GUIDING LIGHT
of Grand Rapids, Michigan

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How did we get here?
And where do we go?
About 2,500 years ago the Greek philosopher Heraclitus was credited with saying, “The only thing constant is change.” If only he could see how right he was. I can certainly relate when I reflect on the past seven years at Guiding Light.

Being a 501(c)(3) non-profit, it is assumed that we’ll fix or address social concerns outside of the realms of business, that we’ll foster a community supported vision. I have embraced this in all activities at the ministry, but now with a new twist.

The day I announced that all participants at Guiding Light had special God-given gifts and talents and that we had a leadership and
strategic responsibility to unleash that potential, we propelled ourselves into new realms of service.

In 2009, Guiding Light, with good intent, struggled to identify and implement programming with strong and transparent outcomes. Slowly we began to move away from a culture of ‘down on my luck’ or ‘woe is me’ to one of ‘the little engine that could’, not only programmatically, but also at the staff and governance level. In a sense, we shut off the TV and stocked up on work boots and hammers. Now we’re seeing people employed and paying for groceries, rent, child support and taxes. They’re taking back their self respect and re-engaging with their communities and families.

With our newfound enthusiasm, we created the Back to Work Program with clear, measurable and transparent outcomes, all while engaging our participants in the planning process.

Our Guiding Light Recovery program uses similar tactics, with an added focus of addressing addiction and teaching tools for a maintainable sobriety. We started Iron House as a safe and affordable stepping stone for those who have attained meaningful employment and want to continue journeying with their new shared community. Iron House supports recovery, but it’s also our first venture into a sustained social enterprise. The units bring in cash flow and provide some income to the ministry.

Then came The Job Post, our second sustainable social enterprise, consistent with the ongoing mission of Guiding Light. Like Iron House, it too provides self-sustaining resources while also serving a public need.

In a short seven years, we have raised staff competency, produced meaningful outcomes, and practiced a culture of transparency. We’re proud of our successful programs and social enterprises.

God has and continues to bless Guiding Light but we know there is always more to do. As Program Managers Matthew and Brian so clearly articulate in the articles ahead, we are just scratching the surface. Only with your support can we continue fostering these God given gifts and talents.

\[\text{This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!} \]
\[\text{—2 Corinthians 5:17} \]
One day in 2009, an acquaintance of Stuart Ray called him and said, "Guiding Light needs an Executive Director!"

Stuart’s response was simply, “That’s great, but what does that have to do with me?”

“I think you’d be good for them.”
He chuckled. “You’re crazy. Thanks, but no thanks.”

“But they need a leader,” his friend said.

It almost felt like a dare. One that he wanted nothing to do with.

He was familiar with the headlines and challenges of the Heartside area in downtown Grand Rapids. The homelessness, the crime, the joblessness, the constant ambulance calls; it wasn’t something he wanted to be a part of.

But his friend insisted, calling him a few times. “I really think you’d be perfect for this.”

“But why me?” Stuart asked. He couldn’t understand it.

Stuart wasn’t looking for anything new. He had spent the last 30 years as an entrepreneur in the restaurant business, employing over 2,200 employees throughout his career. Everyone from teenagers to retirees, all of them working, making money and trying to pay bills and better themselves.

He was used to encouraging and pushing people to be all they could be. He’s promoted people, fired people, and he’s had to find leaders who could help him run the ship. His expectations were simple but high:

Why me? Why here?

Let’s face it, being here is a surprise for everyone.
work hard, be on time, be respectful and communicative.

Over the years, he's seen teen employees graduate high school, go to college, get married, have kids and move on. He saw them through their successes and mistakes. He saw their struggles and their wins. He saw good days and bad.

Stuart knew his restaurants were just stepping stones for workers to move on to a better life, better pay and better benefits. That's how life works. And he would encourage them to do that. He recognized that his high expectations would help employees immensely in their future jobs. If he had a good worker, he'd mention different job openings, or factory work, something that would provide steadier hours, more pay, and better benefits.

There was one thing they all had in common; they all wanted to better themselves. Witnessing that journey time and time again never got old for Stuart. He wanted more of that. He wanted to be on the front lines of people growing and changing their lives.

Along the way, Stuart and his wife started a few charter schools. They taught soft skills, encouraged work readiness and helping others. They encouraged instructors to teach off site whenever they could. He wanted kids to see their community, to try new things. He wanted to see life's possibilities expand for everyone around him.

So in 2009, when he asked the questions, “Why me? Why should I work with Guiding Light Mission?” The answer seems almost obvious in hindsight. But at the time, it wasn’t so clear.

As a strange challenge, Stuart applied for the job, had several interviews, met with the board and inevitably was given the position. “I was scared to death,” he reflects.

Being new on the job, Stuart’s main strategy was to soak in information and see how the place operated. Workers came in through the back door and the walk-ins came in through the front. It was blind altruism with little questions asked. Men came in from the cold, used the restrooms, showered, ate food and went back out again. Each day was a short-term band-aid to a problem that didn’t seem to be getting any better.

Stuart felt like he was peeling back layers of an onion, trying to find the root cause of men hanging out at the mission. It took weeks, even months, of questions.

One by one, he'd approach people and ask, “Why are you here? What happened that led you here?” He'd talk with people, listen to people. The stories were all different but one thing was universal. They didn't have jobs. “How come you don't have a job?” he would ask.

“I was let go.”
“Can you get a new job?”
“I don’t have a car, my clothes are old, I have a criminal record, I have no resources.”

There were multiple barriers preventing these men from any forward momentum. Not to mention, the country was in the middle of an economic crash. Rampant unemployment was the new reality. For these guys, the world seemed hopeless. The missions and handouts in Heartside were the only good thing going for them.

Stuart’s first year was stressful but still incredible. The entire year seemed like orientation: getting his bearings and finding out how Guiding Light operated. But then Stuart turned a corner. According to staff member Matthew Holmes, the story became legend.

“From what I heard, Stuart walked in the back room one morning, saw a large group of guys all watching TV, and he’d had it. He flipped off the TV, and just bluntly said, ‘you all need jobs.’ Just like that.”

There were grumbles, protests, and some anger. “There are no jobs,” someone likely protested. But after a whole year of ‘pulling back the onion layers,’ Stuart settled on what the main focus should be at Guiding Light: work … and if not work, then work readiness for the jobs to come. Stuart knew that in order to be successful, in order to be a blessing to Grand Rapids, in order to help the economy of West Michigan, that he had to help mold the community’s future employees.
Guiding Light’s Back to Work program is a smart and strong solution for promoting financial independence through work. Each year, millions of dollars are funneled back into the economy because of our emphasis on the men finding and holding steady employment.

When Stuart Ray decided that ‘work’ and ‘jobs’ were going to be Guiding Light’s main focus, it sent shock waves through the Heartside District. “Did you hear what the boss at Guiding Light did?” They told it like he really flipped his lid. “He turned the TV off in the social room!” It was like a scandal.

Of course, the TV itself wasn’t the problem. But the moment was a catalyst—a turning point in how the organization would operate.

Matthew Holmes, Director of Guiding Light’s Back to Work program, reflects on how this program got started, “People would come here to sleep at night. We’d feed them breakfast and then shepherd them out during the day to do their own thing.”

When Stuart became Executive Director in 2009, it took him awhile to absorb the culture, the practices and to observe what the other Heartside missions were doing. The interviews and tours only prepared him partially for what he’d experience. “I was scared to death,” he says. “I had to start at the beginning and just get to know the men who came in.”

After a year of what was like an orientation year, Stuart made the decision that the main focus of Guiding Light needed to be work. “We need to do things differently. Men need to work. Period.” While ‘work’ and ‘jobs’ are simple and relevant proclamations,
making it happen is a multi-layered challenge. His first move was to insist that all the men have jobs within four months. “That was the cutoff—four months. But then we found that guys were standing around for three of those months, so we had to retool it all again.”

Another problem to work through were the ‘barriers’. This is the term used to describe the obstacles in the way of steady employment. The larger question, ‘What is preventing this man from working?’ became the base questions. Quite often, the barriers were legitimate.

“I can’t work because I’m homeless.”
“I can’t work because I have severe pain. I’m physically unable.”
“I can’t work because I don’t have the proper tools, clothes or footwear.”
“I can’t work because I don’t have transportation.”
“I can’t work because child support takes up my whole check. It’s pointless to work.”
“I can’t work because I have a criminal record.”
“I can’t work because I have a severe addiction.”

All of these are valid reasons sustaining employment might be difficult. These are some of the ways in which we address the most common:

- “Are you homeless? You can use Guiding Light as a home address.”
- “Are you in physical pain? We’ll set you up with a doctor and help you pay those medical bills. Let’s get you healthy, so that a couple of months from now, you can start working.”
- “Do you need the proper clothes or protective wear? We can lend you the money to get those things. We can provide you with tools, a hard hat, and steel-toed boots.”
- “No transportation? Here are some bus passes. Here is a carpool group. We also have a couple of vans that are coming and going all the time, taking people to work.”
- “Struggling with child support and debt? We can help you talk to the Friend of the Court. Maybe you can get child support temporarily reduced until you’re back on your feet.”
- “Criminal record holding you back? We have a network of businesses willing to give someone a chance.”
- “Struggling with addiction? Let’s get you into our recovery program. Let’s get you mentally stable and sober first, then we can talk about what your next job looks like.”
So basically, we tackle the barriers that prevent men from being employed and independent. By focusing on getting people jobs, Guiding Light becomes an organization that generates far more economic activity than it receives in donations. Take a look at the figures:

Looking at the brief history of the Back to Work program, we project that the cumulative economic impact may exceed $52 million later this year. That far exceeds our program budget for the years between 2012 and 2017. This is money that is circulating around your local grocery stores, restaurants, shops, transportation services, rental properties, taxes and more. Everybody wins when more people are working. This certainly accomplishes another goal of Guiding Light, which is to give more than receive.

What's more, Guiding Light has a new reputation on the street now. Matthew Holmes states, “People in the neighborhood know that if you’re serious about change, come to us. If you want to play games, go somewhere else.”

As it stands now, the Back to Work option is a 90-day live in program. It’s typically for a man who has lost his home or apartment and is out of a job. Men don’t want to be homeless, but find themselves in what they hope is a temporary situation. They come in, they fill out applications, they do an intake interview with Intake Manager Jeff Courtly, and, if accepted, they’re given a bed. Between all the staffing companies in town and the job openings posted on the Internet, most guys are able to find work within five days. A handful even manage to find work after a single day of looking, but everyone is typically employed within two weeks.

They’re required to be drug and alcohol-free. They’re tested randomly—this is for the safety of those in the Recovery program. They’re
required to be at Guiding Light every night. If they work third shift, they can check in and sleep during the day.

ENVISIONING POSSIBILITIES

The Back to Work program is growing and it's working, but there are still plenty of obstacles. Once the men in the program save up enough money for an apartment, they hit another series of roadblocks.

Housing costs in Grand Rapids continue to rise, making it extremely difficult for these men to find a safe and affordable place to live. And after they have worked and saved thousands of dollars through our program, landlords will still deny them tenancy after doing a background check or a credit check. "These men don't need handouts. Now they need an affordable place to live," says Matthew.

FUTURE MOVES

Inspired by Guiding Light Recovery's transitional housing, Iron House, Matthew is proud to announce BTW's own affordable housing program, now in its pilot stage. Currently, we only have six bedrooms to sublet, but many more are still needed to accommodate the massive need for affordable housing.

This opportunity will help the men transition a little easier into independence and establish a renter history along the way, making their next housing that much more attainable. It's a win-win for everybody.

Matthew also aims to one day have more space for his Back to Work program, something that separates these men from the Recovery residents. Both populations are currently living together in this small space but are dealing with very different issues. Both programs could really use their own space to better focus on their unique visions.

He'd also like the opportunity to separate the main BTW sleeping room into several rooms to accommodate the different sleep schedules. This way, the men who work night shifts can get their much needed day-time sleep!

Matthew also recognizes that the men in the program work really hard, day after day, some of them working six days a week or more. Since 75% of their income goes into savings, there isn't much room in the budget for extra activities. Having a couple more rooms on site for some social time could really help with morale.

"It's a tight fit here at Guiding Light," says Matthew. “Having more space would free us up to foster our visions for both communities.”
It was almost two years ago now that Executive Director Stuart Ray was encouraged to start a staffing company within Guiding Light. The challenge was, “Start a company at Guiding Light and bring in some funding.” By starting a profitable social enterprise, Guiding Light’s operational budget would be more sustainable.

When he brought on staffing company veteran, Christina Felan, she was already very familiar with Guiding Light.

“I used to talk to Christina all the time,” says Matthew Holmes, the Back to Work Director. “We’d always send workers her way.”

After much conversation and troubleshooting, Christina made the leap. She left her longtime staffing company job and helped Guiding Light start its new venture. They call it The Job Post.

Like any new business, it took some time to get going. She wrote an employee handbook, created procedures, and sought proper licensing and insurances. “A lot goes into a startup like this!” she remarks.

Christina hit the pavement to find clients and businesses who would sign up with The Job Post. Employment applications started trickling in. The decades old Guiding Light Mission sign was covered up with the
To date, The Job Post has helped over 600 men and women find work!
more suitable “Back to Work at Guiding Light.” Billboards were put up, people started walking in, asking about it, and sticking around to complete an application. Soon, they were able to start placing people in appropriate jobs. For Christina, it was thrilling.

Soon, she was able to hire an assistant. Then another. Today, her team consists of Elliott and Josh, who both completed the Guiding Light Recovery Program. Both men know how job stability is closely connected with healthy lifestyles and discipline.

The team uses several methods to find client partners. One is word of mouth—someone will mention a business that is hiring. Another way is using local staffing websites and social media, like Craigslist, Facebook, Indeed.com and other ‘help wanted’ type ads.

They’ll do some research first—see if the employer is near a bus line, what kind of work they’re offering, and whether it is longterm, sustainable work. They decide as a team whether a company might be a good fit.

Elliott will do some digging online to identify each company’s Human Resource Manager, then he’ll make the call. “Sometimes I don’t get very far and hear, ‘no thanks, we’re not interested’, other times companies are like, ‘I’m so glad you called!”’ With the local economy doing as well as it is, more and more businesses are grateful that someone is offering them workers. Companies like The Job Post are huge assets to keeping local businesses staffed.

“Elliott is a good recruiter,” Christina reveals. “I think he presents our mission well.” When Elliott gets someone on the phone, he tries to make it short and sweet. It’s hard to do when you have so much to say and so much to offer. When he’s given the green light, the “tell me more” invitation, then he can unpack the goal a little more. Here’s his pitch: “The Job Post is a hiring and recruitment firm that exists primarily as a for-profit model, but our profits go to program funding for Guiding Light.” If he can unpack this to a willing listener, then the conversation goes pretty well.

Typically, a client will ask, “Who can apply to The Job Post?” The short answer is, “Anybody.”

With thousands of cars, each and every day, driving past the “Back to Work at Guiding Light” sign on Division Avenue, it’s no surprise that word is getting out about the shift happening at Guiding Light. Applicants are calling, they’re visiting the website, and they’re swinging by the office. Josh, at the front desk, helps navigate them through the application process. People from all different backgrounds are inquiring: men, women, young, and old—diverse people looking for work, people already employed, but wanting something different, parents, single parents, you name it. Being
housed in Guiding Light, it’s also natural that folks are being sent from the local Heartside organizations as well—people who are rebuilding their lives, looking to get on their feet and re-engage with the community.

Young people are relying on The Job Post, too. Teenagers, fresh out of high school, are looking for quick money for their cars, their schooling and maybe an apartment. Those early jobs, done well, can be great resume builders.

Background checks are completed, work history is documented, and drug tests are performed. By the time a worker gets on a job site, he’s met the same high standards required by any other employment agency in Grand Rapids. Christina states, “I feel confident that when I’m sending somebody, I’m sending a qualified employee, the best person for the job.”

THE CHALLENGES

Often, workers come in with barriers, similar to those we see in the Back to Work program (discussed on page 8). Barriers such as lack of transportation, lack of equipment or clothes required for the job. If a person is right for the job, and shows a willingness to be flexible, Christina will match that willingness and go the extra mile. For those who lack dependable transportation, she might offer some bus passes until they get paid.

“Sometimes we do see criminal backgrounds and some past incarcerations,” Christina says. “As long as we understand the circumstances surrounding these past offenses, we can communicate with our client partners what the situation is. I sometimes explain to our employers that what you see documented on paper isn’t the whole story. Many of these applicants are good people, they just did something wrong in the past. And it follows them everywhere they go.” Most of the people that come in just want someone to believe in them, to give them a chance—and The Job Post has partnered with companies that can give them that.

“We walk with people. Some of them are discouraged and scared, so we encourage them to keep going, so they can rebuild their confidence.” Christina offers, “I’ve been in the industry a long time and with the unemployment rate so low, this is the time when employers are willing to hire folks with barriers.”

The Job Post works hard and is honored to confront and remove those barriers. Christina shares a recent experience: “We had a guy come in needing work. He just finished a 16-year prison sentence. On paper, he’s a murderer. But the reality is, he and his buddy were playing and twirling a loaded gun and it went off. He accidentally killed his best friend. He now has to put ‘homicide’ on every application. That will follow him the rest of his life.”

While this is an extreme case, the reality is, people have made mistakes in their past and are just looking for someone to give them a
second chance.

Thankfully, there are employers who listen, who empathize, who want to make the world a better place by giving people opportunities they're typically denied. Many of these employers care about the overall health of their local community so using The Job Post for staffing just makes sense.

The big success is when a worker gets hired in after a probationary period. “It's a win for everybody,” Christina says. “Because that's how it's supposed to work. You go to a temp agency, you do a good job and then hopefully you get hired in. That’s the goal. Now they can get the raises, the benefits, and maybe even climb up the ladder.”

Christina recounts a time when she saw how grateful one of the placed employees could be. He came in the week before Thanksgiving, picked up his check, and thanked The Job Post staff for their good work. He gave Christina a card and a box of chocolates. Inside the card were a ‘thank you’ note and a five dollar bill. “This man likely needed every dollar he could get. But he was so appreciative.” The simple act of gratefulness moved Christina to tears. “I showed it to Josh, and he started tearing up too!”

Christina, Elliott and Josh are grateful as well. “We make a difference in peoples’ lives, and there is nothing that can match that feeling,” she says.

ENVISIONING POSSIBILITIES

The Job Post, as a social enterprise, is certainly working and it’s growing steadily. In the future we'd like to see the company stand on its own merits and become independent from its parent organization.

“We have a great group of clients that have embraced us since the beginning,” claims Christina. “We'd love to increase the job opportunities by partnering with additional companies.”

Robert, Back to Work resident
Taking the time

It's not a game. It's not easy. It's not luck. Breaking destructive habits is a serious journey.

“We want this to be a safe space for truth telling.” Guiding Light Recovery (GLR) Program Director Brian Elve reflects on one of the main goals of the program. “Be honest and learn how to live a life in recovery.”

Sounds simple, but getting to that point takes time. “When guys come in here, they are at rock bottom. I was the same way when I came in.” Brian knows too well the damage addiction can do. Decades of his own alcohol abuse led him to Guiding Light’s Recovery Program in 2012
...to get it right

Guiding Light Recovery's Brian Elve shares some thoughts on what our residents need to heal.

and now later this year, he’ll celebrate five years of sobriety and four years of being employed with Guiding Light.

The staff at GLR has implemented a lot of changes over the years, many of which began after Stuart Ray became Guiding Light’s Executive Director in 2009. When Stuart decided that connecting men with stable employment and independent living would be the main focus, they scrutinized every aspect of their programming to make sure it could support that ultimate goal. In short, Guiding Light wanted everyone who
came in for help to leave employed and paying his own way through life. For some (like those in the Back to Work program), that period is about three months. But for those in recovery dealing with addiction, it takes longer. The barriers are more complex.

The solution for those in recovery is not simply ‘staying sober’ or even ‘finding a job.’ Alone, those solutions are fleeting. They’re temporary, external fixes. One drink can ruin sobriety and finding a job doesn’t mean you’ll keep it. In theory, someone can stop drinking and find a job in a day or two. But is he rehabilitated? Is he living life differently? How long will the good times last? In order to have long-term results, there is a need to dig deeper.

So do not fear, for I am with you;  
Do not be dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you and help you;  
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.  

Isaiah 41:10

Five years ago, things were a bit different. Having the men find stable work was certainly a bonus, but not necessarily the end goal. The cafeteria was open twice a day for the public to come and eat free meals, which kept the kitchen and security team pretty busy each day. After supper, the men were shut in for the night, preventing them from getting into trouble, but also keeping them away from attending local support groups. After years of doing it this way, the staff members were now asking themselves if the structure still worked. They knew they could do better.

“A lot of the guys here do fine with rules. They can follow those,” offers Brian. “But following rules doesn’t translate into long-term health and sobriety. Doing assignments, serving lunches, having friends and
working hard are all great things. But they have little to do with staying sober and clean. It doesn’t change years of behavior. Because, what happens when they leave the program and the rules are gone?”

When Brian was first hired as an Employment Counselor in 2013, he lobbied Stuart to start thinking about Alcoholics Anonymous as one potential piece of the program. He introduced Stuart to a couple of friends, successful businessmen, who credit AA as part of their continued sobriety. Stuart agreed this would be a good offering, so they swapped out community suppers for AA meetings on-site several times a week. This was a big turning point in the direction of Guiding Light. Now, when a man is accepted as a candidate for the Recovery program, he’ll attend an AA meeting that very day.

Soon after implementing AA, Brian moved from Guiding Light’s Employment Counselor position to be the Recovery Program Director. “I knew I could help shape this. I knew I had something to offer.” Stuart gave him the autonomy to research, to present new ideas, and modify things along the way. Everything revolved around, “What does this person need to get well? What has been proven to be successful in recovery? What other methods are out there?”

“AA is still only a piece of what goes on here,” Brian says. “Most guys who come in don’t realize how much fuller life can be outside of just ‘not drinking.’ Guiding Light Recovery intentionally pushes at all areas of their life: how they think, speak, act, feel, interact. That’s when our Seven Focus Points begin to impact them.”

The Seven Focus Points were carved into stone (or paper) after researching and experimenting with what worked and what didn’t. Stuart’s early mantra was, “Don’t worry about how long it takes, let’s just get it right.”

“Getting it right,” so to speak, starts the very day a client walks in the door asking for help. Each person is asked, “Why do you want to be here?” This is where Focus Point One comes into play.

**FOCUS POINT # 1: Willingness to Change**

_The client is willing to change even though it is painful, daily, life-long, slow, and requires new choices._

When a man comes in the front door needing recovery help, he isn’t accepted into the program right away. He’s first given a seven to 14 day probationary period where all the staff can meet him, individually and as a group. He’ll be given a bed, three meals a day, and some tasks to do. He’ll attend AA the very day he comes in. The staff observes the man, to see if he’s serious about tackling, not just his addiction, but his whole self. Is he
willing to let go of his pride? Is he willing to learn new things? Is he willing to complete small tasks? Is he willing to be honest?

**FOCUS POINT # 2: Honesty**

*The client is willing to share the truth even when there is risk of self-disclosure, discomfort, or unpleasant consequences. Honesty is more than just telling the truth; it demands self-reflection and vulnerability.*

Throughout the program, including that early probationary period, honesty is a core value. It's likely that years of manipulation and unaddressed behavior has brought him to this point in his life. There are no ‘magic words’ for program acceptance, just the demand of ever-deepening honesty.

It’s a big deal when a man is accepted into GLR. It means that he’s given the opportunity to change. Coming in, the client is broken, although he may not realize how broken he is or what he has become. He’ll be drug tested and breathalyzed regularly. He’s given a schedule of classes, counseling sessions and exercise.

Brian shares a unique exercise the men go through: “There’s one week where they need to write down every untruth or white lie they told each day.”

Even the phrase, ‘I’m doing great!’ can be a white lie in a place like this. Is there a deep honesty in what you’re saying, or are you tweaking the story a bit? Through the exercise, Brian often hears men saying, “I had no idea I was changing my story to fit each person I told it to!”
FOCUS POINT #3: Self-Awareness
The client begins to choose his own patterns of behavior, to understand the stories he tells himself about who he is. Through an ongoing assessment of self, he may develop a different world view.

Men start to see themselves in a different way as they go through GLR. They start to see patterns of how they relate to others, think, act, feel, and speak. It is both liberating and challenging. Men have full days of classes, assignments, meals, counseling and chores. “We’ll talk about coping methods and defense mechanisms, the things that distract us from looking within.” By the end of the first month, each man will have obtained a sponsor (AA or NA), who he’ll need to call every day.

Each man will also understand his body’s physical needs, whether that be exercise, good food or sleep. He’ll recognize patterns of behavior, in relating to himself and to others. “It’s a powerful experience to see men start choosing new ways of being and relating,” Brian shares. “It is a privilege to witness their transformation.”

FOCUS POINT #4: Accountability to Others
Through honesty and transparency, the client will allow other people to challenge his attitudes and actions and to hold him to his commitments.

After what might be years of escaping commitment and responsibility, the men are finally held accountable here. If something a man says doesn’t quite match his actions, it will likely come up in a session, a meeting, or a devotional, often by his own peers. “They challenge each other!” Brian explains.

There is a lot of hiding and broken promises when men are in their addiction. Here, the men are challenged to structure their lives to be transparent so they can be held accountable for what they say they want and value.

FOCUS POINT #5: Vulnerability
The client learns to live with uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. He realizes that vulnerability is NOT a weakness, but is courageous and it can’t be maintained without a willingness to express honest feelings and emotions.

A man humbled enough to ask Guiding Light for help is only part of being ‘vulnerable.’ A man also needs to be teachable and open-minded. He needs to listen to others and be open to constructive feedback.

Many of the men used drinking and drugging to avoid pain, numb
feelings and ignore problems. Here the men are presented with tools to help them reveal their true selves and to foster close, meaningful relationships. They're given tools to help them live a different way of life. Men start to learn how to say what they mean and ask for what they need, letting their true selves be known despite it being uncomfortable and exposing.

Being vulnerable is a key part of learning how to lovingly interact with family and how to live in community with those who challenge you or disagree with you.

FOCUS POINT #6: Spiritual Curiosity
The client realizes that EVERYONE is a spiritual being, and is willing to explore the questions, "What is the content of my spirituality?" and “How does my spirituality show up in my life?”

“God made everyone different so everyone responds differently
to our program,” Brian observes. “Without getting to know each man, we wouldn’t know what he needs, personally and spiritually.” For some guys, ‘getting right with God’ is a daunting task.

“Men often want a deeper relationship with God, but they might not know how to get there,” Brian says. Each man is required to meet with a Spiritual Director at least once in the first month of his recovery. These volunteers are carefully selected and professionally trained through the Dominican Center to help the men discover what they want their spiritual lives to look like.

“They’re not pushy,” Brian confirms. “They sit with the men and offer help to get them where they want to go.” In his initial session, each man is asked “What do you want your relationship with God to look like? How do you want it to grow?” The Spiritual Director provides a different kind of counseling, offering tools and strategies to help a man get closer to his faith.

“There is a lot of space to talk about discovering God and who He is,” Brian says. “It’s a key relational piece here.”
FOCUS POINT #7: Self-Compassion
The client starts to see himself as more than the sum of his behaviors and that he has worth simply by being human. Negative self-image is displaced by the realization that all persons are worthwhile and that all persons live with struggles and successes.

After going through GLR, the hope is that each man will have an entirely new way of relating to the world and to himself. He will know that he is worthy of love and deeply valued.

The Seven Focus Point classes are cycled through every seven weeks. All the sessions are geared to work together simultaneously. They’re interactive, conversational, and help the men gain a new level of trust, friendship, and accountability with each other. All the men help by asking each other “How are you going to live differently? What do you want and how will you get there?” The whole curriculum encourages each man to take action toward his true values.

THEN WHAT HAPPENS?
Sometime during his fourth or fifth month, each man will start looking for work that is suited to his abilities and his commitment to staying sober. Guiding Light will help him save 75% of his check, so that as he transitions out he’ll have a savings account with enough money to start living independently. During the final phase of the program, each man is eligible to rent a room at Iron House, the sober living apartments owned by Guiding Light. While not mandatory, Iron House offers the continued encouragement of a sober community.

NEXT MOVES
Guiding Light Recovery acknowledges the need to expand, especially in light of the recent tsunami of opioid addictions. At this point, the program can only serve 28 men. That’s not a lot when we’re serving all of Kent County and beyond. We’re often near capacity.

There is no question that we’re outgrowing our building. The physical space is constraining for what we’re trying to do. The men have very little private or community space. And there isn’t a single tree or blade of grass on the property.

The hope is that one day, Guiding Light Recovery can relocate to a larger space, a greener space, away from traffic and sirens and other distractions. We long for the day when a man in recovery, reflective of his life, can sit under a tree, look at the sky, and be in awe of the many opportunities he has been given.
Betsey Vanden Berg remembers the fateful day over 45 years ago that changed her family’s life forever. She was in the fourth grade, coming home from school with her three siblings. Her Mom was upset and distraught. She’d gotten a call that her husband, Arthur, had been rushed to the emergency room with a terrible injury. He was on a home interior job, building his typical custom cabinetry and cutting a piece of wood with a table saw. Something slipped, sending his hand into the blade.

“It was such an awful, scary time for our family,” Betsey recalls. “He was self-employed so I’m not even sure he had health insurance.”

Arthur Van Enk, business owner, breadwinner, and father of four, had to go through a long year of surgeries and therapy to repair what was left of his hand. He lost his thumb and several tendons were severed and fused together with pins. His carpentry business of making custom cabinets had all but ground to a halt.

Betsey’s parents were stressed. Arthur knew he needed to bring in some much needed income as well as secure his family’s future. He needed to think long term. He sought the advice of his friends in the industry
and one of them suggested he buy some property in a growing Kentwood neighborhood and build some apartments. So Arthur and his wife got to work, securing loans, buying empty lots and hiring contractors to build what would become, not one, but three four-unit apartments.

“When they finished one, they’d rent it out and then start on the next one.”

She remembers being in middle school—Saturdays her Mom and her siblings would have to pitch in, maintaining the grounds. Her older siblings would mow the lawn and care for the landscaping, and she and her little sister would clean the vestibule and vacuum out the laundry room.

Betsey shows the pictures she took in the late 70’s. She moved into one of the upstairs apartments when she married her husband Dave. “We lived there for five years.” Betsey laughs at the picture of her little Ford Pinto in the driveway. “We lived there from ’78 to ’83 as we saved money for our first house.”

Decades later in 2015, Betsey was watching the news and heard about Iron House, Guiding Light’s sober living community. She cried out to her husband, “Dave, that’s where we lived!”

Betsey and Dave Vanden Berg had already been supporters of Guiding Light. On a chance phone call with the Guiding Light Development Director, she shared the story of her Dad and his injury. “Dad’s thinking was always geared toward paying the bills for the next week or month, but God had this much bigger plan for him.”

Arthur Van Enk passed away in early 2001, and his wife passed away in 2009. Betsey is sure that both her parents would be thrilled to know that the buildings were used to give men a second chance.

Betsey recalls a couple of verses that resonated with her Dad during his time of healing:

**Romans 5:3-4:** “We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

**James 1:2-4:** “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

In 2015, Betsey was invited to speak at the convocation and opening of the third Iron House. A poignant line she read was, “I know my Dad would be amazed and thrilled that God is using these buildings to now give men a new chance to fulfill God’s plan and purpose for their lives.”
WHY IS WORKING IMPORTANT?

We believe that when a man works toward self-sufficiency, he’s honoring the God who created him. Whatever pain or hardships he brings to our doors, we show him he is capable and worthy of responsibility and love. We encourage steady work, saving money, and making healthy choices. Through these things and a commitment to God, his shame and despair can fade, replacing discouragement with confidence and dignity.

HELPING GUIDING LIGHT IS AN INVESTMENT IN YOUR COMMUNITY!

Helping men get back on their feet helps the economy! When we put men back to work, they’re paying taxes, buying local groceries, and paying for their own housing and transportation. We don’t charge money for our services or receive government funding, so we rely on the community to help us remain strong. With your help, we can be that last remaining hope for a man who might have lost everything.

“YES, I WANT TO INVEST IN MEN BECOMING HEALTHY AND SELF-SUFFICIENT.”

Please consider donating any amount you can to help make this our best year ever! As always, Guiding Light is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Gifts are tax deductible as allowed by law.

Please mail donations to: Guiding Light
255 S. Division Ave, Grand Rapids, MI 49503
Or donate Online at lifeonthestreet.org
OUR MISSION STATEMENT:

Through the guiding light of God’s Spirit, Guiding Light partners with individuals to fulfill their God-given potential through rescue, recovery and re-engagement in community.

GUIDING LIGHT
255 S. DIVISION AVE
GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49503

Facebook.com/LifeOnTheStreet
ph: 616-451-0236
lifeonthestreet.org

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”
Matthew 11:28