




OPEN HOUSE MINISTRIES

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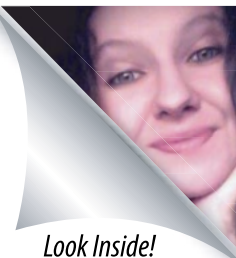
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*For unto us a
Child is born
Isaiah 9:6*



Connections

December 2019



Helen's fresh start: From broken relationships to reunions and warmth

"As long as there have been homeless folks in Vancouver, there have been camps all along the Burnt Bridge Creek Trail system," Vancouver police Officer Tyler Chavers told The Columbian for a story about homeless camps and city actions in Vancouver.

Helen and her 4-year-old daughter Gemma were two of those homeless folks on a few nights, the Open House resident says.

Between warming shelters, couch surfing at an aunt's house and the occasional tenting along the Burnt Bridge Creek Trail, Helen was living a life of unknowns and risk — up until recently. Attempting to leave a life of drugs behind, Helen moved from California to Vancouver at her aunt's urging. While using free computers at Vancouver's Bridgeview Education and Employment Resource Center, a worker and former Open House resident asked Helen if she knew about Open House Ministries. That started a ball rolling, and Helen moved into Open House in April. Since then, transformation and reconciliation have taken the place of addiction, legal trouble and loss.

"Helen dove in head first and jumped into all the things she needed to do in our program," said Katie Fessel, Helen's case manager at Open House Ministries. "She's done everything that's been asked of her, and she's done it well."

"Everything" includes being clean and sober, mental health counseling, drug recovery, taking care of a past warrant, attending anger-management classes, working in the thrift shop receiving job training and more.

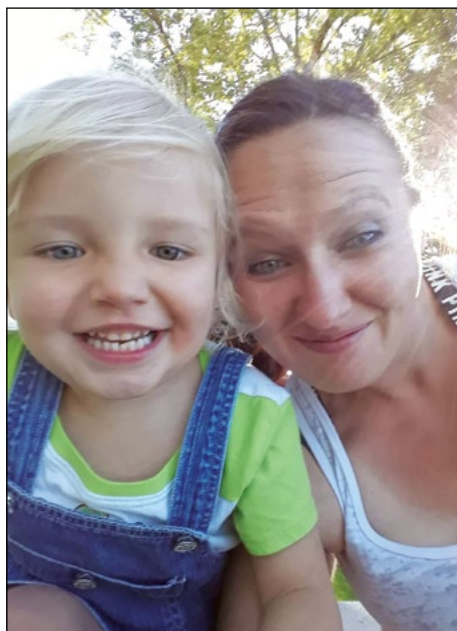
"Looking at Helen today compared to when she first got here is like looking at night and day. Same with Gemma!" says Katie. "When she first got here, I'd never been around a little person like Gemma." Now Gemma is talking and otherwise developmentally progressing.

Gemma started preschool in November. And Helen is looking forward to independent housing that she and Gemma can move into sometime within the year.

Helen herself nods when she hears the description of night and day about her and her daughter. "We were a hot mess," she

says. Gemma was not hitting developmental milestones, and Helen was too resource-limited to get to the bottom of it. While at Open House, Gemma has received a diagnosis of autism and needed resources.

Helen, now 32, grew up in a small town in California. She lost her mom at age 7, due to heart complications, and she became a mom herself at 19. Before arriving at Open House, she'd been addicted for a handful of years to meth and weed, and she had broken relationships with the fathers of her two children. One



God's perfect view

Chaplain's Corner

Today, we are a nation in great need of — Christmas!

These are days of division and derision. It is so easy to categorize people based upon whether they believe like us, or not, in advance of knowing their heart. And far too often, Christians insulate themselves with layers of like-minded people, avoiding those with whom we disagree. As Anne Lamott suggested, “You can safely assume you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.”

Say it isn’t so! John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”

In Bethlehem, the Church of the Nativity is built around the stone manger where Jesus was born. Therein lies a large silver star aglow with an eight-inch, soft, blue center, illuminating the very place of His birth. As poignant as that birthplace is, Christmas is not about a manger 2,000 years ago, nor is it about baby Jesus meek and mild. In the most profound sense, Christmas is a time of “goodwill and glad tidings of great joy” (Luke 2:10). Christmas continues to shout the

truth that Jesus is alive! The Great News for humanity is that “the Word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood,” as The Message puts John 1:14. His Spirit lives in His faithful followers, warmly called His ambassadors in 2 Corinthians 5:20.



At Open House Ministries, our Bible and Recovery classes in 2019 are focusing on discipleship. As young people consider Jesus, and many become His followers, we are called to look like Jesus. Whether through Bible studies, discussion groups, classes on prayer or chapel sermons, we are committed to helping new believers grow in a faith that reaches out to the lost and forgotten people around us.

We are the Christmas lights, illuminating a dark path for others to see the truth. We display the variegated fruits of His Spirit (Gal.5:22-23) in a “thousand points of light” to a dark, cynical and watching world.

Thank you for your loving partnership with Open House Ministries, as God redeems and restores individuals, families, family trees and neighborhoods, to the glory of His Son, Jesus.

From my heart to yours, merry Christmas! ♥

Mark Roskam, Chaplain



TAX-WISE GIVING

Several options exist for year-end giving

If considering making a year-end gift to Open House Ministries, know that it is more than a tax deduction. It’s also more than a way to feel good about yourself around Christmas.

When you give to Open House Ministries, you are helping homeless families receive the shelter, intervention and life-changing, Christ-centered support they need to make a change in their lives now and for eternity.

Ways to make a gift besides writing a check or using a credit card, include the transfer of appreciated stocks and/or mutual funds directly to Open House. Doing that

avoids capital gains taxes. A transfer from your Individual Retirement Account directly to our nonprofit also enables you to avoid taxes that would be due. Maybe you have a Donor Advised Fund already in place at a brokerage house that would enable you to make a gift from it to our ministry.

Year-end gifts are vital for Open House. We rely on private donations, rather than government dollars, to maintain and continue support for local homeless families. If you have any questions about these giving options, please call us at 360-737-0300 or email ross.merritt@sheltered.org. ♥



Make a room a home

Open House Ministries continuously needs supporters to adopt a room in the shelter and prepare it for a new family who's moving in.

This is a great small-group giving idea, given that adopting a room means supplying needs for a studio apartment, including bedding, towels, kitchen supplies, area rugs and even art. We believe in presenting a nicely furnished, individually decorated, clean living space to residents. By inviting them to take ownership of a carefully crafted apartment, residents gain greater respect for the house and the opportunity they've been given. It's also a way we can show them how much we care about them and their transformative experiences and comfort at Open House.

If our Adopt-a-Room Program appeals to you, learn more and add your name to our list by contacting volunteer Ruth Bennett at rbbennett53@comcast.net. You can also call us at 360-737-0300. Help make temporary housing a home for one of our homeless families.



(Continued from page 1)

daughter, Makiala, is now 12 and lives with her father in California. Gemma, the other daughter, is 4 and lives with Helen at Open House Ministries.



This summer, the two daughters met for the first time — with all parents on board. “They got along so well!” says Helen. It was a joy-filled reunion for Helen, who had been estranged from her older daughter and hadn’t seen her for three years.

“I missed so many years with my first daughter, but I’m in contact with her now,” Helen says. “She is such a sweet girl.”

Helen is grateful for her older daughter’s father and his now-wife. She’s overwhelmed by and gets teary when talking about how they have let her back into her daughter’s life.

“They stepped in and have been the parents I wasn’t. I have the utmost respect for them.” The family is considering shared custody in the future, Helen says.

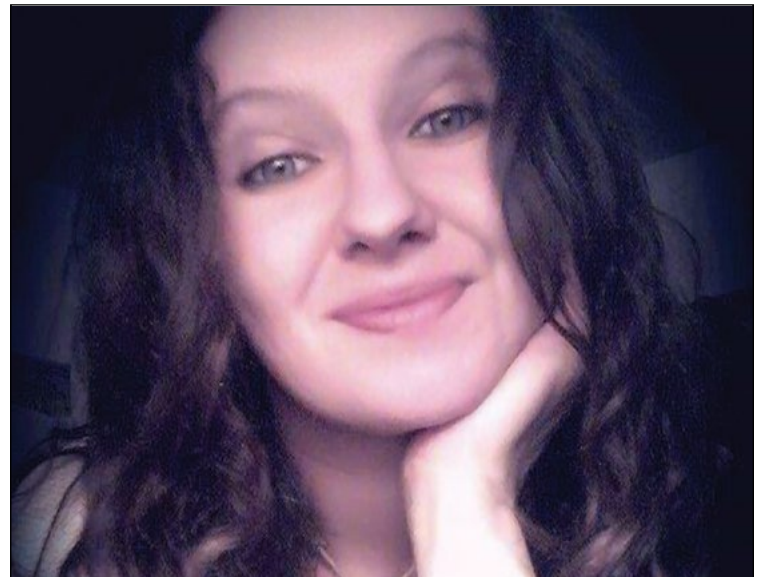
This year, Helen also rekindled relationships with other family members she left in California, including the father of her second child. He is undergoing recovery of his own. She’s proud of him. Helen’s time at Open House has allowed her to get on a different life path. She knows that is possible in his case, too.

“I almost had a panic attack because so many things were happening here,” she said, “but then I stopped and realized that all the things happening were positive.” Helen says she is in a good place, ready for and taking advantage of all that positive.

ACCOUNTABILITY, SUPPORT, FAITH

What has stood out most to Helen at Open House was how

staff members walked alongside her through every bit of work she had to do. Fessel and Renee Stevens, our executive director, even drove up with Helen to Lewis County so she could turn herself in for an outstanding warrant. After 20 hours in jail and a plan for moving forward, the court released her into the care



of Fessel to continue her growth at Open House. Despite the stay in jail, she talks about this trip with Fessel and Stevens as a warm one. “They stood by me.”

What has Helen gained at Open House? “Everything,” she laughs. “I’m so grateful for this place. I wouldn’t be who I am today without Open House.” Helen explains, “This place is a fresh start. I want to give back now. I think that’s where I’ll go in my future.”

Helen got a fresh start in her faith while living at Open House, too. “I was really resistant to the idea of God,” says Helen. “I lost my mom at 7. What kind of God could there be? But since I’ve been here, I’ve opened my mind.”

Accountability, support and faith: That’s how Helen sees Open House. Beautiful, strong and hard-working: That’s how we see her. ❤️

DONOR RELATIONS OFFICER SOUGHT

Interested in making a real difference in the lives of homeless children? We seek a full-time Donor Relations Officer responsible for developing, implementing and maintaining donor relationships, donor engagement and fundraising strategies to enhance and grow revenue of current and prospective donors. Please email careers@sheltered.org for a complete job announcement and application.

THRIFT SHOP VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

We need volunteers to help us run our thriving thrift shop. If interested in some retail time at Open House Ministries or have skills to share, please call or email Claudia Merritt.

She can be reached at 360-737-0300 or claudia.merritt@sheltered.org.



Tours & Talks

Tours are available for anyone interested in learning more about Open House Ministries and seeing the shelter in action. Please contact Leslie Cook, our development coordinator, at 360-737-0300 to sign up for an already available tour date or to create one that works better. You can also sign up on our website: www.sheltered.org/tours/.



Join us! Scheduled tours happen at lunch time and come with a brown bag lunch.

Marilyn fills the halls with 'fa la la'

Secondhand Solutions is our on-campus thrift store. It provides job-training to residents at Open House Ministries, employment to some of our program graduates and income for the shelter. And one evening each year it brings us all apple cider. Ah, yes. Apple cider.

If you stopped by Secondhand's Christmas bazaar on Nov. 4, thanks for your support. If you volunteered for this event, we are beyond appreciative and humbled. This event has grown in sales and merriment over the years, and we were able to raise more than \$700 in just three short hours this time around.

Part of the credit for that might go to Marilyn Verneris. She played Christmas songs at the bazaar from start to finish. Getting people in the mood for a season of giving — and giving shoppers a tune to hum — is a gift Marilyn has given Open House two years in a row. Extra apple cider for her! (By the way: If anyone tunes pianos, Marilyn did mention ours could use it.)



Marilyn says she enjoys contributing to the shelter. Like several of our volunteers, she tells a story about getting involved with us that is actually a bit of a pattern here.

"I moved to Vancouver about a month after my husband's passing," Marilyn tells. "I had been praying for the Lord to use me." She then heard a presentation about Open House at her church and says, "I was hooked and knew the Lord wanted me to be helping."

Four years later, she's still volunteering. Marilyn enjoys using her gifts to benefit God's people.

She started out stuffing the newsletter and still does, along with contributing data-entry work, auction help, block-party registration, volunteering at dinners, helping with other mailings

and tickling the ivories at our Christmas bazaar.

"I love meeting the residents and their families and always lift them up in prayer," she shares.

A giving community is as easy to find at Open House as a deal at Secondhand Solutions. ❤️

SHELTER NEEDS:

Shelter needs are: Men's gloves, hats, blankets and coats.
Thank you!



**Please consider Open House
Ministries in your will or trust.**