

## Celebrating Achievement

SafeHouse staff is very proud of the fact that two members of our team received their undergraduate degrees this June from San Francisco State University.

Katherine (Kat) Penagos was awarded a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Women and Gender Studies and a minor in Education. Kat has been a part-time Residential Counselor with SafeHouse since early this year and hopes to gain more experience as an RC to continue to help those who are marginalized and in need of help. She would like to pursue graduate school in the future and eventually work as a counselor.

Toni Eby, Operations & Finance Manager, also received her Bachelor of Arts with a Major in Women and Gender Studies. Toni was further honored by being selected as the Undergraduate hood recipient for the College of Liberal & Creative Arts. This prestigious honor is given to one undergraduate and one graduate who represent their classmates during the ceremony by wearing their college's academic hood and sitting on the stage. As many of you know, Toni is also a graduate of SafeHouse and uses her personal experience as motivation and inspiration to continue serving survivors of violence against women. Toni has been accepted into the graduate Social Work program at SF State where she will continue her education while working at SafeHouse.

Please join us in congratulating Kat and Toni!



*Kat Penagos Residential Counselor*

### How Can You Help?

Become a monthly supporter!

Send a gift card to Home Depot, Amazon or Costco.

Order from Munchery? List San Francisco SafeHouse as your charity of choice!

Hire a SafeHouse woman as an intern at your organization or business.

Raise awareness about sexual exploitation and homelessness in San Francisco.

### Your donations go to support Safehouse woman.

Please make checks payable to:

San Francisco SafeHouse  
P.O. Box 40369  
San Francisco, CA 94140

Or donate online:  
<http://www.sfsafehouse.org>



San Francisco SafeHouse is a safe and sober transitional housing program for women who have been sexually exploited.

### New Interim Executive Director

We are pleased to announce that Pamela Merchant joined the SafeHouse team in April as Interim Executive Director.

Pamela is a senior professional with extensive leadership and social justice experience. An attorney by training, she has spent the past few years providing leadership, strategic planning, fundraising and governance advice to nonprofits. Prior to that, she served for nine years as Executive Director of the Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA), a human rights organization dedicated to ending torture and seeking justice through litigation, education and outreach. She is a former state and federal prosecutor and has served in leadership roles on numerous nonprofit boards including the Northern California Community Loan Fund, Continuum HIV Day Services, Tenderloin Health and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission.

Pamela is passionate about our mission to provide a safe, nurturing and empowering community for homeless women seeking to escape sexual violence. She is excited about bringing her skills and experience to the Interim Executive Director role and helping to support a successful leadership transition.

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### Learning to Love Myself

*Lisa\* – SafeHouse Graduate, Amazing Community Activist, and Dog Mom*

I am originally from the Midwest, and prior to coming to San Francisco was in an extremely abusive relationship. Although I'm a licensed cosmetologist, I was actively engaged in prostitution. My ex-boyfriend was physically and financially abusive which made it hard for me to maintain my self-esteem and sense of self-worth. In order to cope, I started using drugs; when I would try to stop using he would bring drugs around to keep me hooked. He verbally abused me and made me feel like I deserved little as an African American Woman. It was a hard situation and, although they tried, I was unable to get the emotional support I needed from my family. I made several attempts to go to college but was unable to finish because of the abuse and our transient lifestyle.

I eventually moved to San Francisco to escape the drugs, abusive ex-boyfriend, and prostitution. I thought I could make a fresh start. However, due to the high cost of living, I ended up homeless and on the streets. I didn't know my way around, and was looking for work and attempting to use the shelter system to get on my feet. It was a very scary time in my life. I saw a lot of drug use, violence, and sexual assault while living on the San Francisco streets.

Fortunately, all of that changed when I came to SafeHouse. I no longer had to worry about finding food, being safe, or wondering where I was going to sleep at night. I didn't have to try to seek help all over the City. I had everything I needed at SafeHouse. I started therapy to work on my issues and self-esteem and was able to save money and do fun things that I hadn't done before. I was able to get out of my comfort zone and do things that were new and positive. Because I didn't have to worry about things like paying utility bills and household supplies, I was able to really focus on myself.

SafeHouse made me feel secure about myself and my sexual orientation because I was in a safe place where I was treated fairly. They allowed me the opportunity to work through my internal issues, and become whole.

My life is very full now. I started working part-time shortly after entering the SafeHouse program. The part-time position eventually became full time and I recently picked up an additional part-time job with a pharmaceutical company. Thanks to the staff's help getting me on housing lists, I now live in a beautiful one bed-room apartment in the heart of San Francisco. I am getting ready to go back to school, and am actively volunteering in the community. SafeHouse helped me to believe in myself. I feel so very lucky to have been there.

\* Lisa's name has been changed to protect the privacy of the graduate.