"THIS MEANS THAT ANYONE WHO BELONGS TO CHRIST HAS BECOME A NEW PERSON. THE OLD LIFE IS GONE; A NEW LIFE HAS BEGUN! — 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17"
Guiding Light has been a staple in downtown Heartside for over 88 years. As you can imagine, we’ve seen our fair share of changes over the decades.

Our beginnings were humble and grassroots, with founder John Vande Water going door to door, preaching the gospel and inviting folks to chapel services at the West Fulton St. Mission.

Later, the name changed to Guiding Light Mission as it turned into a more traditional homeless shelter. Early on, we joined the fight against alcohol addiction and did our best to get men off the street. We went from a spiritual-salvation type of mission, to one of faith, food and shelter.

The organization has learned a lot of lessons since then. With our new focus on making men more confident, independent and ready to work, we’ve had to do a lot of things differently. The expectations have risen and the results are real.

Yes, men still sleep here. They receive food and shelter. And yes, the hope of Christ is still alive and well here. But we no longer identify with our 20th century self. We don’t see ourselves as a traditional mission anymore. But rather, we see ourselves as being on one.

The more we hone in on where we’re going, the more excited we are to share the amazing things that God has done through this place.

In the last five years, between our Back to Work program and Guiding Light Recovery, we’ve seen over a thousand men sleep under our roof and leave with full-time employment. They’ve been given a chance to start over. With your prayers, help and support, we can keep going for another 88 years.
Mr. John Vande Water knew he wanted to open his mission in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The big questions were where and how. He started by touring Grand Rapids neighborhoods, going door to door, and calling on people. He loved meeting strangers and getting straight to the point: “Do you attend any church in the area?”

Some would affirm that they did, but many more didn’t “want anything to do with that Bible bunk!” In fact, an astounding two-thirds of the hundreds of homes Mr. Van visited knew very little about Christianity and had a negative impression of it. But God gave Mr. Vande Water a lot of passion and energy for meeting, connecting and helping as many people as he could, regardless of their beliefs. He knew that faithful action and Christ’s love could win hearts.

The West Fulton St. Mission opened on March 31, 1929, a mere seven months before the big stock market crash that kicked off a decade of lost money, closed banks and lack of work. At that time, the Mission was less about handing out food and more about spreading the gospel and saving souls. They did have an on-site thrift store, but for the most part, the space existed as a meeting place—a street church of sorts, attended by whomever Mr. Vande Water could get to come.

In 1944, John Vande Water was asked to serve at a mission in New Jersey and Andrew Vander Veer took over the reigns as Field Missionary.
In 1957, Director Andrew Vander Veer kicked off a new era for the West Fulton St. Mission. With a growing heart toward those ravaged by drugs and alcohol, he helped form an “Alcohol Victories” committee and moved the organization closer to downtown.

He challenged the public with a competition to come up with a new name. Thus, Guiding Light Mission was chosen out of 600 entries. The publicity and support for the new downtown Guiding Light Mission was strong. The late ’50s through the ’60s was a boom period for donations and local church support. The programs and services offered were vast: Bible classes, meals for the hungry, weekday meetings, gospel services, youth programs, juvenile assistance, family support, hospital calls, church planting, African American outreach and more. All were geared toward bringing people closer to the Lord.

The next few decades were a time of introspection for Guiding Light. A philosophy of, “We don’t turn anyone away” made our organization a safe haven for the troubled all through the ’80s. But this begged the question: “Where do we want men leaving Guiding Light to turn next?” Eventually this elusive end goal became clear: if faith works, then all God’s faithful deserve meaningful work, too.
Guiding Light Today

2009-PRESENT

Downtown Grand Rapids grew rapidly during the late '90s and early 2000s. New restaurants, businesses and artist communities were springing up regularly. We saw the arrival of the Van Andel Arena and the DeVos Convention Center, drawing thousands of visitors to Grand Rapids every month and creating thousands of new jobs in the downtown area.

With the economy looking auspicious and the heart of Guiding Light still beating strong, the turn of the century became a chance to change the street population’s blurry future with a newfound focus.

Executive Director, Stuart Ray

Since 2009, Executive Director Stuart Ray, along with the dedicated board and staff at Guiding Light, have been working hard to carve out a new ideology, one that can have measurable results and lasting change. An emphasis on employment, independence, and sustainable housing has opened up a new world of challenges and possibilities. With the last several years of local job growth and economic healing, Guiding Light is doing everything it can to help men face their addictions, get back on their feet, and take control of their lives.
Everyone who has worked here or even stepped foot in here over the last 88 years had some sliver of hope that life could be better, that Guiding Light could help in some way. And we need to continue that legacy. We need to keep that hope alive.

We’re incredibly excited about this new era of Guiding Light. We’ve honed in on our programs, our pillars of light that we are proud of. Each path is a rescue option for someone in need. Each one requires a different level of investment. Ideally, they all lead to the same place: steady employment and a safe, affordable place to live, and a renewed faith.

People who inquire about the services of Guiding Light are offered a couple of different options. But it takes a series of questions to figure out what’s best: the Back to Work program or the much more intense Recovery program?

“First, I need to find out who this person is and why they need help,” says Intake Manager Jeff Courtley. “And then I need to decide if he’s someone who we can help. I can usually tell over the phone if someone can do the Back to Work program or if they really need the Recovery program. Because they really are for different people.”

Jeff usually does the first assessment of candidates over the phone. He’ll run down a list of questions, asking about their story, whether they have an addiction problem or just need a place to start over. “We’ll learn about their situation first.”

The severity of their problem determines their program placement. Those who are considered able will join the Back to Work program and attend the onsite AA meetings, while those with debilitating addiction will join the comprehensive, four to eight month Recovery program, so they can mend their underlying wellbeing before tackling their worklessness.

“People think Recovery from addiction is a quick fix here, and it’s not,” says Jeff. “Some guys do need serious substance abuse recovery, and I try to steer them to that when it’s appropriate.”
Once in the Back to Work program, the men are given a bed, three square meals a day and a run down of all the tools available to find a job, such as use of our computer lab for job research and creating new resumes. Guiding Light has a closet full of suits as well, for upcoming interviews. Usually, men will find a job within their first week, but some may take longer. Most of them will have around ten to twelve weeks to work their new jobs and save money for a place to live.

99% of the men who completed the 90-day program left with steady employment.

TIMOTHY’S New Chapter

Earlier this year, Tim got into trouble with the law. His assault charge landed him in jail for 90 days, causing him to lose his job and the apartment that he’d had for four years. After his release, he had nothing: no money, no home and no job.

“I learned about Guiding Light while in jail, and when I got out, I felt like the Lord was leading me here.” When Tim first came to Guiding Light, there wasn’t an opening. All the beds in the Back to Work program were full. “But the next day, Jeff (Intake Manager) called me up and said, ‘Hey, we have a bed for you!’"

Tim got his bed and his locker and was shown the tools available for him to find work. When he learned that The Job Post Staffing Co. was just down the hall, he decided to fill out an application and connect with them. “A week later I had a job,” Tim says.

I learned about Guiding Light while in jail and when I got out, I felt like the Lord was leading me here.

While at Guiding Light, Tim will have eleven weeks to save 75% of his paychecks. Ideally, he’ll have enough money saved up for his own apartment somewhere. Looking ahead, Tim is hoping he can save up enough money to buy his own home someday. “I hope I can just be happy and have the Lord’s will in my life.”

For more information about Back to Work, visit GuidingLightWorks.org or call Jeff Courtley at 616-451-0236, Ext. 25.
A Clean Slate. A Restored Faith.

RECOVERY

Often Jeff gets calls from a candidate’s family member. Someone’s mom, wife or brother is calling, worried sick about their loved one’s addiction. Jeff will ask them his routine questions, but it’s much harder to get the real story from them. “If the gentleman in question doesn’t reach out himself, then it’s hard to know if we can assist in his recovery. We can only help the man who really wants the help.”

When Jeff does get a possible candidate on the phone, he’ll stay on the line as long as it takes to understand his story and situation. Many of the men who come in with substance abuse problems want jobs right away. They want to work and get a paycheck. They know that homelessness is a reality that could happen, so they’re ready to work hard and get back on their feet. But recovery is more than just paying the bills. They need to take the time to get it right.

The first step is a 7-14 day probationary period, where the staff can observe how the candidate follows the rules and gets along with other residents. Is he willing to let go of his pride? Is he willing to learn new things? Is he willing to be honest and vulnerable? Only then will the candidate officially be let into the Guiding Light Recovery program.

We take four months to get to know each man. We lead him through sessions, classes, counseling, and we give him multiple opportunities to share his story. We encourage each man to divulge his triggers and weaknesses. After years of unaddressed denial and manipulation, each man is retrained in how to be honest about his struggles. Even the phrase, “I’m doing great!” can be a white lie when going through recovery. We need the truth—the whole truth. Only then can we really help each man deal appropriately with his addiction.

Guiding Light Recovery goes deep, far and wide in helping each man transform into a new person. Each man in the program is a pillar of strength and accountability to the person next to him. They look after each other. They become brothers, in a way. Many of the men used drinking and drugs to avoid pain, numb feelings and ignore problems. Here, they’re presented with tools to help them be authentic and to foster close, meaningful relationships: not just with each other, but also with their families and the people they’ve hurt.

After four months of recovery sessions, as well as completion of Goodwill’s Achieve Program, each man can then start looking for work. Ideally, it’s work that they’d find fulfillment in—something they can do well and ultimately be proud of.

Men in the program save 75% of their paychecks for several months so that the transition to independence can be a smooth one. Each man can also 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.

The Account of JEREMY

Jeremy remembers how he got into heroin. “I was 19 when my buddy was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s disease and he was sharing his pain pills with me, his Oxycodone.” A dependence kicked in, and the two of them found it wasn’t always easy to get the pills they wanted. “Pills hit Grand Haven like a wild fire and the demand drove the price way up.”

He started waking up with severe pain in his back. Looking back, he figures it was withdrawals, but at the time, he wanted more oxy to feel good again. When he and his buddy couldn’t get their heavy duty pain pills, they decided to try heroin. “It seemed like a good idea at the time,” he says, with a humble laugh.

“The next ten, twelve, thirteen years, there was never any solid sobriety.” Jeremy went to a handful of treatment centers over the years, often getting medication to help with the heroin withdrawals. He’d detox for a week or two at a time, but nothing stuck.
Recovery is hard. All it takes is one weak moment to destroy eight months of hard-earned sobriety. With alcohol ads displayed everywhere you go, no alcoholic can stay sober alone. AA and NA sponsors are great, but a community of sponsors? Even better.

Iron House is our own sober-living apartments—three buildings all next to each other in a safe and family-oriented neighborhood in Kentwood and one building located closer to downtown Grand Rapids. They’re reserved exclusively for the men who’ve gone through Guiding Light Recovery or the Back to Work programs. We now have 16 apartments, giving us 28 total bedrooms, with each room renting for $450 a month, utilities included. Not a bad deal for someone starting over and looking for a new and healthy community.

The residents all have jobs. They buy their own food, pay their own bills and are engaging with each other regularly. They look after and support each other. They’re practicing community in the best way they can. There is no question that they are stronger together.

For more information about Guiding Light Recovery, Back to Work and Iron House, please contact Jeff Courtley at 616-451-0236, Ext. 25
The word is getting around town that Guiding Light is serious about putting people back to work. We do the hard work of breaking down the barriers that prevent someone from getting a job.

The Job Post is our onsite staffing company—our very own social enterprise that serves the staffing needs of local businesses and the men and women who come in looking for work. Anyone can apply, provided they have a valid I.D. and can pass a drug test. Workers are interviewed, vetted, given an orientation, and paired with an appropriate assignment. There are follow-up conversations to see how things are going, with both the client and the employer.

Since the Job Post opened in 2015, over 800 men and women have found full-time employment. 80% of our current hires are men and women within Kent County.

In addition to drawing from Guiding Light participants looking for work, the Job Post offers services for employers and the general public. This allows us to capitalize on our expertise to generate some revenue and offset some of the expenses of Guiding Light.

Every employee of The Job Post is offered the same benefits as a result of being a part of our unique, non-profit service. That includes (when appropriate) bus passes, van rides, lunch, clothing, safety goggles, gloves, boots, etc. Every employee of The Job Post is also accountable to the same work standards and background checks.
Bringing their STORIES to LIGHT

For men at Guiding Light, the first step toward starting a new life chapter is learning from the stories that brought them here. We invited some of our men to share their path to newfound confidence and purpose on camera, so they could find closure, and so other men could see what recovery in motion looks like.

From their darkest nights to their first new dawn of many, these men left nothing out of their gripping testimonials. Though the details may not have been easy to share or comfortable to hear, their empowering words are a testament to the ever-growing influence of Guiding Light’s Back to Work and Recovery programs, as well as the transforming power of faith the programs embody. Our thanks go out to all of them for their honesty, transparency and bravery.
We collected these video logs to support a broader message of progress at Guiding Light. Through these men and so many others, the difference we’re making is now audible, visual and tangible. Their hard work and infectious faith spreads across West Michigan. Each man’s tale is earnestly filmed and presented, putting more emphasis on the words being said than the man behind them. For as God can speak through many circumstances, we aim to relay the hope of salvation and new beginning from across a diverse range of experiences.

By doing so, the candid nature of these stories doesn’t just show how a man’s time at Guiding Light is dynamic. It shows how our programs have a purpose for men of any background.

It’s no coincidence that the men in these stories share names with prominent Biblical figures. While the modern stories of Mark, Matthew, John and Isaiah show what Guiding Light does now, the historical toil and revelation these men’s names evoke show what we’ve always believed: that faith works through the ages. After all, the virtues and lessons of God and the Lord Jesus Christ are just as applicable on Grand Rapids’ streets as they were on Jerusalem’s.

By shedding a spiritual light on the 21st century stories of Mark, Matthew, John and Isaiah, we hope to remind men on the street and Guiding Light supporters alike that God’s own guiding light can, and should, shine everywhere.

See Matthew’s story at GuidingLightWorks.org/Stories
For example, the Biblical story of Isaiah has always been about change, salvation and establishing new kingdoms of faith. Meanwhile, the Gospel of Mark is about growth and actions that transcend words. The stories of Guiding Light’s Isaiah and Mark are no different, which is why we asked them, as well as John and Matthew, to speak with us so openly.

By using Guiding Light as a stable living space, these men were able to quickly find reliable work. Their willingness to come into our studio and bare all only further reveals how safe and supportive the Guiding Light community has become.

While these men’s faces and names went on to grace billboards, online banners and more, it’s the light in their eyes and the hope in their voices that give Guiding Light’s video stories a third dimension. Each man may have experienced change at a personal level, but their stories are symbolic for all those seeking growth through the persistence Guiding Light encourages.
Shedding New Light: Our 2017 Campaign

Those video stories are just one spark of a new guiding flame, one that we have been igniting across Grand Rapids to communicate our continued commitment to getting men off the street and on a payroll. Defined by a new visual identity and bold voice, this campaign can be seen on streets, online, TV and more.

From wall installations and billboards to website banners and videos, our new messaging reaches out with a succinct purpose. This cohesive campaign propels our 88-year-old organization into the digital age with a timeless sentiment that ties old and new media together.
So while our audience of donors, supporters and program participants may span West Michigan and the web, they will always receive the same recognizable message of hope. This will be increasingly important as our donor base shifts in age and media habits.

From reemphasizing Guiding Light’s core mission of getting men back on a payroll, to just sharing inspiring notes of faith and resurrection, we don’t want to just speak to Grand Rapids: we want to engage with it, striking up meaningful conversations that welcome new donors and supporters into our family.

Guiding Light’s 2017 campaign sees our organization and its men at our most confident. As we continue to evolve and grow alongside the men in its programs, the organization will continually adapt to changing times. But through all change, we will remain adamantly committed to one core mission: reinvigorating Grand Rapids’ most downtrodden through recovery and re-engagement.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”
- John 1:5
OFF THE FIELD. ON A MISSION.

Join us October 5th, for the 2017 Guiding Light Annual Banquet

FEATURING Darryl Strawberry

EVENTS

8/27-9/9 LABOR DAY TEXT-A-THON

This Labor Day weekend, Guiding Light is hosting a Text-A-Thon to capitalize on the holiday and shine a light on our Back to Work and Recovery programs. Starting Sunday, August 27, participants can text a donation using their cell phones. The event will last through September 9 and is highlighted by participation in Avenue of the Arts First Fridays and the West Michigan Labor Fest at Ah-Nab-Awen Park.

10/5 GUIDING LIGHT ANNUAL BANQUET

Join us at Frederik Meijer Gardens as we hear from former MLB player, recovering addict and ordained minister Darryl Strawberry. Your attendance will support our mission of restoring Grand Rapids men struggling with addiction and homelessness through recovery and re-engagement. Tickets are limited; RSVP online by September 20th, or call 616-451-0236 ext. 13. Details and tickets are available online at: GuidingLightWorks.org/banquet

ANY TIME VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

There are many opportunities to pitch in for individuals, families or groups. These opportunities include help in our offices or in our kitchen, to maintenance for our vehicles and kitchen equipment from trade professionals. To learn more and volunteer, please visit: GuidingLightWorks.org/Get-involved
BE THE LIGHT

Why give
By donating to Guiding Light, you are helping Grand Rapids men who are lost, homeless or recovering from addiction and substance abuse. With your support, we are getting these men off the street and on a payroll—renewing their faith and providing them with the community and resources they need to become productive and independent again.

How to give
Any single donation, no matter the size, helps us keep the light on. We also make it easy to set up recurring monthly donations, and we additionally partner with Barnabas Foundation to provide planning services tailored to each family situation, at no cost.

To give by mail:
Please make check payable to Guiding Light.
Please mail to PO Box 1703, Grand Rapids, MI 49501

To give over the phone:
Contact Arla at 616-451-0236 ext. 22.

To give online, or learn more, visit:
GuidingLightWorks.org/Give

Questions?
Contact Development Director, Starla McDermott at 616.451.0236 ext. 20.

Commit your WORK to the Lord, and then your plans will SUCCEED.

PROVERBS 6:13
FOR AS THE BODY without the spirit is dead, SO FAITH without works is dead also.

James 2:26

GUIDING LIGHT
225 S. Division Ave
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
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GuidingLightWorks.org

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 the community.