

MAKING MIRACLES

2021 was a big year for our MIRACLES residential recovery program. As highlighted in last Fall's newsletter, the program was awarded three-year accreditation from CARF. This recognition represents the highest level of accreditation that can be given to an program like MIRACLES, demonstrating adherence to CARF standards and excellence in providing quality recovery services in a residential treatment setting.

The critical need for this program resonated with longtime Siena Francis House supporters Peggy and John Heck, who through their family foundation, established an endowment for the dedicated purpose of helping sustain MIRACLES. In addition to general operations, their gift will provide funding for enhanced family programming and aftercare options that assist graduates with their sobriety journey and plans for the future.

Addiction is an issue that hits home with the extended Heck family. Peggy notes, "This disease cuts across every socio-economic and ethnic group. Many families, like ours, have first-hand experience of how this affliction can wreak havoc within their own inner circle."

"Unfortunately, treatment options for addiction and alcoholism disease are limited in Omaha and disproportionate when compared to the size of the problem", John offers. "Our city needs MIRACLES - a comprehensive and sustainable recovery option for clients and families in Omaha who need trauma-informed care. It is vitally important that help is available to all in our community when needed."

The Hecks make specific mention of the role family can play in the treatment and recovery process. Both John and Peggy shared their personal experience as family members supporting someone in recovery, stating "We have seen with our own eyes how the odds for sustained sobriety increase when a treatment plan involves family working together to build a lasting foundation. Having had the opportunity to participate in the process, we are closer as a family than ever before, and can sleep at night without the imminent fear that we will lose our loved one."

The generosity and compassion of the Heck family will help ensure that any individual who is struggling with addiction is able to receive the counseling and treatment needed. To learn more about the MIRACLES program and how you can help grow this endowment, visit www.sienafrancis.org or call 402-341-1821 ext. 1127.



Above:
John & Peggy Heck

SIENA FRANCIS HOUSE

Serving Hope to the Homeless

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DO YOU KNOW ANYONE WHO MAY BE INTERESTED IN KNOWING MORE ABOUT US?

If you would like us to send them our quarterly newsletter, please contact Ann Corporan at acorporan@sienafrancis.org or by phone at 402-341-1821, extension 1130.

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Siena Francis House's Mission

The Siena Francis House welcomes and empowers those experiencing homelessness to navigate their path to housing.

Siena Francis House's Values

Advocacy: We believe everyone matters and we are committed to being the leading voice to end homelessness.

Collaboration: We believe in the power of working together for those we serve.

Stewardship: We are transparent in cultivating and utilizing resources entrusted to us in the service of those seeking assistance.

Integrity: We take ownership in making ethical and honest decisions that are demonstrated in all of our actions and practices.

Innovation: We embrace change and welcome new ideas and partnerships, in order to provide the highest quality of service.

Compassion: We respond with dignity and unconditional acceptance to the people we serve.

SIENA FRANCIS HOUSE

HOPE
NOTES
SUMMER 2022

SIENA FRANCIS HOUSE SERVICES CENTER



Serving Hope to the Homeless

Read about Siena Francis House's commitment to providing services to veterans, including the hope-filled, success story of formerly homeless Navy veteran, Edwin Gibson!

PAVING A PATH TO PERMANENT HOUSING - MEET EDWIN GIBSON



Perhaps there is no better example of how Siena Francis House helps clients navigate the path to permanent housing than Edwin Gibson. Once battling chronic homelessness, Edwin's stay in our emergency shelter led him to discover the MIRACLES program, where he achieved sobriety, graduated and ultimately found permanent housing as a tenant in our studio-style permanent supportive housing units. His story is definitely both hope-filled and heartfelt.

As a young man, Edwin Gibson joined the Navy in November of 1980. Assigned to serve as a Signaller, Edwin enjoyed the friendships and connections he made, often times forming bonds over cards and drinking during down time. As Edwin reflects, "there was definitely a lot of drinking. Because I was so young, I was perfectly fine with that and enjoyed it way too much."

After his service ended, Edwin attended a vocational school and learned to be a carpenter. Despite this new professional calling, Edwin found himself in a life similar to the one he had in the Navy. After each workday, Edwin and others he worked with would often head to a bar. Eventually, Edwin's drinking became so consuming that he had no control over it. After losing a number of jobs to his disease, Edwin first experienced homelessness, often staying overnight in a park, covered with nothing but a blanket. "In my darkest days", relates Edwin, "I wanted nothing but to stop drinking, but I just couldn't do it. I hated what I'd become, and I often considered suicide."

In October of 2016, Edwin came to the Siena Francis House, homeless and hopeless, staying in the emergency shelter. "I was just a shell of a person back then", recounts Edwin. It was a chance conversation with one of our shelter staff members that forever changed the course of Edwin's life. The staff member spoke with Edwin about the MIRACLES Addiction Treatment Program and "how great it is", remembers Edwin: "He had gone through the MIRACLES Program himself, and told me that my life really could be better – and to 'think it over'. With the way my life was going, I realized that I really needed help. I had lost everything I had, everything I owned, including my relationships. I didn't want to go on living the way I'd been living."

Edwin applied to the MIRACLES Program and was quickly admitted. In MIRACLES, Edwin received individual and group counseling and was enrolled in life skill building classes. Recounts Edwin, "The MIRACLES Program and my counselor helped me understand my past. Until getting into the program, I didn't even know I was

Continued inside ▶

EDWIN GIBSON *Continued*

an alcoholic. They helped me realize that my whole life had revolved around drinking, and that when I start drinking, I cannot stop.”

Edwin did very well in the MIRACLES Program, becoming faithful to the tenets of the 12-Steps of recovery and to his higher power. “In the Alcoholic Anonymous’ ‘Big Book’, I read about the spiritual awakening of the authors and founders of AA”, recalls Edwin. “I didn’t understand that concept at first. However, while in MIRACLES, I did have a similar awakening. Despite my own inability to stop drinking, the program gave me the gift of spirituality. That is what truly helped me stop drinking and allowed me to live life on life’s terms.”

Having first lived temporarily in the emergency shelter and following graduation from the MIRACLES residential program in Spring of 2017, Edwin continued his stay at Siena Francis House – but this time as a person who FORMERLY experienced homelessness. Having secured one of the 48 studio-style permanent supportive housing units on campus, Edwin symbolizes the mission of the organization – breaking the cycle of chronic homelessness through his personal housing plan. After years of dark times he is now sober, housed and employed.

Asked about how his life is today, Edwin shares the following: “every day I read both the AA Big Book as well as the Bible – and both continue to help me. Between my faith and my commitment to sobriety, I have the tools to prevent me from even thinking about wanting to drink. I feel very content with my life, and it’s all because of everything I’ve received at the Siena Francis House. The MIRACLES Program absolutely saved my life.”

2022 VOLUNTEER LUNCHEON

As part of National Volunteer Week, Siena Francis House held our 2022 Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon on April 20th at the Living Room of the Mastercraft Building. With the expressed purpose of paying tribute to, honoring and thanking our amazing volunteers, we had a terrific turnout, with 100 people in attendance.

Luncheon attendees represented the following areas of volunteer service: Meal Service/Kitchen; Administrative and Development; Special Events; Educational Partners and Students; Musicians; Clothing and Personal Care Item Sorters; and Food, Clothing, Monetary and In-Kind Donors.

At the luncheon, we presented awards to a number of individuals and



VOLUNTEER *Continued*

organizations who have demonstrated exceptional volunteer service to the Siena Francis House, especially during these last couple of very challenging years of COVID-19. These included:

OUTSTANDING GROUP VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR
Creighton University’s Schlegel Center for Service & Justice

OUTSTANDING INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR
Lyle Hartnett

VOLUNTEER HALL OF FAME
Jim & Anne Carroll and Madonna School & Community Based Services

Siena Francis House greatly values the crucial role that volunteers play in providing our programs and services to those in need. Frankly, we would not be able to serve the thousands of individuals who turn to us for assistance each year without the help of our committed volunteers. They are truly our “unsung heroes”. In 2021, alone, 1,083 individuals from our community volunteered at Siena Francis House, filling 3,723 volunteer shifts and providing 5,918 hours of service - all incredible amounts. We are so appreciative of the important contributions provided by our volunteers.

If you haven’t had an opportunity to volunteer at the Siena Francis House, we invite you to visit our website at sienafrancis.org to create your personalized account, and to sign up for one or more volunteer shifts. Volunteering can also be a great team-building activity, so consider getting your friends, family or co-workers together and reserve your space today!

If you have additional questions or need assistance in finding the opportunity that is right for you, feel free to contact our Volunteer Services Manager, Silvia Rodriguez, at srodriguez@sienafrancis.org or at 402-341-1821, extension 1113. Silvia is always happy to help!

FROM EXPERIENCING FOOD INSECURITY TO HELPING END IT MISTYESHA WALKER

It was the Fall of 2020 and the world was still grappling with the uncertainties related to the spread of COVID-19. Siena Francis House, like many other nonprofits, was experiencing volunteer shortages and needed help in the dining room. In response to these shortages, Siena Francis House created temporary part-time dining room assistant positions, of which MisTyasha applied for and was ultimately hired to do. What neither she, nor Siena Francis House, knew at the time was just how impactful this relationship would be to one another.

To understand MisTyasha’s passion for her work at Siena Francis House is to first understand her background. As a teenager, MisTyasha’s mother was often not around, sometimes for a month or more. During those times, MisTyasha found herself having to take care of the household, preparing meals for her siblings and doing laundry. “I really didn’t know what I was doing”, recounts MisTyasha, “although I did it anyway!”

After she turned 19, MisTyasha did her best to face life as an adult. Without anyone to help and mentor her, MisTyasha struggled. “I figured this is just how life is going to be. I did the best I could to find housing and to try and make a life for myself”, relates MisTyasha.

MisTyasha eventually ended up homeless, often bouncing between friends’ houses and homeless shelters. Committed to changing the path she was on, MisTyasha enrolled at Metro Community College. “When I was in school, taking classes at Metro, I was homeless, although I was doing everything I could to obtain housing”, states MisTyasha.

During this same time, MisTyasha began a relationship that became serious, and one she thought would be a lifelong commitment. “We got an apartment together, and I ended up getting pregnant. We had a boy we named Tyshawn. Caring for Tyshawn was a full-time job and I ended up dropping out of Metro. We then had a baby girl, Treanna.” Despite the relationship ending, MisTyasha is a great mom to Tyshawn and Treanna, now aged 12 and 5. “Those kids are my life”, MisTyasha says with a broad smile. “There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for them.”

Despite these early challenges, her unparalleled work ethic and commitment to providing for her family led her to a job in housekeeping and guest services for a local hotel. For three years, life was looking up. But in March 2020, COVID-19 presented yet another hurdle. “When COVID hit, so much of the hotel staff got



Our Kitchen’s
Prep Cook,
MisTyasha Walker

laid off, including myself”, recounts MisTyasha. “I poured over employment opportunities, and the uncertainties in the workforce presented difficulties in landing a new job. That’s when I learned of a part-time position with flexible scheduling in the dining room of Siena Francis House.”

MisTyasha wasn’t content with doing just the minimum. She signed up for multiple shifts in the dining room, and instead of going back home following the end of one and start of another, she rolled up her sleeves and helped a short-handed staff in the kitchen. This experience uncovered a new passion – a career in the culinary arts. Within her first 8 months at Siena Francis House, a temporary prep cook position was offered to MisTyasha; one that eventually became a permanent role as a result of her performance. “I thoroughly enjoy serving our guests”, shares MisTyasha, “listening to their stories, seeing them move on and move out. They are really nice people, with good hearts, but who are facing really difficult challenges in their lives. Frankly, I have been in their shoes at one time.”

When asked about her future, MisTyasha has a clear plan: “My goal is to go back to school at Metro Community College and obtain a degree in Culinary Arts. I want to learn more about the food industry, so I can do my job better, and grow professionally. I love being able to provide meals for everyone who comes through our doors, and to help Siena Francis House further our efforts to end food insecurity in the community. My position and the work that I do helps address all of these goals, and feels exactly right, like it was meant to be!”

SO MANY WAYS TO PROVIDE SUPPORT!

Siena Francis House is grateful for the sustained financial support we receive which funds our programs that serve those in our community who are most in need. You may be interested to know that there are many options to consider and choose from, when making a financial gift to the Siena Francis House:

- **Send a check, cash or money order to:** Siena Francis House-PO Box 217-Omaha, NE 68101.
- **Make an online gift**, using a credit or debit card or bank/ACH transfer at sienafrancis.org.
- **Set up a Recurring Donation** (Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly or Yearly), also at sienafrancis.org.
- **Text HOPE to 877-380-1198.**
- **Make a gift of stocks or mutual funds**, or a Qualified Charitable Distribution from an Individual Retirement Account (for those 70 ½ and older).
- **Make an estate planning/legacy gift in your will**, one that will provide housing and hope for those in need to last well into the future.

For additional information regarding making a monetary gift and for details regarding making a gift of stock or a gift from an IRA, please contact Siena Francis House’s Chief Development Officer, Chris Knauf, at 402-341-1821, extension 1161 or at cknauf@sienafrancis.org.