New building update!

In the picture to the left is the building we have called home since we were founded in October of 2006. In the last eight and a half years, this house has acted as a respite from the streets for countless numbers of the homeless youth we have had the privilege to serve. It has seen successes, set-backs, laughter and tears. For the youth who have come through its doors, it has been a place to rest, eat, make friends, and to reconnect with the community. This old house on the corner of 12th Ave. and 4th St. has served us well through the years, but we have outgrown its limits at just 1,800 square feet. With a maximum capacity of 25 youth, there is just not enough room to support the needs of this community, and we are often forced to turn youth away. Luckily, that will not be the case for much longer.

On January 14th of this year, we officially purchased a new building that will be renovated into our new facility. Located at 1220 Corrugated Way, less than two miles from the original Star House, the 14,000 square foot structure will allow us to overcome so many of the barriers we face today. A portion of the building includes pre-existing offices that will house our therapists, administrative staff, and meeting space for on-site providers. The rest is a large warehouse that will be redesigned to add new services and opportunities for the youth.

Some of the new additions seem simple, but they are just not feasible with the space we currently occupy: A kitchen large enough for volunteers to cook a meal for everyone, a computer lab that provides access to the internet for more than one youth at a time, and a separated quiet room for youth attempting to do homework, or just get away from the hectic nature of their everyday lives. Honestly, we’re excited just to have enough offices for our employees.

Not everything we’ll be getting is so simple, but we’re excited to be taking on the challenge. Our new gym will feature a half-sized basketball court to provide the youth with a physical outlet, as well as an effective tool for emotional and behavioral regulation. Another room will be set aside for art and music ventures, and we will be able to bring in volunteers from throughout the community to help the youth find new ways to express themselves. We’ll even have a medical room where our partners can provide healthcare on-site.

One of the new functions we’re most excited to introduce is a “Social Enterprise” program. We are working with experts in the field to design this program to allow us to pay our youth a living wage while they gain soft skills and work experience. It will also help us move towards being a self-sustainable program.

Our Advisory Board, led by Chair Terry O’Connell, who has truly poured his heart and soul into ensuring the success and continuation of our program, has worked tirelessly to raise over $1.4 million to date. We have been fortunate to receive gifts from both the public and private sector. We are very grateful for the generous support of our donors, including The City of Columbus, The McConnell Foundation, Huntington Bank, Wolfe Associates, The Schott Foundation, L Brands, Mid Ohio Equities, and several anonymous donors. However, while the light at the end of the tunnel has grown brighter, we haven’t yet reached our goal. We still need approximately $400,000 to complete necessary renovations. The capital campaign will continue to run until all essential funds have been raised. Our goal is to have the renovations finished and ready to move-in by September of this year.

There are three ways to make a contribution: 1) Give online with a credit card at the OSU giving website. 2) Write a check payable to the OSU Foundation with “Homeless Youth Fund #312330” on the memo line, and mail it to the OSU Office of University Development, 1480 W. Lane Ave, Columbus, OH 43221. 3) Make a donation via our power philanthropy portrait on the Columbus Foundation website. You can also visit www.osustarhouse.com and click on “Support Us” for more information.
New research projects

As you may know, the Star House was founded on research, with the goal of creating and implementing a best practices approach to serving homeless youth. It is with that in mind that we are thrilled to announce the commencement of not one, but two different research projects that will be kicking into action very soon.

The first is the Homeless Mothers II Project where we will identify 240 18-24 year old mothers with children in their custody, and provide them with various services, including therapy and case management. Two-thirds of these mothers will be provided with supportive housing for the first few months. Homeless mothers with young children in their care contend with high rates of substance use, HIV risk, physical and mental health problems and parenting stress. However, a very limited number of studies have examined mother and child outcomes associated with housing and supportive services. Even with increased focus on those experiencing homelessness, the number of homeless families continues to rise, with the demand for temporary shelter so high that many cities are unable to meet the needs of these families. Since homeless substance use disorders mothers and their children are at increased risk for a variety of adverse outcomes, the intervention may produce substantial health-care benefits to their families and society at large.

Our second research project will focus on youth who have expressed suicidal ideation. Suicide is the leading cause of death among homeless youth, with up to 68% reporting at least one attempt in their lifetime. The goal of this research project is to determine if a specific type of therapy shows better outcomes for Star House youth who experience suicidal thoughts and actions, as compared to a more general approach to treating suicidal issues. It is our hope that the type of therapy being studied will show reduced risk of suicidal behaviors, as well as reduced rates of depression and substance use.

The Star House was founded upon a research project in order to identify unique and effective ways to help homeless youth overcome barriers. It is our goal to continue serving as an innovative research leader in the field.

We have a new therapist!

We are very excited to introduce our new full-time therapist, Margaret DeLaurentis! Margaret is a licensed independent social worker who received her Master’s degree right here at Ohio State, and has been working with youth and families for over 30 years. She comes to us directly after spending a few years as a teacher in the Dowd Center at the Homeless Families Foundation.

Margaret DeLaurentis, LIS

“From an early age, I have been driven to ensure that my life’s work was spent in the service of young people,” said Margaret. “It felt like a non-negotiable calling.” Margaret spent about 6 years working with children at private schools, and while she valued her work there, she found it had lost some of its meaning. “It was when I started working at Homeless Families Foundation that I found my efforts really made a difference, and that’s what matters to me.”

She has proven to have quite an affinity for our youth, and is really looking forward to accomplishing small and large goals for our clients and the community in general. “I hope to be able to help improve many of the individual lives of our youth,” she continued. “I hope to serve as an effective catalyst and connection between them and what they need from the community and from the Star House.”

Even being a new member of our team, Margaret recognizes the value of our community support. “I am continually amazed at how much goodwill and positive energy is given to the Star House program from the outside, and how much can be found within its clients, staff and volunteers.” She is excited to join the Star House in its mission to end youth homelessness and serve alongside others who are doing the same.
Acknowledging our Supporters

It’s been a while since our last newsletter, and there are so many people we need to thank. The Mt Carmel Street Outreach team, while also coming to the house twice a month to meet the physical health needs of many of our youth, provided drawstring gift bags, and threw a party for the youth during the Super Bowl. Brian Baker has been coming in every Monday since last September to cook lunch for the youth, and he is yet to miss a single week! Brian was introduced to the Star House by his mother, Sheryl Baker, who purchased and put together 90 gift bags filled with essential items, gift cards, head phones, etc. that were given out as presents over the holidays.

Next Level Gives threw an incredible Holiday party where they provided food, volunteers, gift bags to support the youth and the Star House Staff. They have stayed involved by supporting us with direct engagement volunteers, a full house cleanup, purchasing and putting together new furniture, fundraising, and helping to establish our first ever youth advisory council!

Steve Schmalenberger and OSU’s Facilities and Operations Department have become amazing supporters of our program. They provided us with new paper towel and toilet paper dispensers, and arranged to keep them stocked free of charge. They also have done a great job of helping us work through many of the issues of maintaining an old campus house, including servicing many of our appliances. This is still a budding relationship, but we are so excited and thankful for their collaboration!

Spring semester saw the most consistent and plentiful volunteers in the short history of the Star House, and while it would be impossible to credit them all individually, many of them became vital members of the Star House team during their time here. We have always said that we would not be able to so readily meet the needs of our youth without support from the community, and we couldn’t be more grateful for everyone’s contributions, both large and small.

Current Needs

- Men’s underwear
  Sizes M-XXL
- Women’s underwear
  Sizes 5-9
- Backpacks
- Plastic Cups
- Belts
- Bug Spray
- Sunscreen
- Shoe inserts
- Snacks
- Fresh Produce

Getting involved

As we head into summer, we are losing the majority of our direct engagement volunteers. These opportunities act as one of the most important aspects of our ability to connect the youth back to their community. Having non-employees engage the youth and assist the monitors with cleaning and organizing makes a world of difference. It is only a two to three hour commitment once per week, and it provides an opportunity to form meaningful relationships and to get an entirely new perspective of our youth and their needs. If you would be interested in this, or any other volunteering opportunities, please see our website for more information, or reach out to our Community Liaison, Samuel Masters, to schedule a tour and orientation. He can be e-mailed at masters.104@osu.edu, or reached by phone at 614-432-5409.

On Saturday, March 11th, Rocky Boots of Athens, OH held an event here at the Star House, and donated close to 100 pairs of boots. Upstairs offices were converted to fitting rooms where youth could be properly sized for their new boots.

Boots are one of the most sought after items by the youth, and one of the hardest to get in abundance. “I was really impressed with the quality of the boots,” said one male youth. “I was wearing soaking wet tennis shoes when I walked in that day. I probably would have gotten frostbite without them.”

On Tuesday, May 19, the Making It Happen Foundation is hosting “An Evening with the Tuohys” fundraiser, an evening of inspiration, encouragement and laughter at the Ohio Theater. One hundred percent of the proceeds will benefit Columbus’ homeless youth.

You may remember the Tuohys from the blockbuster movie, “The Blind Side,” that won Sandra Bullock an Academy Award for Best Actress.

This entertaining evening, to be moderated by Emmy Award-winning journalist Harry Smith, will raise awareness as well as much-needed dollars for the Columbus community and other Making It Happen Foundation projects. You will hear stories from the family of how this journey changed lives, including their own. You can expect to laugh, cry and most importantly leave feeling motivated to help change lives!

For tickets, call The Ohio Theater at 614-469-0939, or order online via Ticketmaster.

Tuesday, May 19, 2015
6:30-9:00 pm
The Ohio Theater
39 E. State St,
Columbus, OH 43215
Grace Fellowship Church of Pickerington

For the last few years, members of Grace Fellowship Church of Pickerington have been coming into the Star House to help support our program and the youth we serve. They have consistently come through on their commitments, and have gone above and beyond in so many ways. They’ve coordinated meals and large scale cleaning projects, collaborated with other organizations to host events at the house such as holiday parties, and so much more. It’s a relationship we’ve been very fortunate to have, and it has been a special treat to watch it grow.

As is true for many of the best parts of life, it took a little bit of serendipity for them to get started. “I wanted to get involved with another organization,” said Naomi Harless, one of the Grace Fellowship volunteers who got the ball rolling. “I submitted a request to become a volunteer and received a call about bringing a meal to a drop in center for homeless teens. I had never previously heard of Star House, but literally the moment I got the call I was like, “Absolutely, I want to help.” Naomi and a group of others from Grace Fellowship began bringing meals once or twice per month. Eventually, one of their pastors took an interest, and Grace Fellowship began providing two meals per week, and have been coming through on that service ever since.

In August of last year, Nicole Waggoner, the then newly hired Local Outreach Coordinator reached out to the Star House in order to schedule a tour of our facility. At that time, Nicole was interested in getting more information about the organizations in which her church was involved. We had a great discussion with her about our program and what we were doing, but as usual, one of our youth was the best spokesperson.

“My first time at Star House, I met a young man who looked a little out of place. I sat down and talked with him,” explained Nicole. “As he warmed to me he shared with me that he was a student at OSU and that he was working to put himself through school, but he only had enough money to pay for school and not housing. He told me how thankful he was for Star House, that he knew it was a safe place to get a meal, get a shower and hangout. I knew right then that Star House is a really special place that not only is meeting needs, but offers hope.”

Since that meeting, Grace Fellowship has somehow found a way to step up even more. When our kitchen counter began to fall apart, a simple phone call to Nicole led to a group of volunteers who found and purchased discounted supplies, and then installed a brand new unit! When the holiday season rolled around, they donated over 175 backpacks filled with supplies for our youth. When we sat down and expressed our need for assistance with our Capital Campaign, Grace Fellowship responded by surprising us (on video!) with a check for $25,000 towards the renovation of our new facility!

Other members of Grace Fellowship have also gotten involved, even though they didn’t find out about us through their church. Steve and Robin Rauch have been coming in almost every Monday night since the end of October, bringing clothes, food, baby formula, you name it. Even more than that, and something we can count on from so many of Grace’s volunteers, a caring heart and a listening ear.

“I won’t soon forget the excitement on all the faces the night we brought the backpacks into the house. They really were acting like ‘kids at Christmas,’ showing off to one another what they had in their packs!” remembered Robin. “On a more personal level, I often think back to the evening that I asked a young woman with a sad look on her face how she was doing. She looked at me and said, ‘I’m better now. Yours is the first smiling face I’ve seen all day.’ That is a constant reminder to me that kindness matters.”

What might be most indicative of their members are their deferential attitudes. When we asked them to give us examples of ways they’ve helped and supported our youth, so many of their responses were filled with what they’ve gotten in return. “It is nice to walk in and feel welcomed, and you get a sense of belonging and not being judged,” said Geri Tsardoulas, another volunteer and a familiar face to almost everyone in the house. “At times I feel like Norm from Cheers - they might not know my name, but they are glad to see me. I look forward to seeing the kids, hearing their stories and joking around with them.”