



GRACE HOUSE

GAZETTE

Dear Friends,

Along with the holidays and blankets of snow, December brings “**Home Is Where the Heart Is**” to our community. This annual Dinner Dance fundraiser will be held at the TimberLake Lodge from 5:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. on **Saturday, December 7**. “Home Is Where the Heart Is” includes a four-course meal, silent and live auctions, raffle drawings and a dance featuring *The Groove Merchants*. Two former guests will speak during the event; sharing personal stories about the impact Grace House has had on their personal lives, and the positive changes that have occurred since they've left our shelter. One of their stories is included in this newsletter.

Proceeds from the “Home Is Where the Heart Is” Dinner Dance directly benefit Grace House and its efforts to implement a new on-site training program that’s designed to enhance the workforce and independent living skills of our guests—both past and present.

You won’t want to miss “Home Is Where the Heart Is”. Tickets can be purchased at Grace House until **1:00 p.m. on December 6**. Please support Itasca County’s only homeless shelter by joining us for an evening of delicious food, great entertainment and amazing achievements.

Before you finish your holiday shopping, please consider purchasing socks and underwear for the many men and women who will stay at Grace House this winter. Specifically, we are in desperate need of men’s socks, flannel pajama pants (M, L & X-L) and underwear (M, L & X-L), as well as women’s underwear (sizes 6-8). The demand for these items is always high, but frequently in short supply at our shelter.

Grace House and churches serving as winter overflow shelter sites are both in need of **VOLUNTEERS!** We’ll hold a volunteer orientation training session at Grace House on December 9 from 5:30-6:30 p.m. A short question & answer session will be followed by a tour of our cozy shelter from 6:30 to 7:00p.m. Recruit a friend or family member to attend the training with you. By becoming a volunteer today, you have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of people who are experiencing homelessness.

I would like to give a special shout out to Theresa Grbich who saved the day by coming in at 6:00 a.m. on November 27 to whip up a delicious breakfast for the Grace House-sponsored Chamber Connection. Local business leaders gobbled up Theresa’s fantastic home-cooking while discussing how our community can work together to prevent and reduce homelessness. Thanks for your help, Theresa. You’re the best!

I hope this holiday season finds you happy, healthy and surrounded by your loved ones.

Best Wishes,

Sherry Shadley

Executive Director

J.W.'s Story

On September 12, 2013, I was released from prison with no where to go. I was forced to come back to the Iron Range homeless and almost penniless. My parole officer encouraged me to call Grace House to see if there were any open beds. I called repeatedly, but the shelter was always full. Finally, there was an opening on Tuesday, September 16th. I was told Grace House couldn't save beds for anyone, so I ran there to meet with the staff. This is where my life took a huge change for the better.

Coming out of prison not knowing what to do or where to go was very frightening for me. I was overwhelmed with thoughts of who would hire me? Where would I find a place to live? Questions like these raced through my mind. Thirty days is not a long time to figure everything out and panic set in.

During my stay at Grace House, the staff assured me that everything was going to be okay and everything would work out. While I was at the shelter, I found myself caring about other people, not wanting to see others struggle or families hurting. I realized that this is what I want to do— I want to help the homeless. Knowing I was where I needed to be, I let my walls down and began to open up and let other people in.

On October 7th I had to leave the shelter to attend inpatient treatment for 30 days. I was scared sick! I did not want to leave Grace House. The staff, volunteers and the other guests had become my family, and I was worried what I would do without their constant support. I never thought a homeless shelter would feel so much like my home.

While I was in treatment, Grace House's staff reached out to me, checking on my progress, sending cards of encouragement, and reassuring me they would do everything in their power to help me find housing and employment. It really helped me to know that in spite of my past, people truly cared about me and my life had value.

About one week before I was to graduate treatment, Grace House's staff helped me schedule an interview with Andrew, a case manager from KOOTASCA Community Action, to talk about an opening at the Men's House. I wanted to get into the Men's (Peer) House because it's a place that would give me stability and support. It would also give me the freedom to start pursuing and achieving my goals and dreams of getting a job, finding my own apartment, working with at-risk youth, and becoming a community volunteer. My interview with Andrew went better than expected, and KOOTASCA accepted me into their transitional housing program. I moved into the Men's House the same day I graduated treatment. I have been living there for nearly four weeks and couldn't ask for things to be any better. Having a warm roof over my head was both a blessing and a huge relief!

With housing in place, I could start focusing on finding employment. I went on two job interviews and was offered employment with both companies in the same week! I never thought I would be in a position of having to make a career choice so soon after my release. I started my new job as an auto mechanic on November 26. Grace House's staff also helped me get a Sharing Fund grant to purchase the tools I need for this profession.

I have recently been in contact with a couple of youth groups in the area. I hope to make a difference in the lives of kids who may be headed down the same troubled path I chose to walk back when I was a teenager. I am taking one day at a time to ensure I'm making the right choices and not pushing myself too far, too quickly. I've also started volunteering at Grace House and enjoy being back at my home-away-from-home. The staff at Grace House are yet another blessing in my life. They took a chance on me. They saw me for me when no one else would. I love them with all my heart!