

## **POINTS OF LIGHT: Domestic violence creates homeless surge**

*(originally published January 24, 2026)*

By Chuck Malloy

Imagine the desperation LaRita Shepherd must have felt three years ago, sleeping in her car or along the Boise River. And she had a 7-year-old daughter who was living somewhere else.

LaRita says that as bad as those days were, they still felt safer than staying with her abuser. She tried to leave several times, but each attempt ended with him finding her again. With a shelter feeling out of reach, her only “safe haven” became her car or the banks of the Boise River. In the chaos of survival, substance use took hold as she tried to cope.

“The summers were extremely hot and the winters were beyond freezing,” she said.

Along the way, someone told LaRita about CATCH, a nonprofit agency that helps homeless families find housing and get back on their feet. Now, LaRita and her daughter are living in an apartment in Boise. LaRita is off drugs, working full time and pursuing a career in cosmetology. Her daughter is thriving as a fifth-grade student.

And LaRita is a testimony about the value of CATCH.

“CATCH gave me the self-confidence I have today,” she says. “They’ve given me and many others a second chance at life. Life just seems to make sense now.”

LaRita’s is not the only success story, and she’s far from the only victim of domestic violence living on the streets. According to CATCH, nearly half of the families they’ve worked with over the past year (44 percent) were fleeing domestic violence. In Southwest Idaho alone, that amounts to 100 of the 227 families CATCH has served since 2024. It’s a pattern that Jeremy Blades, the organization’s director of housing services, says he’s seen again and again.

That’s 100 of 227 families served by CATCH in Southwest Idaho since 2024. Jeremy Blades, CATCH director of housing services, has seen this story play out many times.

“The moment a survivor chooses safety, they often lose their housing, financial stability, social support and legal protection all at once,” he said. “Leaving your abuser often means leaving everything behind.”

Stephanie Day, the executive director of CATCH, has seen homelessness from all angles, but she was surprised by the numbers that recently were released. The reality doesn’t match some of the myths – that unemployment, alcohol and drugs are the leading causes.

"I was shocked," she said. "I've been a social worker for 20 years, and we didn't have a good grasp of how rampant the problem was with domestic violence. I think much of the community will be surprised with those numbers, too."

According to Betsy Bowling, a regional director for housing services, domestic violence survivors – such as LaRita -- require specialized support.

"We typically start with safety planning – they often can't live just anywhere. Domestic violence victims lack resources and require more time with case managers as they rebuild safety and stability."

Blades says that finding housing can take anywhere from a few months to a couple of years.

"But waiting doesn't mean waiting alone," he says. "Through our network, more than 40 partner organizations, families receive immediate support including shelter placement, food assistance, healthcare and other vital services while they wait for more safe and stable housing."

Of course, housing – and money – don't grow on trees. The holiday season is over, but the needs are glaring for an organization that last year provided housing for 440 people. That includes 105 families and 208 children. Donations can be made through [catchidaho.org](http://catchidaho.org).

"When you support CATCH, you're not just helping families find housing," says Ryan Den Heuvel, director of development. "You're helping families rebuild, regain stability, and write a new chapter – one where their future is defined not by crisis, but by hope that can reshape their families' trajectory for generations."

LaRita Shepherd, for one, is an example of where "new chapters" can go.

**Chuck Malloy**, a long-time Idaho journalist and columnist, is a writer with the Idaho Community Foundation's Nonprofit Center. He may be reached at [ctmalloy@outlook.com](mailto:ctmalloy@outlook.com)