

## **Kelly White announces retirement as Co-CEO of SAFE**

*Julia Spann to become CEO.*

**February 2022, Austin, Texas** – Kelly White, Co-CEO of The SAFE Alliance, has announced she is leaving the organization as Co-CEO effective March 31, 2022.

Over the past three decades, Kelly has been part of SAFE’s history and has been an instrumental part of the agency’s predecessor organizations, the Center for Battered Women, SafePlace, Austin Rape Crisis Center, and the Austin Children’s Shelter.

When Kelly was hired as Executive Director at the Center for Battered Women in 1993, one of her first projects was a capital campaign to purchase property on Grove Boulevard and obtain HUD funding to build apartments. The Supportive Housing Program opened in 1996.

She led the Center for Battered Women through a merger with the Austin Rape Crisis Center to create SafePlace, all while building the Grove Resource Center. She then managed a deal with the City of Austin in which the Salvation Army would receive the Center for Battered Women shelter and the city would give SafePlace \$3 million to build a new shelter. The Family Shelter was completed in 2000, as was the child development center, school, and warehouse.

That was all in the first decade of her work in Austin. Kelly went on to run for political office, author a book, lovingly mother three children, and lead the Chicago Foundation for Women. Kelly returned to Austin in 2010 to take the position of CEO at Austin Children’s Shelter, which she led through a merger with SafePlace in 2017 to form SAFE.

“The concept of SAFE is the exact right model,” Kelly White said, “and it is tough. Addressing the full cycle of violence is imperative because violence and abuse happen sequentially and simultaneously in people’s lives. If we want to end generational violence, the only way to do it is to deal with the totality of violence and abuse, rather than creating some arbitrary silos around domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and trafficking.”

Today, Austin is one of the few cities in the world with an organization like SAFE that addresses the cycle of violence and abuse holistically. Many years ago, Kelly saw the interconnected, intergenerational nature of child abuse, domestic violence, and sexual assault. Over the decades, she has strategically worked to create a community organization that works on all types of violence in order to stop that cycle.

As a survivor herself, Kelly has always put the needs of the people we serve front and center.

“When I started I was ashamed to admit that I was a survivor—no one acknowledged it back then,” Kelly said. “But somewhere along the way I realized that this was an experience and voice I should bring to the work.”

Her desire to grow shelter, advocacy, the hotline, anything to help kids who have been hurt, powerful prevention services, and more has all been informed by having survived abuse.

“I will miss Kelly at SAFE,” said Julia Spann, current Co-CEO of SAFE. “I am and have always been in awe of her vision and drive. I cannot overstate the impact of Kelly’s work in this community.”

Kelly leaves SAFE in a strong financial position moving into the new fiscal year and the agency will continue to be led by committed and exemplary executive leadership. Julia Spann, SAFE’s current Co-CEO alongside Kelly, will continue as SAFE’s sole CEO. Having built a community of partners and supporters over these decades, SAFE is confident that our place in Austin is secure and that we can continue to serve survivors of abuse and violence.

If you would like to inquire about an interview with Kelly White, other SAFE staff, or community partners Kelly has worked with over the years, please email SAFE Communications Officer Antwon R. Martin at [amartin@safeaustin.org](mailto:amartin@safeaustin.org) or call 512.772.9374.

Historical photos available.

### **About SAFE**

SAFE is a Central Texas nonprofit committed to providing safety, stability, and healing to anyone who has experienced violence and abuse. Locally, we provide housing, support services, and prevention programs to stop the cycle of violence. Globally, we engage in conversations that shape a culture free from violence and abuse. Learn more at [safeaustin.org](http://safeaustin.org).