



# Unmasking The Truth Of Child Abuse

Masquerade Ball Raises Donations For Rainbow House

BY CHELSEA BENGIER

For the past three years, the Masquerade Ball has been one of the two major fundraisers for Rainbow House, an organization that helps abused and homeless children from Columbia and eight other counties. The annual event is at 7 p.m. on Saturday, March 17, at the Elks Lodge, 4747 E. Elk Park Drive. Tickets are \$75 per person and \$125 per couple.

The event changes every year to keep it fresh and interesting for the guests. For this month's event, there will be a red carpet entrance and optional black-tie dress. Entertainment will include music from the Norm Ruebling Band, live painting with David Spear, and Aric Bremmer as emcee.

"We wanted a fundraiser that would get the community involved," Rainbow House Marketing Director April Barnett says. "It is here to unmask child abuse and shed light

on the struggles children face every day."

The Masquerade Ball raised \$36,000 last year, says Development Director Chad McMinn. This year's goal is to raise between \$40,000 and \$45,000. All the money goes to the Rainbow House's three programs: the Children and Teen Emergency Shelter, the Homeless Youth Program and the Child Advocacy Center. McMinn estimates that 250 to 300 will attend this year.

The live auction is the largest draw for the event. There are 10 to 15 packages, which include cooking classes, hot air balloon rides, trips to Washington, D.C., and a tailgate for 20 people. Donation jars will be set out during the event.

At the end of the evening, one of the three king and queen candidate couples will be crowned for raising the most money. Each couple runs their own fundrais-

ing activities; people may donate online or in person.

Candidate Amy Susan and her husband, Bogdan, will be attending the Masquerade Ball for the first time. They are raising money by selling tables for the event and hosting fundraisers such as an Oscars Award Show party.

"Asking people for what's in their pockets, whether one dollar or 50, allows those who don't have a large income to donate and become involved in a good cause," says Amy Susan. She hopes to raise \$5,000; at press time, she had collected \$1,500 by selling tables for the Masquerade Ball. She is also making HeadFrocks, which she will sell at Swank to raise money for the event.

"Awareness is the most important thing," she says. "Everyone can find a way to help by having a little love and most importantly, sharing their love."

The Rainbow House not only serves sexually or physically abused children, but also helps a growing group known as "throwaways," those who are too young to be on their own but too old for foster care.

"These kids have no home," Susan says. "It is haunting and disturbing to think they have nowhere to go, especially on cold, snowy nights."

The Rainbow House accommodates as many children as it can, but there is always a waiting list of 15 or more for the Homeless Youth Program. This 18-month program makes sure teens are on an education track and teaches them to be financially independent. Participants must go to school, work or perform community service for 40 hours a week. Also included is a Life Skills program where they learn to cook, interview and write resumes.

Susan says she thinks the program gives homeless children a chance they wouldn't have had on the streets. As a supporter of the program, she encourages others to donate, too.

"Find a way to always keep it on your mind," Susan says. "Make it a part of your every day life and raise awareness any way you can. Every little thing helps." ■

> To purchase tickets or find out more about the Masquerade Ball, visit [www.rainbowhousecolumbia.org](http://www.rainbowhousecolumbia.org).