

"Lotus House becomes their family. Every woman becomes a mother, grandmother, aunt and sister," Margulies said.

For more information or to see a list of needed items, visit [www.lotushouseshelter.org](http://www.lotushouseshelter.org) or call 305-365-2478.