

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

From finding faith to sharing hope

As this year comes to a close and I reflect on the work God has been doing at Open House Ministries, I am reminded of so many amazing stories of families who have been touched by our ministry. How time spent in counseling and hearing the gospel has changed lives, helping families overcome struggles and move onto stable futures. It is not unusual for people who have found new life in Christ to find a way to share healing and hope. They know first hand how hard it is to overcome addiction and often want to help other people fighting the same battles.

Cynthia has one of those stories. Her early life had a rough start and she leaned into drugs to cope with her problems. Life became so complicated she was separated from her children while she continued to struggle with addiction. Without a home of her own, she remembers feeling overwhelmed by the choices she had made and desperately wanted to find a better life for herself and her kids. It was a friend of her mother's who told her about Open House Ministries and she remembers how excited she was to find a healthy place to start over.



Alex and McKynzie at the 2021 Christmas party provided by the Portland Wholesale Lumber Association and Santa

It wasn't long before Cynthia moved into a space at the shelter. She started learning new life skills and most importantly, found faith in Jesus Christ. It changed everything for Cynthia. And sharing hope with people in need became Cynthia's focus.

Today, Cynthia is employed as a receptionist at the Recovery Café of Clark County. She gets excited when she shares how she's learned the names of over 250 members and loves to greet them when they come through the

door. She knows what it feels like to be valued by other people and wants them to know that they matter. She sees how it gives people hope when you recognize them and ask them about their day.



Cynthia with her son, Alex, and daughter, McKynzie

Cynthia loves her job, and she's been given an opportunity to learn new skills through the Recovery Coach Academy. She's so proud of her two kids, Alex and McKynzie. Alex participates in all kinds of sports, and Cynthia beams when she shares how Alex has been growing through a biblically-based boot camp. She lights up when she talks about McKynzie's love for drawing and how she loves to share her artwork. Both kids have great memories of the gatherings

at Open House Ministries, especially at Christmas time when friends reach out to support us and share gifts with our resident families.

We have been blessed to connect with many organizations in our community with the common goal of healing people struggling with homelessness. We are grateful for the support we receive from our faith community and businesses who understand the value of helping vulnerable and hurting people in our community.

Our community is blessed every time a broken family finds acceptance and love. They can then rebuild with confidence and the skills they need to succeed. Your prayers and support help make that possible. Please remember Open House Ministries in your end-of-year giving plans. You will be blessed. Merry Christmas from everyone at Open House Ministries.

Blessings,

Renee Stevens

Executive Director

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. ~ Romans 15:13



Pressing On Toward The Goal

Imagine camping all night outside of a store with a friend for a Black Friday sale. Then, as the time arrives for the store to open, a store clerk comes to greet everyone, but he comes with some disappointing news. He informs everyone that the manager is running late and they can't open until he arrives. This letdown is then compounded by the awareness that your phone is on three percent. Because you have been out all night, your phone didn't get a chance to charge on your nightstand, and it's almost dead. So you decide to leave the line and charge your phone in the car. After just a little while, you come back. Yet, to your dismay, when you arrive, you see the store open, the line is gone, people exiting with shopping bags full of merchandise, and the product you waited for is sold out.

If you are anything like me, you feel angry and want to blame someone. You want to blame the manager for being late. You want to blame your friend for not calling you or buying you anything. Blame the store for not handing out line numbers so your spot would have been saved. Blame your phone's battery dying so fast overnight. Blame the mall for making the parking lot so far away. Or even blame the entire US economy and culture for making Black Friday sales a thing.

This frustration is how I used to read the parable of the Bridesmaids in Matthew 25:1-13. In this parable, ten bridesmaids are on their way to a wedding when they hear the bridegroom is delayed and they must wait. Five of them forgot to bring oil for their lamps, and so they leave in the middle of the night to find more. Meanwhile, in the time they are gone, the bridegroom arrives, and the wedding commences. When the five bridesmaids who left return, they are shut out of the wedding.

What I struggled to understand at first is that this is not a parable about poor planning. Yes, we could all learn from the Scout motto, "Be Prepared." Sometimes, the unexpected happens. Sometimes, poor planning creates emergencies. Yet, this is not the lesson of this parable.

The bridesmaids were there to attend a wedding. Likewise, the purpose of camping outside of a store on Black Friday is to attend a sale. It's not about not having a charged phone. There is no one to blame but myself if I forget that's why I'm there. This highlights the difference between the groups of bridesmaids. Five thought the goal was to have full lamps. Five knew the goal was to attend a wedding. The wise in this story are not identified because they planned ahead. The wise in this story are identified because they knew the goal and didn't waver from it.

As we come to the end of the year and look ahead to a new year, it is imperative we have a clear understanding of our purpose and goal we are striving toward. Remembering what the Apostle Paul writes in Philippians 4:13-14, "Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

• *Chaplain Jon Nichols*



Christmas Giving Perspectives

This special time of year seems to change our perspective and helps put us in the mood for giving and doing more for others. We seem to think less about our own needs and desires and consider others, which helps to make it a wonderful time of the year. You, as our faithful supporters of Open House Ministries, are doing this for our residents and staff through your generous support of time, talent, and treasure. Thank you!

Christmas is a time for giving, and Open House Ministries (OHM) seems to be at the top of your list for generous gifts. You have been so faithful, and we cannot thank you enough for being so supportive in helping homeless families have a place to call home and helping them to realize there is a new and better direction they can take. They hear the message that God gave us the greatest gift

of all because He "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16).

As a volunteer in the development office, I have had the pleasure of talking to many of you and hearing how much you love supporting the mission of Open House Ministries. Many have told me they wish they could do even more, which gives me the opportunity to discuss how they can by remembering to include OHM in their will/trust or with beneficiary designations. Also, transferring RMD's directly to OHM may positively impact your tax obligations.

If you would like to discuss opportunities to give in more detail please contact Jean La-Crosse at (360) 737-0300 or email ross.merritt@sheltered.org. *Have a blessed holiday.* •

MINISTRY BLESSINGS



We are grateful to the Vancouver Elks Lodge #823 for their continued generosity to Open House Ministries. This year they are supporting our children's program with craft and room supplies, and healthy snacks for our kids. Thank you, Elks Lodge #823. You are a blessing!

Children's Program Coordinator Hannah Emrick (left) pictured with the Bradwells

TOURS & TALKS

Want to see Open House Ministries up close?
First Friday tours are back!
 Noon to 1 pm
 Contact us for a tour at events@sheltered.org



Thank you to everyone who joined us for our holiday bazaar. We were so blessed on November 6th.

SHELTER NEEDS

Bottled water
Copier paper 8.5 x 11
Clorox wipes • Baby wipes
Pull ups: All sizes • Diapers size 5 & 6
Women's underwear:
Sizes x-small to medium
Men's boxer briefs: All sizes
Children's toothbrushes & toothpaste
Women's deodorant
Socks of all sizes • Canned soups
Thank you!

VOLUNTEER!

Visit our website at www.sheltered.org and find out how you can make a difference at OHM



900 W. 12th St. | P.O. Box 242
 Vancouver, WA 98666-0242
 360-737-0300 www.sheltered.org