

## Our Mission

Stephen Center partners with individuals, families and the community to overcome homelessness, substance abuse and mental health concerns.

*Celebrating 40 Years of Help • Hope • Heroes*



# RIPPLES OF HOPE: THE LEGACY OF COMPASSION OVER 40 YEARS!

For four decades, Stephen Center has been a sanctuary for the most vulnerable, a beacon of hope and a testament to the power of compassion. Each decade has unfolded a new chapter in this story of love and dedication, opening doors and hearts to those in desperate need.

In the 1980s, **Marg Evans** arrived at the Stephen Center, a woman with a heart full of empathy and hands skilled in the art of healing. Founder Sharon McNeil had sought her out, recognizing Marg's exceptional experience in mental health and substance abuse. Marg brought with her the vision and expertise to develop a Chemical Dependency Program within the Emergency Shelter. Her arrival marked the beginning of a transformative era, as the center became a safe, sober, and secure haven within the Omaha Homeless System.

Marg's compassion knew no bounds. In the 1990s, she met **Maggie Nocita**, a woman seeking refuge and support. Maggie's spirit was weary, but her heart was pure. Marg saw in Maggie a kindred soul, someone who could offer warmth and care to others. Under Marg's encouragement, Maggie stayed on at the Stephen Center, quickly becoming a mother-hen to the ladies and children. Her selfless dedication and nurturing nature earned her the affectionate title of "Mother Teresa of Stephen Center." For 33 years, Maggie has poured her heart into the center, tirelessly giving back to the place that had once offered her salvation.

In 2010, during a brutal snowstorm, **Beth** arrived at the Stephen Center. She stood at the gates, barefoot and trembling, her tote bag the only thing she possessed. Maggie, seeing the despair in Beth's eyes, knew exactly what to do. She embraced Beth,

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# From the Desk of the CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Dear Friends of Stephen Center,

As we celebrate Stephen Center's 40th anniversary this year, I am honored to introduce myself as the new CEO, stepping into this role on August 19, 2024. I am deeply humbled to follow in the footsteps of our founders, Sharon and Dick McNeil, and to be only the fifth CEO in this organization's history. Their vision, rooted in compassion, dignity, and respect for all, continues to inspire the critical work we do today.

Though my background is rooted in fundraising and advancement, I had the privilege of serving on the leadership team at Siena Francis House during the pandemic. There, I worked alongside a dedicated team to navigate the unprecedented challenges of providing services to those facing homelessness and addiction. This experience reaffirmed my belief that empathy and genuine concern must be at the heart of every service we provide.

Here at the Stephen Center, we are a reflection of how we treat our most vulnerable neighbors, friends, and community members. Our mission, like the road to permanent housing, is not one that can be walked in isolation. It is forged through partnership between our clients, our dedicated staff, and the most generous community found right here in Omaha. Together, we create hope for a brighter future for all who come through our doors.

As we continue celebrating this milestone anniversary, I am reminded daily of the responsibility I carry to honor the legacy of the McNeil family while helping build the future of Stephen Center. The words "Hope, Help, Heroes" inscribed over our door are not just a promise but a commitment—to you, our supporters, and to every individual we serve. It is my great privilege to ensure that this commitment thrives for another 40 years and beyond.

Thank you for your unwavering support as we walk this path together.

In Service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Knauf". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional but personal style.

Chris Knauf, J.D., CAP®  
CEO, Stephen Center

*Here's to the next 40 years of the Stephen Center! Become a monthly donor and give \$40/month in honor of 40 years of service.*



Ripples of Hope continued from page 1

offering her warmth, kindness, and the promise of a new beginning. Beth, deeply moved by Maggie's grace, began to emulate her mentor. She devoted herself to the center, becoming a guiding light for those who, like her, sought a second chance.

Beth's journey of redemption found its purpose in 2020 when she met **Ashley**. Ashley was fragile, barely a year sober, and seeking hours for Drug Court. Beth saw a glimmer of hope in Ashley's eyes, a reflection of her own past struggles. She took Ashley under her wing, offering her the same unconditional love and support she had received. Inspired by Beth and Maggie, Ashley dedicated herself to helping others,

investing in relationships with those who were weary and rebuilding her own family connections.

Today, Marg, Maggie, Beth, and Ashley stand as the four pillars of the Stephen Center. Their love and dedication radiate through the halls, touching the lives of everyone they meet. For 40 years, Stephen Center has been a place of peace and transformation, for countless lives. Each person who walks through our doors is met with open arms and hearts, finding solace and the chance to rebuild their lives.

The story of Stephen Center is a story of compassion, resilience, and the enduring power of love. It is a story of women who have given their all to lift others from the depths of despair, creating a ripple effect of kindness and hope that will be felt for generations to come.

# HEARTS THAT HEAL

Sharon McNeil

A note written in December 1984  
by our founder and first Executive Director,

“A few days ago I was helping my daughter, who’s a high school senior, with an English project on “The Merchant of Venice.” She would skip around, reading a few lines here, a line or two there, and we would share our ideas of what Shakespeare intended for the reader to understand. It took me back to forty years ago (can that be?) when I first read it. How different it sounds to me now when I hear,

“The quality of mercy is not strained,  
It droppeth as a gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath.  
It is twice blest—it blesseth him that gives and him that takes.  
‘Tis mightiest in the mightiest.”

What majestic words! Now I say that—I’m sure way back in my senior high days I had but the merest clue of how deep a truth these lines tell us. Today I have seen that truth in living color.

Interestingly enough, back in 1983, when my husband and I started the project that turned into the Stephen Center, we often debated what name the shelter should be called. He always wanted it to be the Stephen Center. Stephen, you might recall, was the well known deacon and martyr of the early Christian community. Moreover, he was chosen to look after the neglected needs of the widows and orphans. (Homeless, maybe?) So my husband strongly (I thought quite stubbornly) argued the case that Stephen was the obvious name for a shelter that aspired to look after the widows and orphans (homeless) of our community.

Well, I wanted to call the shelter, would you believe it, Mercy House I love the word “Mercy”—it speaks to me of kindness, compassion, benevolence, grace, blessing, forbearance; forgiveness, and all the best of what makes us beings—human. Good case I built for my name, Mercy House. But, as you can see, this newsletter is not called “The Latest Word from the Mercy House” so you can tell who chose to give in and show “Mercy.”

Well, all this brings me to what I really want to say—This is a season of Mercy. We always wish each other Merry Christmas, but I suspect we actually mean “Mercy Christmas” in our hearts. Is it just me, or do you too, deeply long for Christmas to be a season of the joy to the world that comes with our showing mercy and living out the kindness, compassion, grace, forbearance and certainly the forgiveness that we hope to receive from those we love? I personally can no longer equate tinsel, expensive presents, sumptuous meals, physical, mental exhaustion and stress with what I want this holy season to mean in my life and family.”



# A PATH TO Hope and Recovery

Jodie arrived at Stephen Center in the winter of 2023 as a 32-year-old mother of two, struggling with chronic homelessness, mental illness, substance abuse, and a history of domestic and sexual abuse. Child Protective Services had removed her children from her custody for their own safety, and she was in desperate need of support and a genuine opportunity to turn her life around.

Determined to change, Jodie sought assistance from Stephen Center, which provided not only basic needs like shelter, food and clothing, but also case management and supportive services to help her create a pathway to success. She entered Stephen Center's Pettigrew Emergency Shelter and, with her case manager, developed a personalized case plan addressing her unique needs including legal aid, mental health and medication management.

In 2023 the average length of stay in our Emergency Shelter was 41 days. Jodie, like a number of emergency shelter clients, required more than 41 days to get to the root causes of what has continually led her back to homelessness, and develop the appropriate supports to transition to stable housing. Stephen Center case managers worked with Jodie on her goals. Through Stephen Center referrals, Jodie began to meet with a therapist and psychiatric practitioner, initiating a dual approach to help with her mental health. She attended classes on Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Healthy

Relationships, and Emotional Regulation, acquiring tools to manage her emotions and build stable relationships. These efforts were critical in helping her gain emotional stability and independence. A significant milestone in her recovery was moving into a Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) apartment at Stephen Center, marking a transition from temporary shelter to stable housing. This supported her ongoing recovery and personal development. Her comprehensive case plan has been essential for outlining steps towards sustaining housing and recovery. Building on this foundation, Jodie has gained visits with her children and is working on a plan to attain custody once again. "Stephen Center is a place I never thought I would come to. However, I did, and I have found a whole new support system. I have been able to be a part of things I thought I'd never be able to be a part of. I've been able to blossom into my own person. They've helped me gain visits with my children again, and I'm so grateful for all they've done for me," said Jodie.



# Memorials & Honorariums

## The Latest Word

January 16, 2024 through  
July 15, 2024

You can memorialize a loved one or pay tribute to someone special in your life while helping those in need in our community. When you make a Memorial or Honor Gift, Stephen Center will send an acknowledgement card to the family or honoree. Gifts are also recognized in this newsletter. You may use the enclosed envelope to send your gift.

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Set it and forget it! Your donation automatically happens each month, making giving easy and hassle-free. Focus on what matters most, knowing your support never wavers.



## **Sign Up Now & Start Making A Difference!**

Visit [stephencenter.org](http://stephencenter.org) and click "Donate," or call our office at (402) 731-0328.



# Merry Mart

Spread holiday cheer by donating new board games, clothes, gift cards and other small items to the Stephen Center Merry Mart. Parents will have the opportunity to shop for their own children, and every client at Stephen Center will get a gift on Christmas Day.

## NEEDS LIST

- Board Games
- Craft Kits for Children and Adults
  - Travel Coffee Mugs
  - Reusable Water Bottles
- \$10 Gas Station Gift Cards
- Movie Theatre Gift Cards
- Baseballs, Basketballs, Footballs
- Hoodies/Sweatpants/Leggings, all sizes
- Costume Jewelry Sets

Deliver your gifts to Stephen Center's Donation Dock, located at 2723 Q Street. The dock is open Monday - Friday from 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. and weekends from Noon - 4 p.m.

Or shop from our wishlist at <https://stephencenter.org/donation-center/>

**Friday, December 14th is the deadline to donate!!**



*Thank you!*



# Stephen Center NEWS

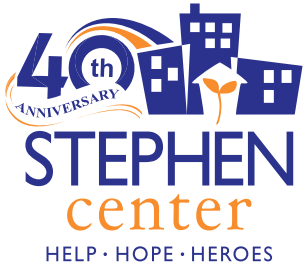
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[stephencenter.org](http://stephencenter.org)

Please visit our website to keep up with all the latest news  
& needs of the Stephen Center Community

### Chief Executive Officer

Chris Knauf

### Chief Development Officer

Teri Corcoran

### Chief Financial Officer

CEO Systems

### Chief Operations Officer

Shannon McNeil

### Shelter Manager

Mareiko Turner

### HEAD Director

Linnette Kramer

### Community Engagement Director

Beth Ellis

### Grants & Development Manager

Rex Younkin

## NEEDS LIST:

### Stephen Center gratefully accepts donations of:

- Cereal
- Coffee
- Over-the-counter medications (ibuprofen, acetaminophen)
- Cough Drops
- Deodorant for Men and Women
- Combs and Brushes
- Disinfectant Wipes
- New/Gently-Used Towels
- New/Gently-Used Twin and Queen Sheet Sets



facebook.com/StephenCenterOmaha | 402.731.0238