

Stories of HOPE

SPRING 2023

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It's Never Too Late

"I was broken, couldn't lift my head up. I was so full of shame and guilt and remorse . . . but I'm no longer that person from before. I've been transformed."

INSIDE:

- A Note from Leon
- Cindy's Incredible Story
- Creativity in Action

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Dear Friend,

With every issue of this newsletter, we have the joy of sharing poignant and uplifting stories of life change with you, and Cindy's story (page 3) is no different. One of the things I'm most inspired by in Cindy's life is her deep desire to share her newfound hope with others. When we interviewed her for this newsletter, there's something she said that's so powerful:

"If you think you're too broken, you've done too many wrong things, you've been down and out for too long, you've lost your family... it's never too late to change."

Cindy is a shining example of someone who has experienced radical life change and wants to see others experience the same thing. Here's why that's important for you to know: **As a partner in this ministry—through your gifts, your volunteer efforts, your prayers—you are impacting more people than you can possibly know!**

We share the stories of men, women and families impacted by the warm meals, safe refuge and life recovery programs you help provide. But your impact goes even farther. It stretches to children whose lives are forever changed because their mom or dad got help for their addiction. To parents, siblings and friends who rejoice over restored relationships. To other hurting individuals who desperately need to know it's not too late.

Thank you for giving hope to so many through your generosity and kindness. We're so grateful.

Your partner in ministry,

Leon Negen
President/CEO

President/CEO Leon Negen and all of us at Hope Ministries know it's never too late for a hurting heart to be filled with God's love. Thank you for helping us give hope and change lives.



Our Ministry Centers

Bethel Mission

Door of Faith

Hope Center for
Women and Children

Hope Café

Hope Ministries Thrift

P.O. Box 862
Des Moines, IA 50304-0862

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hopeiowa.org
Donate online.



Some of our happiest days at Hope Ministries are when we get to celebrate with our life recovery graduates! Men in our one-year program spend 40-45 hours each week in life skills classes, job readiness training and substance abuse counseling. If needed, they work toward earning their high school equivalency diploma and strive for practical goals such as getting their driver's license, paying off debts and fines, and opening bank accounts. They also get involved in local churches and recovery groups.

Our men's program staff often say that completing our entire program is much like completing a year of college. It's a hefty accomplishment, and we're so proud of every person who stays the course!



We recently celebrated the graduation of (front row from left) Alex, Shannon, Camron, Donnie and Jason.

One of our most recent graduates, Shannon (pictured above), appeared in our fall newsletter last year. He also shared his one-minute testimony in a video on our YouTube channel. Check out Shannon's inspiring story and others at youtube.com/@Hopelowa.



Hopelowa channel



There was a point in Cindy's life where it seemed she had everything. A marriage, a new house, a convertible, a camper, even a motorcycle. From the outside, her life looked nearly perfect . . .

Until a relapse into drug addiction stole everything. "Because of my relapse, I ended up divorced and lost everything I had. I fell back deep into addiction, depression and self-loathing."

Cindy's addiction stretches back to her youth, when multiple traumas—including the death of her sister and experiences with abuse—left a lasting impact. She'd tried 30-day treatment programs in the past, but after her last relapse, she spiraled. "I was lost and homeless. I lived in my storage unit for a year."

But in 2020, Cindy made a decision she says changed her life forever. Her brother allowed her to stay at his home for two days but told her she had to find somewhere to get help. So she called Hope Ministries.

"I'll be forever grateful to my family—my brother and my son. I knew I needed to straighten out my life and regain their trust. And when Hope Ministries took me in, they changed my life. They saved my life."

Cindy spent the next two years at our Hope Center for Women and Children, participating in substance abuse counseling, life skills classes, work skills training, Bible studies and more. She paid off all her debts and fines and reached one sobriety milestone after another, while also restoring relationships with her family members.

"Over my two years here, I've been able to forgive myself. I've been able to change my outlook on life. It takes time

"I was a meth addict for 35 years. I want to be a witness to all those out there who think there's no chance of change. There's always hope."
—CINDY

for that kind of transformation—not 30 days," Cindy says. "It takes time to gain new thinking patterns and habits. This is a safe place to get off the streets and be around people who help you experience real life change."

"The name Hope Ministries is exactly what it implies—*hope*," she adds. "My life is fantastic now, but I can only imagine it's going to get even better because I will stay on this path and I will continue to change. I know the sky's the limit."

Cindy graduated from our program in the summer of 2022, and today, she's thriving. She has a full-time job at Amazon, is active in her church and loves spending time with her family while cheering for the Chiefs and the Cubs. Most of all, she's dedicated to growing in her faith.

"It took me being down as low as I could go, having nothing left in my life, to realize who Jesus is and what He's capable of doing in my life," she says.

To ministry partners who made her life transformation possible, Cindy says: "You saved my life in so many ways—gave me a safe place to live, food on the table. You allowed me to change in a safe environment. There aren't enough words to say thank you."

Your gifts, volunteering and prayers changed Cindy's life forever. Thank you.



It's surprising but true: Our shelter and life recovery centers—and our Hope Cafe, too!—are frequently just as full during the summer months as in the winter.

That's why the need for your support remains great in the coming months. Please consider supporting our life-changing programs and services with a gift this summer. **To make a secure online gift, visit hopeiowa.org/donatenow.** You can also mail a gift using the enclosed reply form. *Thank you!*



All right, silly pun aside, we have a big need right now for toilet paper! When you're sheltering up to 200 men, women and children a night, it's easy to fly through TP. And as long as we're talking paper products, we're also in need of paper towels.

You can help! Would you consider hosting a donation drive at your church or workplace for rolls of toilet paper and paper towels? We'd be so grateful. In the past, some groups have built towers of toilet paper or had fun in other ways with their donation drive. If you're interested, please feel free to reach out to us at info@hopeiowa.org for promotional ideas and delivery details.

Getting Creative at our Door of Faith

Creativity has been a part of volunteer Vicki Van Mersbergen's life since she was young. Both of her parents were creative, and she has fond memories of her mother's flower gardens and the flower arrangements she made for their church. Today, she shares her love of art with her family and grandchildren . . . and with men at our Door of Faith recovery center!

Vicki leads a monthly art class for men in life recovery, and her husband, Norman, who leads chapel at the Door of Faith, often helps her set up. The class is voluntary, and Vicki says she and Norman have been amazed at the talent they've seen on display.

"One of the men showed Norman and me his ink drawings. They're amazing! Many of them have much more art in their background than I do. It's a lot of fun for us all."

The men who participate in the class agree. "Vicki is friendly, and even in a group setting spends time one-on-one with each of us, teaching and giving us ideas," said one of the men. Another pointed out how she's helped him "learn different art skills."

And one recent graduate, Shannon, got to take one of Vicki's sample paintings with him after he graduated. Vicki wrote the reference Zephaniah 3:17 on the back of the frame, and Shannon plans to use it to brighten his new home.

"It's a gift of God to enjoy music, art and beauty," Vicki says. "It lifts the heart!"

