

Grace House of Itasca County ~ 2013 Annual Report

Dear Friends, Volunteers & Supporters,

2013 proved to be an incredible year for Grace House—one filled with positive growth, greater financial stability, exceptional publicity and unprecedented community involvement.

Some of Grace House's 2013 highlights included:

- ❖ A 20% increase in new volunteers.
- ❖ Installation of a children's playground.
- ❖ A complete facility makeover during the June 21 United Way "Day of Action."
- ❖ A 50% increase in contributions from individuals, businesses, churches, civic groups and service organizations.
- ❖ Construction of www.gracehousemn.org, a new, user-friendly website.
- ❖ Creation of a new logo.
- ❖ Becoming the host site of weekly Narcotics Anonymous meetings for guests and community members who are pursuing recovery.

Over the past year, Grace House deepened relationships with many agencies and organizations that serve individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We regularly partner with KOOTASCA Community Action, Salvation Army, Northland Counseling Center, Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency and other members of the Housing Issues Advisory Committee (HIAC) to ensure the needs of Grace House's guests are met. Agency funding cuts and the ongoing lack of affordable housing have intensified the need to share organizational resources and collaboratively coordinate the delivery of services to vulnerable adults and children.

A special capacity building grant from Nonprofit Assistance Fund last spring enabled Grace House to hire E3 Consulting, a local website development company to begin designing a much-needed website. The public unveiling of the new

website in August has: increased public awareness of homelessness in Itasca County; intensified volunteer recruitment; facilitated significant on-line donations; and, spurred student, civic and nonprofit groups to host fundraising, toy and personal care item drives for Grace House's guests.

Feature articles and consistent media coverage caused contributions from individuals, churches, civic groups and service organizations to **more than double in 2013!**

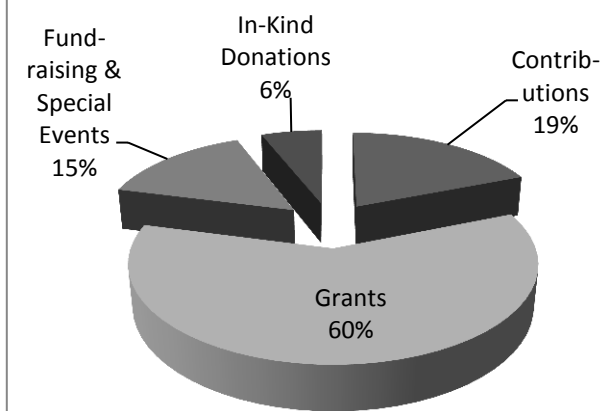
A generous grant from The Home Depot Foundation resulted in the construction of a children's playground on the grounds of Grace House in September. Designed by ICC engineering student, the playground has already proven to greatly increase children's assimilation to their temporary, new home. It

provides kids with a greater sense of normalcy and a creative outlet free from the stress of being homeless.

Support from the business community grew exponentially this year. Nearly \$10,000 in corporate sponsorships was secured during Grace House's 2013 Dinner Dance, making this year's "Home Is Where the Heart Is" our most successful fundraiser to date. Relationships developed with Wal-Mart and The Home Depot yielded in-kind store donations of cleaning products, office supplies and appliances that greatly offset the shelter's annual operating expenses.

To better serve people who are experiencing homelessness and poverty, Grace House again participated in community events this fall, such as Itasca County Community Connect and Veterans Stand-Down. To raise awareness of homelessness in Itasca County, Grace House teamed up with HIAC agency partners to help plan national Hunger & Homeless Awareness Month events in November. The highlight of these activities was the participation of 120 children, students, faith leaders, parents, social justice advocates and Grace House guests in the annual "One Night without a Home" Walk along Pokegama Avenue and US Highway 2 in Grand Rapids.

2013 Sources of Income





2013 also ushered in a new logo for Grace House to better reflect the organization's transition into an independent shelter. Designed by students from the Minneapolis College of Art Design, the beautiful nest featured in our logo represents the safe, cozy and nurturing environment Grace House offers its guests.

The addition of a designated Volunteer Coordinator resulted in the recruitment of nearly 30 new community volunteers in 2013 alone. More than 160 talented and loyal volunteers filled 1,092 shifts, contributed nearly 8,017 hours of service, prepared 6,056 meals and provided compassion to the 193 adults and 23 children who stayed at Grace House last year.

In spite of these achievements, homelessness continues to escalate in our community. The number of individuals who have been turned away from Grace House due to a lack of vacancies has quadrupled in the past two years alone! In fact, Grace House was forced to turn away **538 people last year** simply because there were no beds available at the shelter at the time these inquiries were made.

To meet the growing demand for emergency shelter, Grace House recently joined forces with the faith community to implement the Winter Overflow Shelter Plan. Seven churches have graciously opened their doors and agreed to provide overnight sleeping accommodations when our shelter is full this winter. Staffed by church volunteers, the overflow shelter sites will host up to 10 additional guests per night, one week at a time through the end of April.

Low wage jobs and an ongoing shortage of affordable housing continue to drive homelessness in Itasca County. According to a report produced by Minnesota Housing Partnership in August 2013, there are roughly 48 rental units available for every 100 extremely low-income renters in our county at any given time. Many of these units are sub-standard and frequently fail to meet HUD inspection criteria.

For the past nine months, Grace House, Northland Counseling Center, MN Department of Corrections, KOOTASCA Community Action, Itasca County Health & Human Services and Itasca County Housing & Redevelopment Authority have been participating in training offered through the Housing Institute of Greater Minnesota to discuss solutions to this housing shortage. Our Housing Institute Team recently secured funding to conduct a housing study this spring to demonstrate the need to build more affordable housing in our community. This team of housing advocates will explore the potential for the development of affordable housing that include supportive services for low-income families, individuals with mental health and chemical dependency disorders and those who've experienced long-term homelessness.

One of Grace House's long-term goals is to implement new programming that will increase the self-sufficiency and employability of our guests. Grants from Blandin Foundation, United Way of 1000 Lakes, Grand Rapids Area Community Foundation, Lake County Power's Operation Round-Up and Northland Foundation will allow Grace House to begin providing on-site workforce and independent living classes to its guests throughout 2014. Business professionals, agency staff and nonprofit leaders have volunteered to teach a wide range of financial literacy, workforce preparedness and self-sufficiency skills classes that will enable our guests to lead more productive lives.

We continue to be grateful to our dedicated board of directors and staff at Grace House. They are: Barb Sanderson, Larke Huntley, Jenny Wettersten, Pat Medure, Ron Oleheiser, Steve Teff, Barb Veit and Dave Roerick, board members; and Tara Venema, Jen Poore, Heidi Madsen, April Christensen, Jessica Mohn, Jason Empey and Scott Schuman, staff members.

While we're committed to obtaining new sources of funding to secure long-term financial sustainability, we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for supporting Grace House with your financial contributions and your donations of time, food and other goods. Your generosity made 2013 an unforgettable year for Grace House and the guests we served.

With your continued involvement and support, 2014 will be another incredible year filled with continued growth, stability and forward momentum.

Sherry Shadley
Executive Director

Madelen Schuemann
Board Chair