

The **LIGHT** **POST**

Guiding Light Newsletter | *Issue 13*



This photo on our billboards was not posed. Scan the QR code to see the real story.

A black and white photograph of two men embracing. The man in the foreground is seen from the back, wearing a dark jacket. The man behind him has his arms around the first man's shoulders. The background is a bright, overexposed outdoor setting.

FROM
DARKNESS
TO LIGHT

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"If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there Your hand will guide me, **Your right hand will hold me fast.**
Even the darkness will not be dark to You; the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to You."

– Psalms 139:7-12



**For unto us
a son is *reborn***

GuidingLightWorks.org/Give

**"BY THIS WE KNOW
LOVE THAT HE FIRST
LOVED US."**

- 1 JOHN 4:19

It's easy to think about movement of dark to light as we go from winter to spring or night to day or even bad to good. As we at Guiding Light walk beside men and women in their darkest moments, we start to see another type of movement from dark to light: self-obsession to active service, selfishness to care of others, self-consciousness to compassion.

In the depths of addiction, the only person the addict cares about is themselves. And usually feelings of guilt and shame over how they treat others are buried under more substance use. Part of this movement to new life is the ability to accept forgiveness from God, accept forgiveness from others, and accept their flawed human state – not with self-flagellation but with renewed energy from being free from those dark and destructive bonds of selfishness.

Part of what we do at Guiding Light is equip individuals in learning how to be aware of the world around them, to WAKE UP, and to learn to love others. This is the basis of community. This is how God created us: to learn to love Him as we learn to love each other.



When I talk about love, I don't mean fuzzy feelings or simply an emotional state of being. I mean action. I mean sacrifice. I mean being vulnerable and open. I mean learning to care for others regardless of how I feel at that moment.

This is hard! This is a lifetime of work! Thank God for His Spirit and supernatural love showing us the way. As you notice the days getting longer, think about these things. When you hear about the death and destruction all over the news, let it prompt you to dig a little deeper in loving those around you.

You make this work possible. Not just hot meals, warm beds, daily showers, clean clothes. Not just sobriety or full-time work or dignified housing. But deep, gut-level movement from despair to hope, from self to others, from dark to light.

God bless,

BRIAN

Executive Director of Guiding Light

DAVID

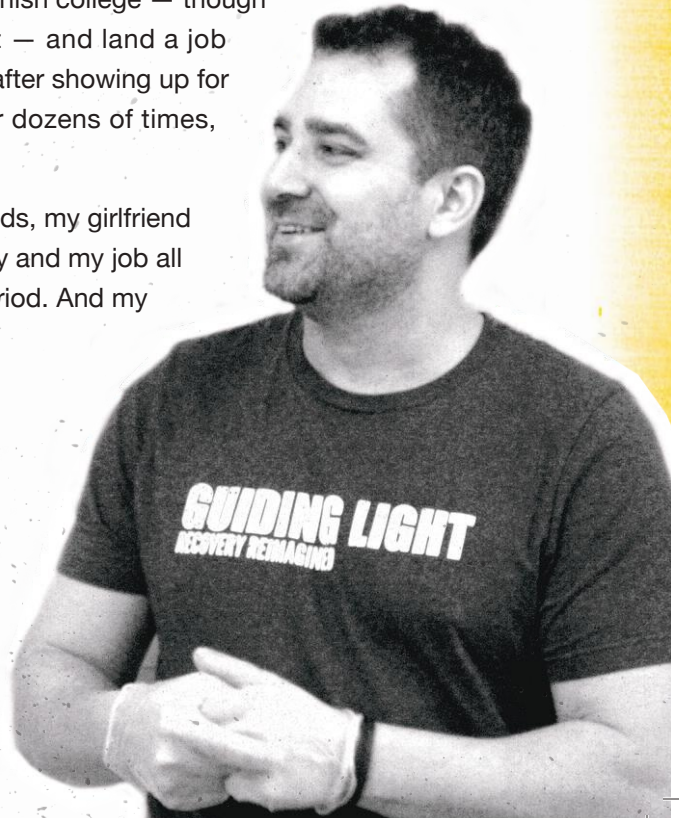
**"IT REALLY IS THE GREATEST GIFT
I COULD HAVE EVER GOTTEN"**

David is a walking, thriving example of the power of second chances. And he'll be the first to tell you how he is making the most out of his gift of a second chance at Guiding Light, where he is moving from the darkness of rock bottom to the light of new life.


An alcoholic since before high school, David somehow managed to finish college — though he barely remembers it — and land a job where he excelled. But after showing up for work late and hungover dozens of times, his employer fired him.

"I had lost all of my friends, my girlfriend that I was going to marry and my job all within a three-month period. And my drinking just escalated."

But that still wasn't rock-bottom.



I am committed to living a different way in this world through my recovery and personal growth where I will be honest, willing, vulnerable, and responsible to myself and to others


8.25.23

He spent most of the next decade hiding out upstairs at his mother's home and drinking eight bottles of wine — sometimes stolen — every day, from the time he woke up to the time he fell asleep.

He ended up in the hospital on a monthly basis and was worrying his parents sick.

Then David's father convinced him to try Guiding Light. That lasted only about a month until he was expelled for rule violations. He started drinking again, developed tremors, became incapable of living a normal life.

There it was: rock bottom.

And with it, eventually, his second chance.

One day he was shaking and crying, begging his father to let him end his life.

"Of course, he said no. I realized at that moment I needed to get back to Guiding Light. I called and asked if it was alright to come by again despite getting kicked out, and they said, 'sure, come on by.' I had hit that low and I guess it showed, because this time it was totally different."

What was different this time? He was ready to embrace the Guiding Light value of living at cause — taking charge of his own life.

“Prior to this second time around, my whole life was living at effect. I was playing the victim. But the second time was totally different. I was just ready.”

And what he found when he was ready was that Guiding Light is a community.

“You have a roof over head and food in your belly and a place to sleep — that’s pretty standard. But it’s the commitment of the people who work here, the life coaches, the therapists, spiritual directors, even the executive director. They really show they care, and **they put in the time to work with you** to really find out more about yourself than you could possibly imagine.”

David said he has learned to be honest with himself and others, to be vulnerable and open with his family, to work on his physical, mental and spiritual health.



“I’ve been healthier and happier here than I have in the past 10 years of my life. With the help of my community and Guiding Light, my life coach, spiritual director, therapist, all that, just all working together — I haven’t smiled as much in so long that I can’t even remember.”



With David's new life comes new responsibility. He is serving as a houseman, a role he describes as "helping all my fellow addicts here, the Guiding Lighters." He's looking forward to moving to the next stage of his recovery, Achieve, so he can find work and move on to Guiding Light's sober living community, Iron House.

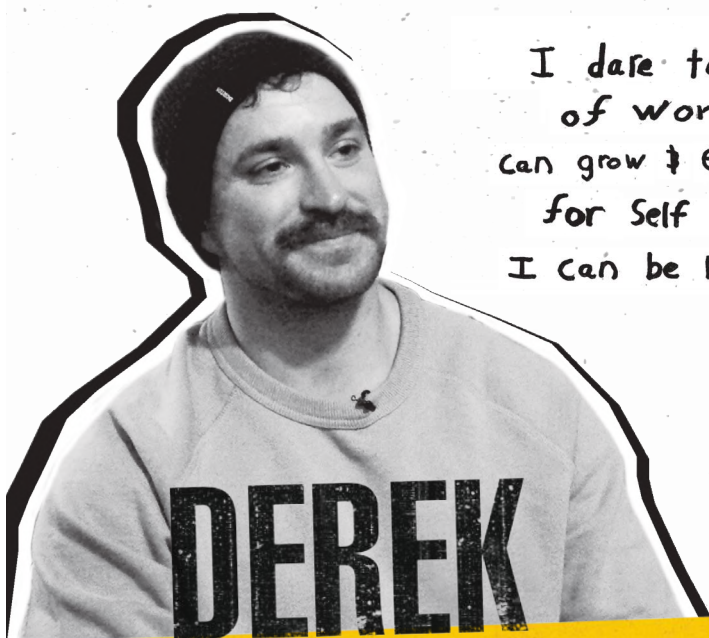
David knows he is not the only one with a new life. His parents and family have found peace of mind — and pride — in his progress.

"My family has always loved me. They didn't know — they're not licensed therapists. But they were always worried about me and there was disconnect because of that. Being the source of anxiety to your family is something no child wants. Now, they couldn't be prouder. They say how happy they are for me, and it brings tears to their eyes."

David is filled with gratitude for everyone who enabled his second chance and made his journey from darkness to light possible.

"I couldn't appreciate the donors more. I mean this whole program is based on them and what they donate. The clothes in our bed, the food we eat, the activities we get to do, to experience that there is happiness in sobriety. That's something I would've never imagined being able to do. It's a gift and we don't take it for granted whatsoever.

"And to see happiness and live a life of happiness is ... words can't describe it. I mean it really is the greatest gift I could have ever gotten."



I dare to live a life
of wonder. Where I
can grow & express my Love
for Self & others where
I can be Loved & be me

Derek

5-21-19

"YOU'VE JUST GOT TO LEAN INTO LIFE."

Looking back with the bright clarity of several years of sobriety, Derek can see how dark his old life was, and how close he came to losing everything.

"Without the donors and the funders, without Guiding Light, I probably would've died in my mom's basement. I hope they all know how helpful they really are."

His gratitude is sincere, because instead of falling into darkness, Derek has stayed in the light. He completed the residential recovery program, found work, moved to Guiding Light's Iron House sober living community — and today is out on his own, recently engaged to a woman he loves, and building a new life and embracing a future full of possibility.

“Now I’m able to provide something for our local economy. I’m able to provide something for the other people who are out there suffering. Today, I can reach out my hand and say, ‘Hey, there is hope.’”

At one point, things looked anything but hopeful. Derek was a blackout drinker, had racked up a couple of DUIs, was in and out of jail, got fired. “It definitely was not a happy time.” Even then, when he first heard about Guiding Light’s long-term approach to recovery, he scoffed at the idea.

“At that time, I was like, ‘There’s no way I could ever do four months someplace. Those people must be really, really messed up. That is definitely not me. I don’t have that kind of problem.’”

Turns out he did have that kind of problem. After a probation violation and three-month jail sentence, “all chaos broke loose.”

“I was living in my mom’s basement, just drinking all day every day. I wasn’t employed anywhere. I would just do side jobs for cash that I would use for my drinking money. And I would just buy cheap liquor and that’s all I did. Just drank all day.”

It got to the point where he broke down crying, telling his mother he couldn’t go on anymore. She took him to a detoxification center, where he suffered through withdrawal and the **painful recognition that something had to change.**

I thought, ‘OK, that four months now sounds pretty good, because I can’t go back to that life, or I’ll die.’”

What he found instead of death was new life. He found a community of staff and peers who helped him heal his mind, body and spirit.



- 1 Derek nailing his name to the wall at Guiding Light after his first year of sobriety
- 2 “The ‘Clean Jerks’” is Derek’s CrossFit team he started with 2 friends from GLR. It’s a fun play-on-words referencing an exercise and being sober.
- 3 Derek recently proposed to his girlfriend Allie – whom he met after getting sober – now 3 years later they are starting their life together.

“Those friendships that I made there, the life coaching and the therapy and the spiritual guidance, all those things were very beneficial for my introspection. A lot of times the hardest things that you had to hear came from the guy in the bed next to yours.”

The standard four-month residential program (made possible by donor support) that once seemed so intimidating turned into six months — and he was glad for it.

“I was so happy. I should have made that choice sooner, but it took what it took. I started eating healthier and I started really taking care of my body and it just gave me something to focus on. And even now when I go to the gym and I do the CrossFit competitions, there’s just a fire inside me. I use that past hurt, and it drives me.”

Derek appreciated the discipline of the residential phase of Guiding Light because it set him up for success when he moved to Iron House, where he had to hold himself accountable.

“It’s a nice way for you to really push yourself into saying, ‘OK, here’s how I time-manage my days, going from work to coming home, to going to meetings, to going to church, and to going to the gym to manage my social life and I can still go see my family and I can still take care of everything I need to do.’”



Along the way, he has learned to say yes to new experiences and to embrace the discomfort that comes with new ways of living. Derek says that's the most important advice he would give to anyone starting on the path to recovery at Guiding Light.

“Just say yes so it makes you uncomfortable. Just say yes to the program, really lean into it. I think that was a big thing for me that really pushed me a lot. Someday you'll be sitting there, and someone comes up to you and asks you if you want to run a marathon, and you really don't want to do it. But you just say yes.”

That's a true story, by the way — all 26.2 miles of it.

“The most I had run before was 10 miles and then they convinced me to do it. And we got through it, but boy was it something.

You say yes because you're going to push yourself to do things you never thought you could and you're going to be so happy.”

Derek knows what he's talking about. He's still embracing what he calls “the abundance of life,” and he wants others to do the same in their journey out of the darkness of addiction.

“Just find what makes you live. I have fitness, my exercise, and I like to be healthy. Some guys, it might be music, or it could be something intellectual for people who love to learn. But just find what makes you live. Even if you're just sitting in a room talking with someone, you've just got to lean into life.”

ONE YEAR IN

Every few months at Guiding Light we hold a ceremony for men celebrating the milestone of reaching one year of continuous sobriety. These are men that came to our doors, stayed for the 4-month recovery program, found work, moved to Iron House, and fully committed to a wholly new way of living. To commemorate these success stories, we invite each of these men to give their testimony to the community, and then nail their name to our wall upon which they are joined by over a hundred of their peers.

I AM COMMITTED
TO A LIFE OF
SOBRIETY I WILL BE
MY BEST SELF EACH DAY.
I WILL LIVE MORE,
LAUGH HARDER
AND LOVE THE MOST!



"I HAVE BECOME

THE BEST VERSION OF MYSELF"

Jack is a son, veteran, Iron House resident, and recovering alcoholic. He recently celebrated a year of sobriety and nailed his name to the wall in October 2023. On the following pages is a speech he gave to his friends, family, peers, and support network commemorating this important moment.

“Day after day I fought the idea that I had a problem with alcohol. Those days turned into months, months turned into years.

During that time I struggled with relapse after relapse with minimal days of being sober in between because I would refuse to accept the obvious signs that I couldn't control my compulsive behavior that I had with alcohol.

Alcohol cheated me out of my authentic self, my relationships with friends, family and loved ones.

Even when I had accepted that my addiction would eventually kill me I would wake up the next day and continue to drink when it didn't.

Being in my last relapse before coming to Guiding Light I was in a hotel room and for the first time I was praying to a higher power to give me the strength and courage to change.

I learned in the program about character defects. Specific character defects of mine like feeling broken, feeling like a failure, not feeling good enough and more.

Guiding Light helped me learn the true meaning of words like willingness, honesty and responsibility. Guiding Light reminded me the importance of being self-aware and the benefits of having self-compassion and how it is important in recovery.





Scan here to watch Jack's full speech.



In the last 490 days I have lived my best life.

I have become the best version of myself and I live by my commitment statement which is to live a life of sobriety.

To live more, laugh harder and love the most.

I repeated phrases to myself like living a different way in this world, commitment to active recovery. I repeated words like taking action and being accountable.

I learned the importance of acceptance and taking sobriety one day at a time. These are just a few examples of what help build the foundation of sobriety that I have today.

I know now that everyday isn't going to be a good day and when bad days happen I need to learn and grow from those days and not run from them. Certainly I know now that picking up a drink would have no benefit in fixing those bad days or even making the good days better.

In December of 2022 I moved to Iron House where I am not only grateful to be surrounded by a community of like minded people, but I am grateful for being part of a community I consider family.

**" I came from out of the darkness
into the light**

I think that's what they call this

Guiding Light.

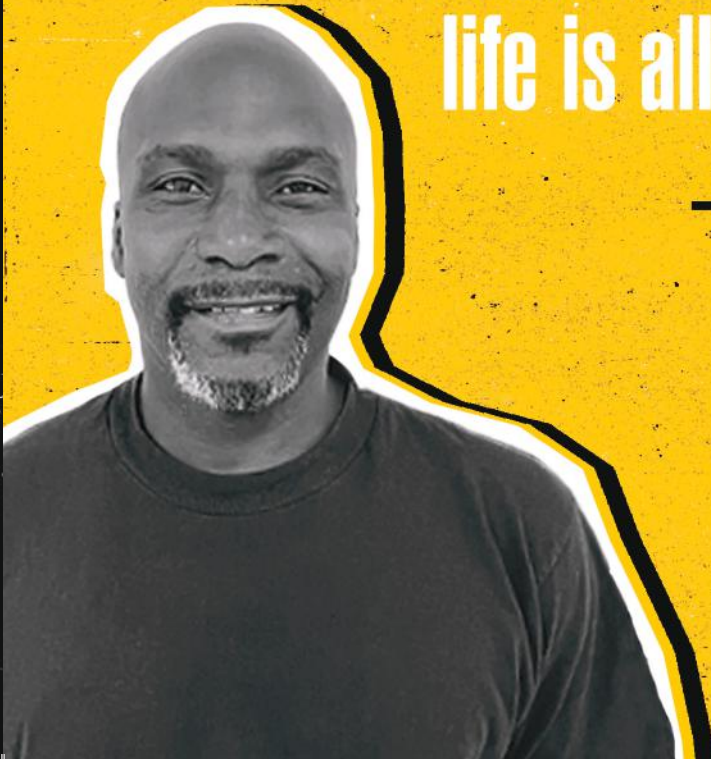
**I stepped into the light,
I could see clearly now.**

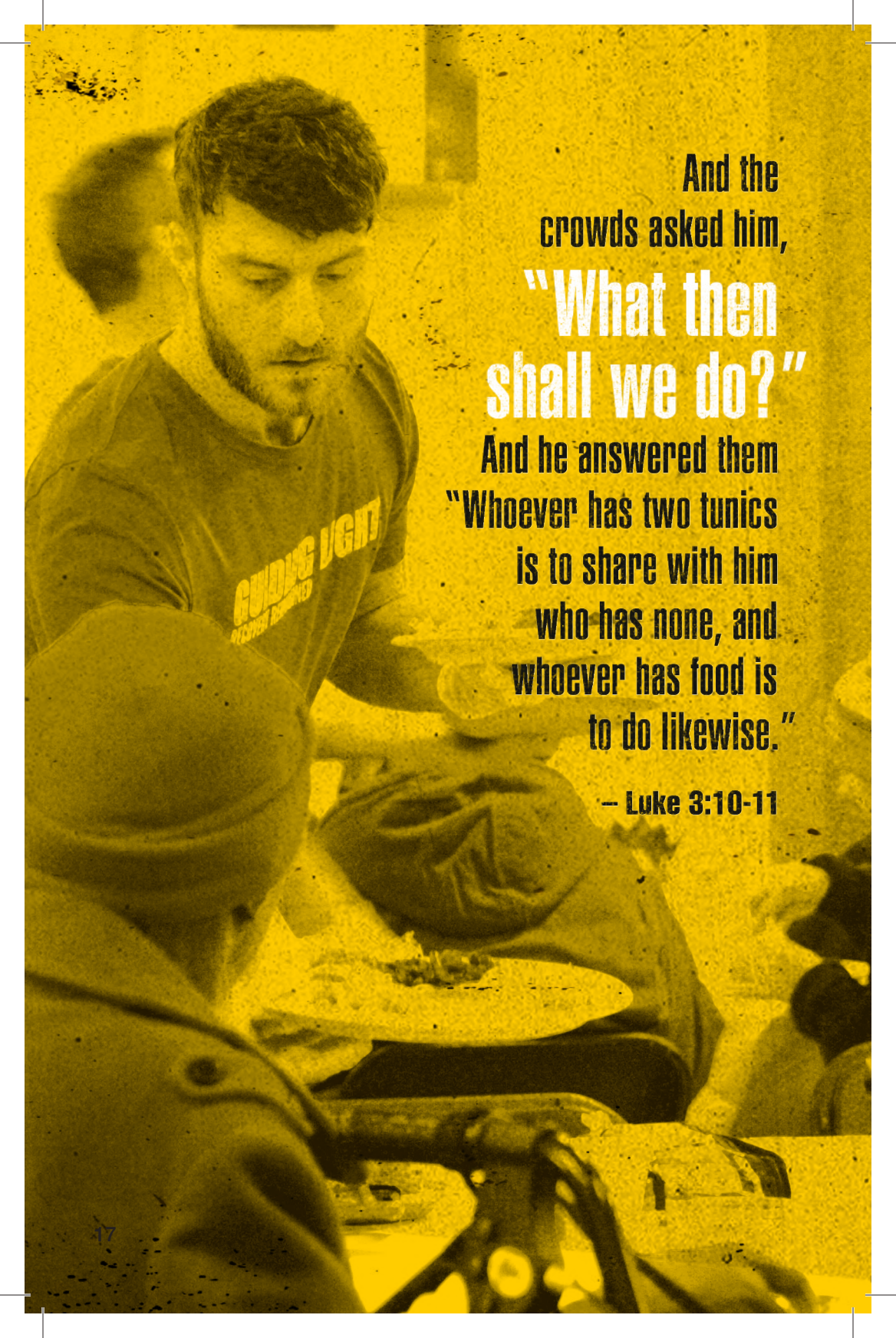
Believe me, I can see clearly.

**...They could change a broken-down man
and build him up and help him see what**

life is all about."

— Mike




A man with a beard and short hair, wearing a dark t-shirt with the words 'GUIDING LIGHT' printed on it, is shown from the chest up. He is looking down at a plate of food he is holding. The background is a textured, light-colored wall. The entire image has a yellowish tint. In the foreground, the back of a person's head and shoulders is visible, suggesting a crowd of people.

And the
crowds asked him,
**“What then
shall we do?”**

And he answered them
“Whoever has two tunics
is to share with him
who has none, and
whoever has food is
to do likewise.”

— Luke 3:10-11



**Movement from self to others
is essential in living a new way
in this world.**

The men in the recovery program get to practice service and care for others so it becomes a part of their character. Having our recovery men host Guiding Light's holiday community meals provides opportunities to learn skills in the kitchen, practice hospitality and service, and show up in community while also providing for our Heartside neighbors. They helped prepare and serve over 800 hot, sit-down meals this Thanksgiving, and Christmas for the neighborhood.

A black and white photograph of three women standing together and smiling. The woman on the left is wearing a light-colored top and a headband. The woman in the middle is wearing a light-colored blazer over a dark top. The woman on the right is wearing a dark tank top. They are standing in a room with a floor decorated with stars and swirls. The background shows some office-like furniture and a window.

WOMEN'S RECOVERY

AT RUTH'S HOUSE & ESTHER'S HOUSE

While Ruth's House and Esther's House (our transitional sober-living homes) have been operational since February 2023, we are still hard at work getting the residential treatment program for women off the ground. Currently, we are in the process of interviewing candidates for a women's program manager. The leadership team is working through the slow and exacting process of a special land use permit with the city, we're purchasing a van for the women's transportation, and have secured a wonderful location for day-time programming and classes. Keep us in your prayers as we continue to move forward in meeting these critical needs in our community.

AMY

Guiding Light has been exactly that for me: a "guiding light" through the difficult, dark, and seemingly hopeless path of addiction. The women at Esther's House have been encouraging, helpful, and kind — propelling me toward a life of self-confidence, self-love, serenity, and sobriety. **The gift that Guiding Light has given me are the tools to create a life that is "happy, joyous, and free."**

JULIE

My name is Julie. I've lived at Guiding Light Esther's Transitional Home for 7 months. I've really enjoyed living here. I'm almost 9 months sober off of drugs and alcohol. **It's the longest I've gone sober since 1993.** I've lived at other transitional houses before and I didn't do well there. I've lived at places where you can relapse several times and they just move you to another of their homes. It was too easy to not take my recovery seriously. We have wonderful women at Esther's house and it's a beautiful, large home that fits up to 8 women. I recommend this house to any woman who really wants sobriety forever one-day-at-a-time.



JACQUE
IN THE WORDS OF HOUSE MANAGER MOLLY

Since arriving at Ruth’s House, Jacque has been able to hold a job, which is new for her compared to the last four years. During her active addiction, she shared that she wasn’t able to communicate with anyone, not even the people she loved. She said she would stumble over words, not being able to enunciate or use correct volume. She said she would shake and her face would twitch, which was noticeable for the people she tried to talk to. She hasn’t had any friends or attempted to even make friends in several years **but that has changed now. She has close relationships with the other women in the house.** She also said that she can communicate with everyone on a level of getting to know them and is starting to enjoy socialization.

Learning about this from Jacque, I would have never known she use to struggle with any of this. Jacque is very social, motivated, and driven. She credits living in a structured environment with rules for part of her success. Since Jacque has social anxiety, living with other people in a close, supportive community has helped. She has a stable work environment and has a safe and sober group of friends to be out in the community with.

YOU MAKE THIS POSSIBLE!

It is because of your support, investment, and advocacy that these stories of transformation and new life are a reality for men and women struggling with addiction.

What can you do?

Fund us! Financial support keeps the lights on, programming thriving, and possibilities abounding.

Pray for us! What a beautiful thing to bring others before the ultimate King and Creator in prayer and supplication.

Advocate for us! Let others know you support Guiding Light. Share your Light Post with a friend or neighbor after you've read it. Use us as a resource if you hear of someone struggling with addiction.

HOW TO GIVE:

CHECK, CASH, MONEY ORDER, PAYPAL, VENMO, ONLINE:

Please make checks payable to *Guiding Light*.

Mail to: PO Box 1703, Grand Rapids, MI 49501.

Secure contributions can be made online at www.GuidingLightWorks.org/give.

STOCKS, LEGACY, MEMORIAL, IN-KIND GIVING:

We are honored to be the recipient of these gifts and have streamlined systems. Contact David@GuidingLightWorks.org or 616.451.0236, option #5.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact David Madiol, Director of Development & Communications. David@GuidingLightWorks.org or 616.451.0236, option #5.



DONATE HERE

SEE THE DIFFERENCE YOU'RE MAKING



WATCH: Videos of men who share in their own words about the changes in their lives.



READ: Blog posts about the daily life of the Recovery program.



EXPLORE: Key Performance Indicators and data points for our Food Ministry and Recovery/ Sober Housing Programs.



LISTEN: Casting Light, our very own podcast, features real conversations of men and women shaping our community through recovery and understanding.



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GIVE TODAY