



March 3, 2023

Dear Supporters-

Happy Spring! Or is it still winter? Depends on the day. But no matter how bi-polar the weather is, we know just wait a minute and it will change!

As I sit here writing this letter, I realized that I have been Executive Director for the Grace Center for 1 year. I think about how far we have come in the past year and I am excited! Excited to have this opportunity to make a difference in so many lives. I am truly honored to serve.

Change has been the focus of every letter and it is still the focus for the Grace Center!

We did open the Overnight Shelter on January 9th as planned and it has been overwhelmingly successful. Before I get into the details, I do want to explain how we calculate our statistics. We use what the Shelter industry calls bed nights available and bed nights used. Bed nights available is calculating how many regular beds you have available and how many nights in the month you will be using them.

For example, we have 16 regular beds for men and in January we were open for 23 nights. $16 \times 23 = 368$. So for the men, we had 368 bed nights available. For the women, we have 6 regular beds. $6 \times 23 = 138$ bed nights available for women in January.

So now we know how many bed nights we had available, how many did we actually use? If a person stays one night, he/she will use 1 bed night. But if that person stays a week, he/she will use 7 bed nights. In January, we had 30 men stay with us and those 30 men used 270 bed nights. $270/368=73$. For the men, we were 73% full for the month of January. For the women, we had 14 women stay, using a total of 95 bed nights. $95/138= 68.84$ or 69% full for the month of January. We did not have any families with children stay in January.

In February, we had 448 bed nights available for men and 40 men used 458 bed nights $458/448=102$ or 2% over capacity. Also during February, we had 26 women use 231 bed nights. We began putting 3 women per night in the family room which increased our women's bed capacity to $9 \times 28 = 252$ available. $231/252 = 91.7$ or 92% of the new capacity. If we had only used the designated women's beds and left the family room vacant as we did in January, we would have had 168 bed nights available. $231/168= 1.375$ or 138%. When we run out of beds available, we use cots. As you can see, we used cots on most nights.

I want to share a bit about our clients. They are truly wonderful people. Yes they all have issues, but then don't we all? Not a day goes by that at least one will thank a staff member for being open. When we ask for volunteers, there are always several hands that rise. They do a great job of keeping their rooms clean and helping with anything needed.

It has always been my desire that the Shelter be the starting place for services. And it has been. It is my job to create a place that is warm, welcoming, loving, where everyone can feel safe, seen and heard. To create an atmosphere where clients can meet the life changing Grace and Mercy of God. That is what changes lives.

The results? We are overflowing our regular capacity nearly every night after being in operation only 7 weeks! But we are not just giving them a place out of the cold. We are helping with identification, connecting with recovery and mental health services, medical and vision care, jobs and housing.

I was sharing this at our February Board meeting. If you remember, our property purchase included the old house behind our current location. It was our original plan to remodel that building into administrative and supportive services offices, but after sharing the overflow with the Board, they gave me permission to renovate the building into a separate Women's Overnight Shelter! I was thrilled!

We will begin the remodel on Saturday, April 1st. In fact, we are making an event out of it! We are inviting volunteers to come help with the demolition of the interior of the building. We will be taking it to the studs and putting in all new wiring, insulation, plumbing, flooring, sheetrock as well as the required sprinkler system. We will have 2 roll off dumpsters and plenty to do! If you would like to help, please be there at 9am, Saturday, April 1st. Please bring gloves. Also bring hammers, safety glasses and crowbars if you have them. My goal is to complete the demolition in 1 day if possible! We will provide coffee, water and lunch. We just need you!

The sooner we complete the demolition, the sooner we can begin the remodel!

We will be closing our current shelter for the season on March 31st as originally planned. Everything happened so fast that I was not able to write grants to fund the shelter. As a result, we have been using proceeds from the sale of our building downtown to fund the shelter to enable us to stay open through the winter. Over the next 6 months, I am writing grants and seeking donations to run both of the shelters. It is my hope that when we reopen November 1st, we will have sufficient funding to remain open all year. Please join me in prayer for God to bring in the necessary funding to complete the renovation and provide the operating expenses needed.

Back to the statistics. In February, we served 66 people in the overnight shelter program. In addition, between January 1st and February 28th, we served 195 people in our Day Center program. Some of these transitioned into the shelter program but this just reveals the scope of the homelessness problem in Ardmore! And the vast majority are local. Either born and raised in Southern Oklahoma or have been here for years.

Please be assured that our Day Center will remain open as will our Resource Center. Our Day Center provides breakfast, showers, laundry, hygiene items as well as assistance with identification, SNAP benefits, Sooner Care and connecting with recovery resources if desired.

Homelessness is a growing problem both here and nationally. I recently saw a news report on homelessness and it shared a very surprising bit of information. The fastest growing group of people becoming homeless are over the age of 55 and especially those living on a fixed income. With the dramatic rise in rent, utilities, food and gas this past year, those who are on a fixed income just simply can't survive and are forced into homelessness. We are seeing the same trend in our shelter also. We have a 70 year old woman who lives in her car and comes into the shelter when it is cold. She couldn't pay her rent and was evicted. The waiting list for senior and income based housing is astronomically long. And she is not an isolated case.

We see this every day in not only our shelter, but in our Resource Program. Our Resource Program provides emergency rent and utility assistance to those who are at-risk of homelessness. We help them stay where they are so they don't end up on the streets. Leslie, who runs that program receives calls every day from people looking for help.

In 2022, we assisted 243 families with emergency assistance totaling over \$33,500. In addition, we assisted 414 families with clothing vouchers and clothing from our Clothing Closet. Between the Resource Center and Day Center, we served over 1,000 individuals and families during 2022. If you are needing assistance with emergency rent or utilities, please contact Leslie. Her number is 580-223-2027, option 1. Her email is leslie@ardmoregracecenter.com.

But none of this is possible without your help! As we continue to expand and grow, our needs grow also. We are so very thankful to have you partnering with us and helping us serve the most vulnerable in our community. The countless donations dropped off of food, clothing, hygiene supplies, laundry detergent, toilet paper and more are vitally necessary. We truly can't do this without you!

As we move forward through Spring and Summer, please keep us in mind and help us financially. No client is ever charged a fee for our services. All of our funding comes from churches, businesses, and individuals in addition to the grants we receive from local foundations. Every single dollar is needed.

I love writing these letters and keeping everyone updated as to the happenings with us. It gives me a wonderful sense of gratitude that God has brought me to this community to serve both the homeless and work to improve our community every day. I am truly thankful to be called to this ministry.

If you are on Facebook, please be sure and follow our page The Grace Center of Southern Oklahoma. This is where we put our immediate needs and share what is happening.

If your church or group would like me to come and share about our mission and work, please call me directly at 580-223-3252. There are many times I am not in the office as I work from home when I write grants. But I do have a business phone in my home office. I can also be contacted via email. My email address is:

Director@ardmoregracecenter.com. Feel free to stop by our new location if you haven't seen it. We love to show it off!

Thank you again for your faithful and continued support. It truly does "take a village". May God richly bless you and your families as He continues to provide for our needs through your giving.

Linda

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