

The **LIGHT** **POST**

Guiding Light Newsletter | Aug. 2019 | Issue 5

WORK IN **PROGRESS** *for 90 years.*



Commit to
THE LORD
whatever you do, &
HE WILL ESTABLISH
YOUR PLANS.

Proverbs 16:3 (NIV)

Welcome to
The Light Post 90 Year Issue

HIGHLIGHTS

Stories made possible through your support

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A MESSAGE *from* STUART RAY

You may have noticed our strong job market here in Grand Rapids. Over the past few years, it has become easier for those out of work to find new employment. That is, unless an individual is without an address. When homelessness, joblessness and addiction coincide, it can be the beginning of a downward cycle into poverty and life on the streets. This can last for years, or even decades, as men slide into sickness or even death due to the exposure addiction beckons.

At Guiding Light, we provide the opportunity to find full-time employment and an address. We connect program participants with jobs that best meet their skills, abilities, and goals. We recognize that people need more than just jobs to be whole. We also connect these men to each other so that they can assist one another not only in job searches, but in their spiritual exploration as they form stronger relationships with one another and with God. We understand that in order to become healthy, each person has needs that must be addressed holistically and in community with others.

Guiding Light is not just a place, but a process and transformational experience. Our programs meet each individual participant exactly as he is and address his obvious physical needs of clothing, food and employment. Then the real work begins. Once he is in one of our programs, he has responsibilities here that contribute to the daily upkeep of the mission. He is up at 6 AM, he does his assigned chores and goes to Bible study. He forms relationships with his

fellow participants and has opportunities to mentor his peers. When he is not doing these things, he is either searching for work or going to work. All of these activities enable him to make changes in his own life. He is renewed through these processes, and his story changes. Instead of being isolated and desperate, he becomes a part of a healthy community and is able to make plans for his future.

While many men have similar experiences that led them to Guiding Light, we recognize that each individual has their own story to share that holds the promise of unique ways in which God will use them to positively impact the lives of others. Our Back to Work and Recovery programs give these men stability, consistency, and opportunity. Each of our programs have specific rules and procedures that are designed to meet the particular needs of each man who lives here. No participant is allowed to become stagnant. At the point where each man's story and ours intersect, there is hard work, hope, and God's promise to prosper each of us.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stuart". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stuart Ray
Executive Director



RECOVERY, REFLECTION, RENEWAL.

Michael Finds New Life.

**“This is truly
a place where
miracles happen.”**

Traditionally speaking, miracles occur amid blinding light, the roar of thunder and the onset of visions.

But Michael will softly tell you that his unfolded the day he walked into Guiding Light. “This is truly a place where miracles happen,” he says, “and I don’t even think you need to be a recovering addict or homeless or out of a job. I think the average person can come in here and learn countless new things about themselves.”

Michael is arguably qualified to make that assessment, as he’s been in and out of too many other facilities where he tried without long-term success to address his problems with drugs.

A native of the Clarkston area, Michael was born with pituitary dwarfism—a disorder marked by growth hormone deficiency and characterized by slow growth and small stature—and it haunted him during his formative years. “I was bullied in middle school and in high school,” he says, “and it had to do in part with the dwarfism in my younger years, but also how we lived in an upper class area and weren’t really part of that.”

He dropped out of high school and performed odd jobs, but “broke all the rules” his parents had laid down at home and moved out at 19. Eventually, “prescription drugs were at the epicenter of my life, and I lost control.”

By the time Michael was in his late 20's, he'd fathered two children with a woman he'd been in a relationship with for about eight years. "But my infatuation with getting high took precedence," and they went their separate ways, she with the kids.

"I was really spiraling out of control, sleeping on couches of friends and acquaintances until they kicked me out. Then I'd just find some other place to go."

At one point, he called home a tent in the woods, and during an odyssey that endured into his early 30s, Michael entered and exited several rehab centers in Michigan and Indiana. In February of 2018, he finally discovered Guiding Light. With the help of staff, he's earned his GED, secured a driver's license for the first time and landed a full-time job. Last month Michael celebrated one-year of sobriety. Today, Michael is living independently at Guiding Light's Iron House and reaching back in an attempt to re-establish connections with his former girlfriend and their 7-year old son and daughter, now 10.

"I haven't seen them since they were 2 and 5," he says, explaining that their mother decided in was in their best interest not to have Michael involved in their lives until he got clean. The progress Michael has made at Guiding Light has the mom willing to explore reconciliation. He explains, "I've talked to her a few times on the phone recently and she agrees that I should be a part of the kids' lives as long as I move forward. I haven't talked to the kids yet, and I figure it will be an emotional moment. I am eager to be with them again, though we haven't decided on when or where."

46% OF MEN
in Guiding Light Programming
ARE ESTRANGED FATHERS

MICHAEL'S TO DO LIST

1. REMAIN DRUG FREE
2. OBTAIN G.E.D.
3. GET A DRIVER'S LICENSE
4. BUY A CAR
5. BE A FATHER TO MY KIDS AGAIN

Michael is taking the time to become self-aware about what's important and what's not. That would include zeroing in on the unimportance of "stuff," and wonders "what the world would look like if you were to replace material things with more internal compassion." That would have to be preceded by self-awareness, he notes, "since it's hard to make somebody happy when you're not happy."

What did Guiding Light provide him that he couldn't find elsewhere? "There's an energy about this place," he says. "It's more about getting in tune with yourself, and understanding the science of addiction. At other places, it seemed like pauses in the road. You went right back out to do the same thing, and they don't talk about that."

Taking action, says Michael, is the difference between dreaming and doing. "I don't stop at the vision stage anymore," he says. "I'm a doer now. And it's helping me create and fill in more and more pieces of the puzzle."



FINDING REFUGE *in* RECOVERY.

Back To Work Is The Compass Joe Needed

The scar on Joe's hand is a chilling reminder of a night for which he can't provide a lot of details, other than remembering "I got stupid drunk and mad at something and put my hand through a TV."

He's come a long way since that evening, when he was regularly using inhalants to get high, bouncing around from one job to another, and facing eviction from an apartment into which he'd retreated because he suffered from social anxiety.

Joe graduated high school from an alternative facility after losing his mother while still a teen. At the age of 19, he found himself on his own. Perpetually short on money, he spent several months living in his clunker of a 2001 Monte Carlo, parking it from time to time at a Wal-Mart. None of the jobs he had seemed to stick.

Joe had trouble connecting with others. After work, he'd simply come home and spend time alone, often resorting to "huffing." "It's not easy for me to hang out with other people," he says. "I'm good at hiding and avoiding contact with others."

He sought therapy at a mental health facility, where a clinician recommended he seek assistance at Guiding Light. Two days after being evicted from his place in Allendale, he applied and eventually entered the Back To Work program.

It's here that Joe found a new pace and purpose, nailing down a decent job and starting to tackle close to \$1300 in debts. "Joe's been successful in all phases but at first he didn't think he could do it," confirms Jeff Courtley, who directs the Back to Work program. "He's worked well with case managers and has come out of his shell. Joe did the work to save close to \$4000, and recently he moved into his own studio apartment."

*God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.*

Psalm 46:1 NIV

Though both his biological parents are gone, Joe—now 21—stays close to an older sister and her children and hopes to work in the film industry some day. He's set to start classes soon at Grand Rapids Community College, and is easing into personal relationships with colleagues at work.

Joe is grateful for the opportunities afforded by Guiding Light and its Back to Work program. He views Grand Rapids' Heartside neighborhood as an area hosting sources of refuge, but where "it's still easy to abuse the system" and at some places "you don't have to improve your life at all."

"Guiding Light stands apart", he says, "because they hold you accountable to yourself. And if you can't cut it here, you can walk down the street and see where you're going next and there's not the same advantages and possibilities."

“I’m just glad that Guiding Light exists,” he says, “because without it, I don’t know where I’d be.”

JOE'S TO DO LIST

1. TACKLE DEBT SO THAT I CAN GET AN APARTMENT
 - (A) BANK OVERDRAFT FEES PAID \$325
 - (B) PAST EVICTION DEBT PAID OFF \$783
 - (C) PAST UTILITY BILL PAID \$150
 - (D) IMPROVE CREDIT SCORE
2. PERSONAL GOALS
 - (A) GOOD PAYING JOB
 - (B) STUDIO APARTMENT
 - (C) MONEY IN SAVINGS ACCOUNT
 - (D) BACK TO SCHOOL PART TIME (GRCC)

Stories like Joe's are only possible
WITH YOUR SUPPORT

GUIDING GRAND RAPIDS *for* 90 YEARS

With your prayers, determination and generosity, we have persisted for nearly a century. This is not the history of an organization, but of a community rising up to confront the challenges of its most vulnerable members. We are guided by you, our donors, who have made our every success possible.

A LONG HISTORY OF BRIGHT FUTURES.

Guiding Light was first established as West Fulton Mission in 1929 by a layman named John Van de Water. It began out of a need for meals for the unfortunate in the community. Later, after moving to its new location, Guiding Light started what would become one of the most important components of its program; offering treatment for those struggling with drug and alcohol addiction.

Today, Guiding Light continues to fulfill the mission set forth by its founders. With your help, we can continue to provide services to the homeless and suffering while sharing the love of Christ with those in need. As we move into the future, our mission remains to provide recovery and re-engagement for those living at society's margins.





Once
LOST.

Now
FOUND.

An odyssey with a hopeful ending.

“A place not only to survive, but thrive”

Dmitry is arguably an anomaly.

As an infant, he was sold on the black market at the hands of a cruel babysitter in his birthplace of Russia...later kidnapped from an orphanage...and then graduated high school in the States with a 3.66 GPA. But eventually, Dmitry lost control and ended up homeless and living in his car.

What was unusual about Dmitry's application to the program last year was his age at the time, just 22, notes Jeff Courtley, who directs the Back to Work program. "While we have had someone in the program as young as high school age, the average age we serve is 37," he says.

Dmitry's tragic start in life smoothed out at the age of three, when he was adopted by an American family and brought to West Michigan. He graduated with honors from high school, serving as varsity soccer squad team captain and earning All-District and All-Conference honors.

After a year of college at Western Michigan University, he dropped out in favor of pursuing jobs in the restaurant industry in Grand Rapids. In the fall of 2016, he and his girlfriend embarked on a cross-country road trip, working odd jobs as they made their way across the southern states and then west to California.

They returned, leased an apartment they couldn't afford, split up, and Dmitry found himself living from couch to couch and then in his car. Homeless and without steady work, the weight on his 5-foot-10-inch frame went from an already lean 150 to 130 pounds. At one point, he sought counseling from a mental health facility and was prescribed drugs for anxiety and depression.

Realizing that finding a job would help create a healthier lifestyle and allow him to live in better comfort, he applied and was accepted into Guiding Light's Back to Work program in October 2018. He found employment through The Job Post, Guiding Light's very own social enterprise that offers hiring and recruitment opportunities for men and women who possess a valid I.D. and can pass a drug test.

Most of the jobs pay better than minimum wage and are in manufacturing. In Dmitry's case, he found a good-paying, second-shift job and was able to pay off over \$3600 in debts he'd accumulated through student loans, past evictions and medical expenses.

Dmitry has since finished the Back to Work program and lives and works independently. "Dmitry was very compliant and motivated," says Jeff. "During the first 30 days especially, we're concerned about how a candidate walks the walks, and not how they talk. Dmitry definitely walked the walk."

Dmitry views Guiding Light as the touchstone that helped him get his life back on track, and in more ways than just securing employment: "They gave me a safe and secure environment, a place not only to survive, but thrive," he says. "All of my necessities were taken care of while I put things back into place."

Dmitry understands that his four-month stay at Guiding Light was covered by donations from people he'll likely never meet.

“To those donors, I have immense gratitude for giving me the opportunity to turn my life around and become the best person I can be.”

"I've been able to switch from a survivalist mindset into a productive member of society. And now, I'm going to keep building on that, looking for ways to continue progressing."

DMITRY'S TO DO LIST

1. DEBT REPAYMENT

READJUST AND GET CURRENT ON:

\$1100 IN COURT FINES

\$5000 IN STUDENT LOANS

\$2400 IN PAST EVICTION COSTS

2. ADHERE TO, AND SUCCEED IN, GUIDING LIGHT RELAPSE PREVENTION PROGRAM

YOUR LEGACY WILL LAST *for the next 90 years*

Planned Gifts offer you smart and creative ways to increase your impact—often while benefiting your family, too. By understanding the available options, you can multiply the end results of your generosity in ways that are simple, flexible, cost-effective and extraordinarily powerful.

Non-Cash Assets

- Stock or marketable securities
- Retirement benefits
- Real estate
- Tangible personal property

Gift in a Will or Trust

Your final act of stewardship and care, a means to purposefully allocate your resources to support the people and causes you hold dear. By including charitable giving in your will, you model to your loved ones a legacy of generosity, and you help ensure that Guiding Light gets individuals off the street and on a payroll in the decades to come.



Why give

By donating to Guiding Light, you help 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 partner with Barnabas Foundation to provide estate planning services tailored to each family situation, at no cost to you.

To give by mail:

Please make check payable to Guiding Light.

Please mail to PO Box 1703, Grand Rapids, MI 49501

To give by phone:

Contact Arla at 616.451.0236 ext. 22.

To give online, or to learn more, visit:

GuidingLightWorks.org/Give

Questions?

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

SEPT 19TH | **MINISTRY UPDATE LUNCHEON**
Noon
Free to Attend, Reservation Required
Register to attend at: GuidingLightWorks.org/Luncheon

JAN 22ND | **MINISTRY UPDATE LUNCHEON**
More Details Coming Soon

FEB 2ND | **SOBER BOWL 2020**
4:00PM at Guiding Light
Free to Attend

Your involvement and support
LIGHTS THE WAY
IN THE NEXT 90 YEARS

*Many are the plans
in a person's heart, but it is*

**THE LORD'S
PURPOSE**

THAT PREVAILS.

Proverbs 19:21 (NIV)

The path of the righteous is like the morning sun
SHINING EVER BRIGHTER
until the full light of day.

PROVERBS 4:18 NIV

90
YEARS

GUIDING LIGHT

255 Division Ave S
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

616.451.0236
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.

