

Dear Friends,

We started 2015 with a bang! The final payment on our building loan was made at the end of 2014, which enabled us to ring in the New Year **mortgage-free!** The generous support of Itasca County residents, churches and businesses has helped Grace House blossom into a financially stable shelter that offers hope and new beginnings to more than 200 guests each year.

In 2015 we continue to build on the success of the STRIVE Project and Winter Overflow Shelter Plan, two new programs implemented in 2014. Last month was spent compiling and reviewing statistical information on the effectiveness of our new programming. We discovered encouraging and significant improvements in employment and housing outcomes amongst the guests who stayed with us last year.

Our in-house case management services intensified during the past year, which allowed our staff to more quickly and effectively connect guests to important community resources and rental assistance programs. As a result, **60% of our 2014 guests**—including those served through overflow sheltering efforts—**secured safe, permanent housing** by the end of their stay at Grace House. This is a 15% increase in successful housing placements from 2013! Working with guests on a one-on-one basis helps our staff identify their unique housing and financial barriers and work with them to create individualized plans to move them from homelessness to stable housing and employment.

The STRIVE Project brings area professionals to the shelter to provide guests with instruction in interviewing techniques, résumé writing and financial literacy topics. Through STRIVE, guests gain essential skills needed to gain and maintain meaningful employment. In 2014, **17% of our guests obtained employment** during their stay at GRACE House. In previous years, an average of less than 10% of guests achieved this critical goal. We also observed a marked increase in the number of already-employed guests who were able to maintain their employment while staying at Grace House and beyond.

The encouragement and knowledge contributed by STRIVE Project instructors empowers our guests to make positive life choices that help breakdown the many obstacles they face while experiencing homelessness. This leads to greater success in long-term housing and employment placements.

The STRIVE Project and Winter Overflow Shelter Plan help Grace House realize its goals of preventing and reducing homelessness. Again, neither program would be possible without the involvement of our dedicated volunteers and strong backing from the business community. We are truly grateful to everyone who helped make 2014 a remarkable year for Grace House and the guests we serve!

Best Wishes,

*Sherry Shadley*

Executive Director

## Volunteer Spotlight: Ron Snell

This month we're recognizing Ron Snell for his many contributions to Grace House. Although a relative newcomer, Ron has quickly made himself an indispensable volunteer at our shelter. In addition to his service as a 4:45-9:00 p.m. shift volunteer, Ron has become our resident handyman. He has accomplished multiple repair projects over the past few months, including restoring electricity to our one and only exterior outlet. Now our overnight volunteers can plug their vehicles in during the sometimes bitterly cold evenings. There's no job too big or small for Ron. In fact, he stops by Grace House several times a week eager to know if we have any new assignments for him to tackle. As a regular volunteer with Elder Circle and RSVP, Ron shares his many talents with seniors in our community who need help with home repairs and maintenance. In his spare time, Ron enjoys cooking for and spending time with his grandchildren. On behalf of our board and staff, we extend our many thanks to Ron for keeping our maintenance expenses to a minimum and our building operating safely. Thanks for all that you do for Grace House, Ron!

### Important Dates to Remember

**February 23 @ 1:00 p.m.:** Coffee, Chocolates & Conversation—afternoon volunteer support meeting

**February 24 @ 5:30 p.m.:** Coffee, Chocolates & Conversation—evening volunteer support meeting

**March 2 @ 1:00 p.m.:** Church Coordinator Meeting

**March 9 @ 5:30 p.m.:** Volunteer Orientation & Training

**March 23 @ 1:00 p.m.:** Coffee, Chocolates & Conversation—afternoon volunteer support meeting

**March 24 @ 5:30 p.m.:** CPR Training with Simon Gretton, MEDS 1. **Please RSVP—limited to 15 people**

### **Top 5 Critical Needs:**

We were absolutely inundated with in-kind donations during the holidays. Several service organizations, families and elementary school students conducted fundraising drives to purchase and donate items on Grace House's wish list, as well as gifts for our guests. We stood in awe of the outpouring of generosity demonstrated by our community. Our pantry and freezers are well stocked. But, we're running low on several personal care items our guests need during their stay at Grace House. This includes:

1. Full-Size Bottles of Conditioner
2. Shaving Cream for Men & Women
3. Men's Deodorant
4. Disposable Razors
5. Sports Bras (S, M, L, XL)