The LIGHT POST

Guiding Light Newsletter | *Issue 22*

SOMEONE WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Title: Read Corey's story on page 9
Image: Read Brandon's story (center) on page 7

FREEDOM, MOVEMENT, GOD, WORK, RELATIONSHIP, COMMUNITY, SERVICE, GROWTH, CHARACTER:

THIS IS THE NEW LIFE.

DEAR FRIENDS,

You are offering new life to men and women! I don't mean this metaphorically.

FREEDOM, movement, God, work, relationship, community, service, growth, character: this is the new life.

Men and women who come to us don't just have a slight drinking problem or use drugs recreationally. They are chronic addicts who've had brushes with death, where nothing has worked before. You're offering them a last chance at Guiding Light, not because they don't deserve more chances but because next time will be probably be the last time.

We hold our men and women to high standards because we know that as God's children they are worthy of love and capable of hard things. When we talk about housing, it's not Section 8. It's their own apartment. If we talk about insurance, it's that they get off of Medicaid and on their employer's insurance. If we talk about sobriety, it's not using less but not using at all. If we talk about work, we mean a full time job at a liveable wage.

As you read about Jess, Brandon, and Corey, know that you were the ones still fighting for them when they were at rock bottom and couldn't fight for themselves. Thanks for fighting for me all those years ago.

BRIAN

Brian Elve, Executive Director

JESS

A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE

Jessica had it all.

“I had my life together at one point. I was an upstanding adult,” she said. “I had children. I had a house. I had a career. **And addiction took everything that I had from me.**”

The losses stacked up gradually. Then all at once.

“First, it was small things. I would lose a little bit of money here and there, and that was going to drugs and to alcohol. I started losing friends. I started losing cars,” she said. “Then I started losing the really big things. I lost my career. I lost my house. **And I lost my kids.**”

Her family could see what was happening and warned her, but she was in denial.

“I thought, ‘There's no way a person like me could end up homeless,’” she said. “I never thought that could be me. **I never thought I would be the person who didn't have her children. I never thought I would be the one. Until I was.**”

During one of several trips to short-term rehab, someone told her about the new women’s recovery program at Guiding Light. But she kept trying to do the bare minimum, which inevitably

led to relapse. Finally, she decided she needed long-term help. She reached out to Guiding Light and its free, Christian-based, comprehensive, long-term program.

“I found that it was a good thing I didn’t go when I had first heard about it because it was a bigger deal than what I had prepared myself for,” she said. **“I was overwhelmed at what the program was offering me — in the best way possible. It was promising me a new life, and a new life was what I needed.”**

Now having celebrated her first year of abstinence-based sobriety and living in one of Guiding Light’s sober living homes for women, Jessica can see how the program changed her life.

“Guiding Light taught me how to show up in the world, how to be a better person, how to be a different person, how to show up for the people who matter, how to show up for myself,” she said. “They taught me discipline. Simple things like taking care of myself. That was huge.”

The program gave her a community of women, “people around me who are holding me accountable every single day, not just to stay sober, but to be involved in my daily life, to show up to meetings, to show up for myself, to get out of bed some days.”

“I was spiritually broken and I didn’t recognize how important that was. They opened my mind up, got me going back to church and put the presence of God back in my life. I’m not doing this alone. Guiding Light helped me to recognize that I feel more spiritually fit and that’s helped me immensely throughout my recovery and throughout my time here.”

Guiding Light also helped Jessica restore something else that she had lost: a relationship with God.

In addition to helping Jessica get back to work and back to God, it helped her get back to family. Her relationship with her 5-year-old and 13-year-old, although at a physical distance, is closer and stronger than it ever has been.

“It feels incredible. It really does,” she said. “I questioned myself as a mother for a long time. I questioned if I even deserved to have my children. **And now I know that they need me as much as I need them. And now I know that I do deserve to be their mother.”**

Her time with a community of women in recovery — she describes them as “some of the best people that I've ever met” — **taught Jessica that more women deserve to seek help.**

“There's always this stigma around women in recovery. We're

supposed to have this all together and have this all figured out as women, and I hate that stigma. But we're worth recovery as much as men are," she said.

"And once we get that help, we can be these brand-new moms for our children. We're absolutely worth it and our children deserve it and we deserve it, too. And if we can put in that work, we can be the best versions of ourselves for our children."

As she continues her journey of sobriety, rebuilding what she lost, Jessica says how deeply she values "these wonderful people who got me through the toughest experience of my life." She wants to repay the gifts she was given after she had lost it all.

"I want to make sure express my gratitude for Guiding Light, for the program, for the donors, for the life coaches, for absolutely everything," she said. "I am so grateful for this opportunity to have a second chance at life."

Is there a woman you know who could use help? Call Elizabeth on our intake cell at 616-881-4790!

BRANDON

WHEN I PUSHED, THEY PUSHED BACK

The last time he tried a treatment center, Brandon got kicked out. After months of sobriety, he was caught drinking. It was a familiar cycle, and he could see it coming.

"Every time I got sober, it was kind of like a lit fuse. When was it going to blow up in my face?" he said. "I was always on the edge of drinking again."

Years of what he called "feeble attempts to get sober" were getting him nowhere. Then his parents suggested Guiding Light. He called on a Monday, arrived on a Tuesday, and quickly discovered what makes Guiding Light different.

"They're hard on you, but they take care of you, too. They basically started putting me back together until I could start doing some of this stuff for myself," he said. "Some of it was gentle conversations, some of it was in my face, and other times I just straight up got challenged.

"When I pushed, they pushed back. And nobody ever did that before."

Brandon needed that. After years of anger and isolation, he was learning to be honest with himself.

"Basically every thought going through my head — about me, about the world — was completely toxic. The only thing keeping me going really was I didn't want my folks to bury me," he said. "For years basically I had little moments of

happiness and then kind of balled up rage and sadness. I was mad all the time. I may not look it or show it, but I was mad all the time."

At Guiding Light, he found a supportive community that accepted him for who he was.

"People were intentional about being involved in my life and in turn I became involved in their lives," he said **"I didn't have to pretend to be somebody to appease somebody. And I can't remember it ever being like that, where I'm just me and that's OK."**

While Brandon had no problem being challenged by the Guiding Light staff, it was a little more difficult for him to accept the importance of living in the moment.

"I am a profuse planner, and they intentionally would force me to just be present and deal with what I have to deal with right now," he said. "Before, it was always hard for me to recover because I had one foot in the past and I had one foot in the future. I have learned to deal with today"

Brandon completed the recovery program, found a job, and moved to Guiding Light's sober living community for men, Iron House. In June, he reached a full year sober. It comes with a huge difference: an entirely new way of living. **"I had to figure out how to live a life worthy of my recovery,"** he said. "If I am living a certain way where life progressively is getting better and better, the recovery almost kind of takes care of itself as long as I do what is necessary to maintain it."

The guy who used to have so much anger discovered he actually has a soft heart. He's learning to stay positive, to remember life does not have to be miserable. And he's still learning about himself.

"Guiding Light taught me how to look at life differently and live differently. And that is the one thing I had never done before," he said.

COREY

THEY SAW SOMEONE WORTH LOVING

Corey was one of the six men and women celebrated in July for reaching their first year of abstinence-based sobriety, and this is his story as he told it to over 150 people gathered in the Guiding Light chapel.

My name is Corey. I'm going to briefly talk about my past and what brought me to Guiding Light, and then a little bit about this past year.

I was addicted to opiates for over two decades**. If you've ever read a book or seen a movie about a junkie, that was me.**

IV drug use, overdoses, lying, manipulating, suboxone, methadone, Narcan, you name it.

Eventually, I put the dope down and picked up the bottle. At first, that seemed like an improvement because alcohol was legal, socially acceptable, and I could get it anywhere without going on dangerous quests to get a fix.

But before long, it became just as destructive. I was hospitalized multiple times, went to jail, and put the people that I loved through things no family should ever have to witness. Through it all, I convinced myself I was the only one who was hurting. **I honestly believed I was just going to die drunk.**

My family kept suggesting rehab, but I had already been before and thought I knew more than the experts. Eventually, my probation officer was at his wits' end with me, and when I asked him if I could go to Guiding Light. He responded, "Yes, please go to Guiding Light.

On July 14th of last year, my mom dropped me off here. **I remember sitting in the car telling her I didn't think this place or any place could help me.** I also told her I wasn't looking forward to meeting 30 new guys because we'd all just pretend to like each other while we were here, and those friendships would end the day we walked out the door.

I couldn't have been more wrong. It didn't take long before I realized Guiding Light was different. I became proud to ride around in the Guiding Light vans and wanted Guiding Light shirts to wear around. More importantly, **I realized this place wasn't just helping me stay sober; it was helping me become someone I actually wanted to be.**

We've all heard the phrase, "The opposite of addiction is connection." I believe that's true. Addiction isolates us; it pushes us away; it pushes family away, destroys friendships, and convinces us we're alone. This community didn't see me as a bad person or a delinquent. They saw someone worth loving, worth believing in, and worth fighting for.

Even when I didn't believe those things about myself, they helped me work through the lies I had been telling myself, discover what I truly value, and begin living a life that reflects those values through counseling, spiritual direction, and a community that genuinely cared about me. I found hope again. Before coming here, four months sounded like an eternity. Now it's hard to believe that so much change can happen in such a short time. The greatest gift Guiding Light gave me wasn't just sobriety; it was community. Everywhere I go now, I run into someone from the recovery community. I have a sponsor. I'm working the steps, and for the first time in a long time, **I don't have to do life alone.**

Earlier, I said I thought I'd make fake friends here. The men I went through the program with, I truly love these guys. They're more than just friends, and the best part about that is when I say that they know I'm. It's not just words. They know I just actually mean it. So thank you to Guiding Light, all the staff, the donors who make this place possible, my family, especially my mom, for never giving up on me, and my brothers in recovery. All of you.

STEWARDS OF GOD'S GIFTS

Retired physicians Dave Oviatt and Susie Radeckv use their expertise to care for people around the world. The couple volunteers "wherever God leads us."

So far that has included Togo, Papua New Guinea; Niger, Zambia, Cameroon, Nigeria, Egypt, Liberia, Kenya, Bangladesh, Liberia, Honduras, Papua New Guinea, and Nepal, some locations multiple times.

But they also always kept a place in their hearts for Grand Rapids, where they practiced medicine for 24 years, Dave as an internist and hematologist, Susie as a family physician who directed the Michigan State University-affiliated Grand Rapids Family Medicine Residency Program for 19 years.

"Of course we knew of Guiding Light just through our medical work, because you can't be a physician here and work in emergency care without knowing about Guiding Light," Susie said.

"The devastation of alcohol in particular is the most common, it just affects every part of the body," she said. "And I think oftentimes medically we just feel like we're drying off the stone and throwing it back in the water. I think our focus is to kind of help them to get through the physical part, but **I think we quickly learn that that's just ... It's not enough."**

Which brings them to one of their motivations to support the work of Guiding Light.

“Some physicians do and some don’t accentuate the spiritual aspect of care for these people,” Dave said. **“And that’s where an organization like Guiding Light is so good.”**

Years ago, Dave toured Guiding Light to learn about its approach to addiction recovery. Impressed that spiritual formation was incorporated into the full spectrum of care, he and Susie decided to become donors.

Recently they took their support a step further. They pledged a gift in their estate plan and became one of the founding members of Guiding Light’s Heritage Society. It was a decision, like their work around the world, driven by their faith.

“We’re stewards of all the blessings that God has given us, and we have to not hold them so tight that we don’t share them,” Dave said.

That becomes obvious when you see someone suffering, Susie said, whether that person was born into Third World poverty or lost everything to drugs or alcohol.

“When you first are confronted with the significant needs of people, you’re humbled immediately,” Susie said. **“What did I do to deserve my parents, where I was born, the opportunities given to me? ... It certainly has motivated us to be even more generous with what we do.”**

The Oviatts have always been careful with their money, something they attribute to God’s hand in their lives and growing up in families where those values were important.

That care with money allowed them to retire early and serve through World Medical Mission, the medical arm of Samaritan’s

Purse. It also allowed them to set aside part of their estate to provide for their children and grandchildren, along with a portion for Guiding Light and other ministries they support.

The Oviatts agreed to share their story in the hope that others see how to help Guiding Light — and the different approach it takes to recovery.

"The modern worldview is much more about 'read the book, follow these steps, pull yourselves up.' It's all based on our effort. I mean, it's a worldview, but it might not succeed," Dave said.

Susie added: "It's a lot less likely people will relapse when they have a spiritual focus."

Dave said he appreciates how Guiding Light approaches it program participants as "whole people who are God's children."

"It helps them really transform," he said. "It's a transformative process based on the spiritual root instead of saying, 'I can do this if I just work harder,' **We can't work our way out of such problems.**"

As doctors who have ministered to physical needs while also prioritizing spiritual health, sharing their gifts with Guiding Light and the people it serves comes naturally to the Oviatts.

"Our time on earth is very short," Dave said. "We're just passing through and the Bible says that life is a mist. And so, while we have to be concerned with our physical being, we also have to be concerned with our spiritual being and trying to share our faith with others as best as we can. **Eternity lies ahead.**"

Smart Giving: DAFS

WHAT'S A DAF?

A **Donor-Advised Fund** is like a charitable savings account. You make an irrevocable contribution through places like the National Christian Foundation, Fidelity Charitable, and other pass-through organizations, receive an immediate tax deduction, and then make grant recommendations to qualified 501(c)(3) charities like Guiding Light.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT DAFS?

- Simplified giving: Your fund administrator handles all paperwork, record-keeping, & tax receipts. You can manage all your donations, grants, and records from one convenient account.
- Flexible timing: You can take your tax deduction when you make a contribution and then choose when and where to disburse grants.
- Tax-efficiency: Contributions are tax deductible. Even better, investment growth is federally tax free. You can also donate appreciated securities, avoiding capital gains.
- Family legacy: A DAF is a powerful way to build or continue a tradition of family philanthropy, creating a plan that continues supporting the people and ministries you value most.

INTERESTED IN LEGACY GIVING OPTIONS?
Scan the QR code to visit our planned giving page or email us at info@guidinglightworks.org

Guiding Light partners with National Christian Foundation and Barnabas Foundation, both of which offer donor-advised funds. DAFs are also available through many investment firms, banks, and community foundations. Once your fund is established, you can recommend grants from your account throughout the year to qualified nonprofit organizations. Most DAF platforms are user-friendly and operate much like an online banking or investment account. You can also find helpful links and resources on the Guiding Light website. Of course, please consult your tax advisor regarding your specific tax situation.

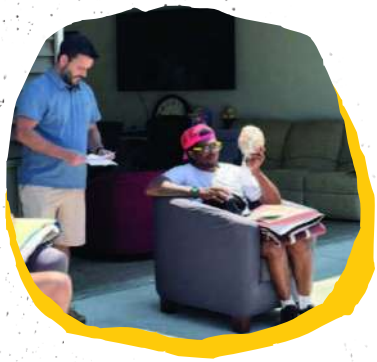
TAX DEDUCTION UPDATE

Starting in January of this year, there is a new permanent universal deduction: non-itemizers can deduct charitable gifts up to $1,000 ($2,000 for couples).

We think this is another great reason to become a LightKeeper: a community of supporters who give on a monthly basis. $80 a month makes a significant impact on the lives of men and women here at Guiding Light. $160 doubles that impact — and keeps you under the $2,000 deduction limit.

HIGHLIGHTS

NICK BAKES BREAD



We know the value of structure, challenge, and high standards — but you also know we like to celebrate whenever possible! Every time a man or woman moves into our long-term sober living, we host a move-in ceremony. It's short and sweet, with symbolic gestures to remind them of what's important in their increasing independence. The crowd favorite is a loaf of bread: a reminder of the true Bread of Life, Jesus, and the importance of hospitality. We used to get a loaf of bread from Wealthy Street Bakery because the owner is a Guiding Light program alum, but this is even better: our men's program manager, Nick — who once stood up for his own move-in ceremony when he moved to Iron House — is now baking the sourdough bread himself to offer the men and women at their celebration. What a beautiful and poignant circle of creation, offering, and relationship.

A HEART OF SERVICE

Nate sustained an injury at work and is waiting for a surgery date. Instead of sitting around at home, he asked if he could volunteer at Guiding Light. When he was in the program last year, he helped at the front desk: answering the phone, buzzing people into the building. So for the past 6 weeks, Nate has been here at the front desk, 40 hours a week, offering his time and positive attitude to all. Thanks, Nate! Appreciate you.

3 YEAR CELEBRATION: DREW, JORDAN, & MATT

Another three-year sobriety celebration at our executive director's home! Drew had a bit of a different journey to Iron House than normal. He changed his mind at the end of programming and moved out to his own apartment instead of going to Iron House. A few months later, he came back to staff and asked if he could live at Iron House because he made the wrong choice: he realized how deeply he needed the community and structure. Because of the gap, he didn't get a name plaque to put on the wall of names on the Year Sobriety Wall. So at this gathering, Drew was presented with his long-overdue name plaque. The tears flowed and everyone cheered. Congratulations to Jordan and Matt as well! Good job, men!

NEW

WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE

Introducing the Guiding Light Women's Collective, a new way to connect, serve, and make a lasting impact. The Collective brings women together to support the Guiding Light Women's Recovery Program through community, education, service opportunities, and philanthropy. Whether addiction has touched your life or you simply want to help more women find hope and healing, there's a place for you. Join the Collective today and help create more opportunities for women to experience lasting recovery.

LEARN ABOUT THE NEW WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE BY SCANNING HERE

NATIONAL RECOVERY AWARENESS MONTH

September is National Recovery Month and celebrates the millions of people living in recovery from substance use and mental health disorders. Recovery is possible! It's also a month to celebrate the families, providers, and friends helping men and women live in this new reality. **YOU are part of this solution! Thanks for investing in community members like Jess, Corey, and Brandon.**

3 WAYS TO GIVE:

DONOR ADVISED FUNDS (DAFS), IRAS, STOCKS, LEGACY, MEMORIAL, IN-KIND GIVING: We are honored to be the recipient of these gifts and have streamlined systems. **Contact (616) 451-0236, option #5 or david@guidinglightworks.org**

ONLINE GIFTS: Secure contributions can be made by scanning the QR code below or visiting: **www.guidinglightworks.org/give.**

REPLY WITH THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE: Mail to PO Box 1703, Grand Rapids, MI 49501.

GUIDING LIGHT
RECOVERY REIMAGINED

255 Division Ave S, Grand Rapids, MI 49503
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