



From left are, back row: Sarah Kresser, Darci Bailey, Betsy Bailey, Marcia Therrien, Lisa Lessard, Pat Weston, Lisa Paquette; front row: Lynzy Guyer, Mallory Jacob, Robyn Jacob. (Courtesy Photo)

NORTHEAST KINGDOM

Umbrella's First Annual Dinner Gala Raises Funds And Awareness

Umbrella's first annual Spring Gala fundraiser was an unequivocal success, organizers say, raising tens of thousands of dollars for the social services organization and highlighting its programs to the community. The gala took place at the St. Johnsbury Welcome Center, transformed by volunteers for one night into an elegant evening event venue.

Approximately 160 people attended the event, raising an impressive \$30,000 to support Umbrella's programs, which provide advocacy, child care resources, job training, and safe spaces for families. The evening's highlights included a silent auction, a raffle, refreshments by Craftsby Country Store, entertainment by Roseanne Hebert, Phil Brown and Buzz Hubbard and a brief presentation featuring one of Umbrella's founding members and two women with firsthand experience of Umbrella's advocacy and job training programs.

Founding mother Pam Parker recalled that Umbrella was created by women who wanted to "learn to fix cars, woodwork, and stop rape." One of the event's speakers discussed her participation in Umbrella's Cornucopia program, which provides job

training to women in transition. The other speaker recounted the details that made her feel secure when Umbrella moved her young family to safe housing many years ago: new toothbrushes for her children, enough blankets for everyone, age appropriate clothes and playthings.

The presentation alone prompted spontaneous individual donations which totaled just under \$10,000, supplementing proceeds from the raffle and silent auction. Items for the raffle and auction were donated from area businesses, individuals, and organizations, and included gift certificates, spa treatments, landscaping services, artisanal goods such as cheese, spirits, fine art and knitwear, and even a baseball signed by Red Sox pitcher Chris Sale.

Proceeds from the event will benefit Umbrella programs including The Advocacy Program, Kingdom Childcare Connection, The Family Room, and Cornucopia. The Advocacy Program provides safety planning and support for survivors of intimate partner violence. Kingdom Child Care Connection gives resources and referrals for childcare programs in Caledonia and Southern Essex counties. The Family Room

offers supervised visitation and exchange services for parents seeking to establish or rebuild relationships with their children. Cornucopia helps women who are transitioning from unsafe or unsustainable living conditions to develop marketable job skills.

The gala ended on a sweet note with scoops of Dolcetti gelato, the delicious handmade product Umbrella's job-training program which combines supportive vocational training with social enterprise, offering women an opportunity to practice all aspects of business development while supporting the local economy.

Commenting on the event, Umbrella's Executive Director, Amanda Cochrane stated that the event "was very meaningful because it showed the depth and breadth of the support of our work in our community." She went on to say that, "The stories shared by our clients at the event were truly inspirational and show how a community can really lift up individuals and support them on their paths to safety and security. From all of us at Umbrella, thank you to all of the guests of the event and those who sponsor and donate towards our work."