

Heal & Rise  
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“I went to an event, and I’ve never been to an event like that where women stand in a circle and share personal things. I left there feeling completely empowered and I knew I needed to do something like this,” said Jennifer Ramirez, founder of &Rise, a non-profit organization for female survivors of trauma and abuse.

Ramirez founded this organization alone by starting women support groups out of her living room in 2019. “I remember one day there was a huge snowstorm and I thought no one was going to come, and I ended up having 15 girls in my living room. I had a guest speaker, and I also shared my story. One of the girls from that event asked me to do an event for her and we ended up selling 150 tickets, that was my lightbulb moment,” said Ramirez.

The services &Rise offers for survivors include free counseling in Illinois, support groups, financial education, professional help with resume building and mock interviews, and healthy relationship workshops.

“I was a broke single mom once upon a time with \$25,000 in credit card debt living in Logan Square where there were gangs, drugs, and shootings every day so to be able to get out of that be where I am today. And to also shared it with women to say hey I did this as a single mom with no child support, you can do it too,” said Ramirez, “that’s why the financial education is such an important piece for me because I want to teach women how to be financially independent. That’s my long-term goal is that all women are financially independent.”

Ramirez is currently the only employee for &Rise with 13 employees working under her, which means she does everything for the organization; meetings, planning events, budgeting, paying bills, everything business owners do but all by herself.

About 3,000 women have been serviced by this organization, and many are starting to graduate their counseling sessions as the specific program just started about six or seven months ago. However, many are sticking with the counseling program and are continuing their healing.

The volunteers focus on helping with newsletters, bookkeeping, blogs, and data analytics. Some of the other volunteers are the support group facilitators. They must go through background checks, and extensive training for domestic abuse, trauma inform, and sexual abuse training. “If these people aren’t properly trained, they can retraumatize these women and that is my worst nightmare. I want to make sure they are in a place where they are educated to work with survivors,” said Ramirez.

“We still to this day have not received any city funding, or state funding, nothing. Even though we are here making a difference in people’s lives, we are not getting the grants that we have applied for,” said Ramirez. &Rise is very thankful for all the donations they have received from galas, and fundraisers because that is the soul funding of their organization at this time.

They put on different events for fundraisers, the biggest one is “Casino Night Gala”, which is black tie so the patrons could dress up. They as well do a “galantines” brunch, where they teach women how to love their authentic self.

“This year we actually worked with Jamica Smith, and we re-upholstered a chair together and the women were able to right everything they wanted to let go of,” said Ramirez. “Then we stripped the chair and made a new one. The purpose of that was to get rid of the past and creating something new and beautiful. We donated the chair to another women’s shelter, Wings”.

For someone to change, it takes commitment. Ramirez said, “It’s very hard to see women distressed or struggling every day, but it is even harder to see someone who is not willing to make that commitment. I know I can’t help everyone logically, but I want to, because I have my heart and I want to help everyone”.

Many of the survivor’s form friendships through the services offered so they do book clubs and fun activities to further the connections of survivors.

“We have women of all different ages, financial backgrounds, people with college degrees or no degrees. It is crazy how these people wouldn’t have met, but because they have these experiences in common, they are able to bond and create relationships with each other,” said Ramirez. They have created a warm, supportive, and safe environment for these women who are seeking understanding of themselves and what they have been through.

&Rise is an organization that focuses on healing and to show women that they are seen, and they have worth no matter what their past is. They also focus on making sure the women are not jealous, or catty with each other. It is all positivity, and support.

“I think girls being mean to each other is a societal thing, I think some people want us to be against each other. Because, if we come together women are so powerful. So, if we come together and support each other, we can do anything,” said Ramirez.



