

*The Lighthouse of Southern MN / Spring 2025*

# NEWSLETTER

Restoring hope and ending homelessness one person at a time.



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## *Executive Director's Letter / Amanda Starks*



Greetings,

We are excited to share our first Lighthouse of Southern MN newsletter. With the changing seasons, our hard work and planning have come to fruition.

Effective January 1st, 2025, Hospitality House and Rachel's Light merged to become one organization. With a resolution as important as this one, there was much time, research, discussion and work involved in this significant decision. And, it was not arrived at lightly, or without considerable thought into the history and contributions each organization holds within our generous community. We saw the merger as an action that would add value to both entities, and with that, the new organization will be called The Lighthouse of Southern MN.

As we progress into this new phase of our journey, the word "change" is fitting as it encapsulates the transformation and integration process that led to the merger of the two entities into The Lighthouse of Southern MN, very well. Staff have diligently been comparing programming and systems to assist guests in navigating various barriers. This effort aims to ensure our guests' success and support their overall well-being. The Lighthouse of Southern MN will serve those who are experiencing homelessness by providing support through tailored programming that fosters independence. We will continue to identify and address the unique challenges each person faces, while filling the gaps in resources to help them successfully transition to stable living. We are committed to our mission and our vision; restoring hope and ending homelessness one person at a time. Our work would not be possible without the support of our partners and community members. The transition of our organization was significantly accelerated by the generous grant funding from South Country Alliance; \$160,000, and Steele County Public Health; \$60,000. Financial support, coupled with positive feedback from the community, have served as strong motivators and clear indicators that we are moving in the right direction. We sincerely appreciate everyone's support for our mission, and are pleased to share our latest updates.

Love & Blessings,

Amanda Starks

## *Program Updates: The Lighthouse of Southern MN / Operations*

I'm excited to introduce myself as the new Director of Operations for The Lighthouse of Southern MN! My name is Molly Kerr, and my family and I have called Owatonna home for the past nine years. I have been fortunate enough to be involved with several local organizations, and I am passionate about fostering a strong community.

It's been a busy and exciting first quarter here at The Lighthouse of Southern MN. We've welcomed three incredible new Guest Advocates, one new Program Director, and connected with many new volunteers who are ready to make a difference. If you've ever considered volunteering with us, now's a great time—please don't hesitate to reach out!

The Lighthouse of Southern MN has made great strides internally, rolling out a new Personnel Handbook and launching our 90-day review process to support our amazing team. I'd like to take a moment to thank our Personnel Committee and our Executive Director, Amanda Starks, for their guidance during this period of transition. I couldn't be more grateful for their support!

I'm incredibly grateful to the entire staff at The Lighthouse of Southern MN. Watching how seamlessly they work together to uplift others across both the Men's and Women's programs is truly inspiring. I'm honored to be part of this amazing team.

I'm looking forward to continuing to grow our organization and working alongside all of you as we pursue our vision: ***"Restoring hope and ending homelessness one person at a time."***

We honestly can't do this without your support. Get involved, spread the word, and help us make a lasting impact on the lives of those in our community!

Take great care,

Molly Kerr



### *Program Updates: The Lighthouse of Southern MN / Women's Program*

It's been a hopeful season here in the Women's Program! We've had some wonderful conversations and made meaningful progress toward strengthening our community partnerships and expanding the opportunities available to the women we serve. From connecting with local organizations, brainstorming new ways to collaborate, and seeing women take steps toward their personal goals—there's a lot to be hopeful about.

We're continuing to focus on skill-building, support, and community engagement. We're also excited to offer more hands-on opportunities, including regular volunteering at Community Pathways and new events focused on everyday essentials, such as meal planning and healthy cooking.

A recent highlight was a meal prep event offered by The Exchange Club Center for Family Unity, where guests were able to plan, cook, and take home meals. All while enjoying time together! These kinds of moments remind us of the power of shared experiences.

Thanks to everyone who continues to support and cheer on the work being done. We're building momentum, and I'm so grateful to be in it together.

Sincerely, Alicyn Prestegard

### *Program Updates: The Lighthouse of Southern MN / Mental Health Therapy*

The Lighthouse has been busy developing new formal programming around mental health supports, 'in house'. This is not all 'new' support as all Rachel's Light Staff and Hospitality House Staff have traditionally made mental health support a priority in our everyday interactions with guests. Recently, I've been learning the ropes of a new documentation program (Counsel) to formally offer mental health therapy to our guests who are interested. Forms have been developed in an online portal, and several guests have completed and are receiving one one-on-one intentional time and space in a therapy setting. This opportunity is reducing barriers and allowing men and women to experience therapy support for the first time, and they report feeling more comfortable and safe to do so. More importantly, the support is helping them reach their personal and housing goals. We have developed a flexible office setting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the men's program and are working on space in the women's house until we move to our 'forever home' at Oak Hill. I feel professionally and personally blessed to be a part of The Lighthouse and happy to work towards whatever future supports we can develop here. Mental health is one of the biggest factors in homelessness and if it wasn't prior to a person becoming homeless, it is while they are affected. Thank you, community and financial supporters for making the growth at the Lighthouse possible.

Sincerely,

Shannon Karston, LICSW, Therapist

## *Program Updates: The Lighthouse of Southern MN / Men's Program*

We've had a meaningful and uplifting quarter here at the Men's Program of The Lighthouse of Southern MN, and we're excited to share some highlights with you.

Our guests were recently introduced to the clinical therapist program and have begun working one-on-one in their healing journeys. It's been inspiring to witness their openness and commitment to personal growth, and we're honored to walk alongside them as they take these brave steps forward.

We're also thrilled to announce that our team is now fully staffed! With every role filled, we're better equipped now, more than ever to provide the consistent care and support our guests need and deserve.

This month brought two incredible success stories—two of our guests made the move into stable housing. Move-outs are a big deal, marking a new chapter of independence and hope. We couldn't be prouder of these guests as they move forward.

In lighter, but equally important moments, the guys took part in a meal-prepping class provided by The Exchange Club Center for Family Unity. It was a fun experience that brought everyone together and served as a reminder of the power of community and everyday life skills.

Perhaps the most powerful story we've experienced this month was Steven's.

With the generous support of the Owatonna VFW, Steven, one of the guests and a proud veteran, was able to take a deeply personal and healing trip to Lampass, Texas. As a medic in the service, Steven risked his life to save others, including one soldier who, sadly, did not make it home. Decades later, Steven finally had the chance to visit the fallen soldier's grave to say goodbye.

Thanks to the kindness and collaboration of many, Steven's trip and opportunity to say farewell in his own words, became a reality. The Owatonna VFW helped fund the flight, Crosby of Petal Peddlers provided transportation and companionship, and the staff at Oak Hill Cemetery helped immensely in assisting Steven with finding his comrade's resting place.

This journey held lasting meaning for Steven—and for all of us as well. It served as a powerful reminder that healing isn't bound by time, and that the connections built through service remain with us, enduring and real.

We're profoundly grateful to everyone who played a role in making this trip for Steven a reality. Generosity from the community gave a veteran peace and closure. And to Steven; thank you for sharing your story with us. You remind us why this work matters.

Let's keep showing up for our veterans and for each other. Every step forward counts.

Sincerely,

Ashley Von Ruden

*(see some pictures from Steven's trip on page 8)*

THE LIGHTHOUSE OF SOUTHERN MN

April

### Needs List

- ✓ Toilet Paper
- ✓ Toilet Bowl Cleaner
- ✓ Disinfectant Wipes
- ✓ Softener Salt
- ✓ Post It Notes
- ✓ Garbage Bags

*Thank you for your generous donations!*



## Volunteer | Ways to Support The Lighthouse of Southern MN

*Here are three ways to support The Lighthouse of Southern MN:*

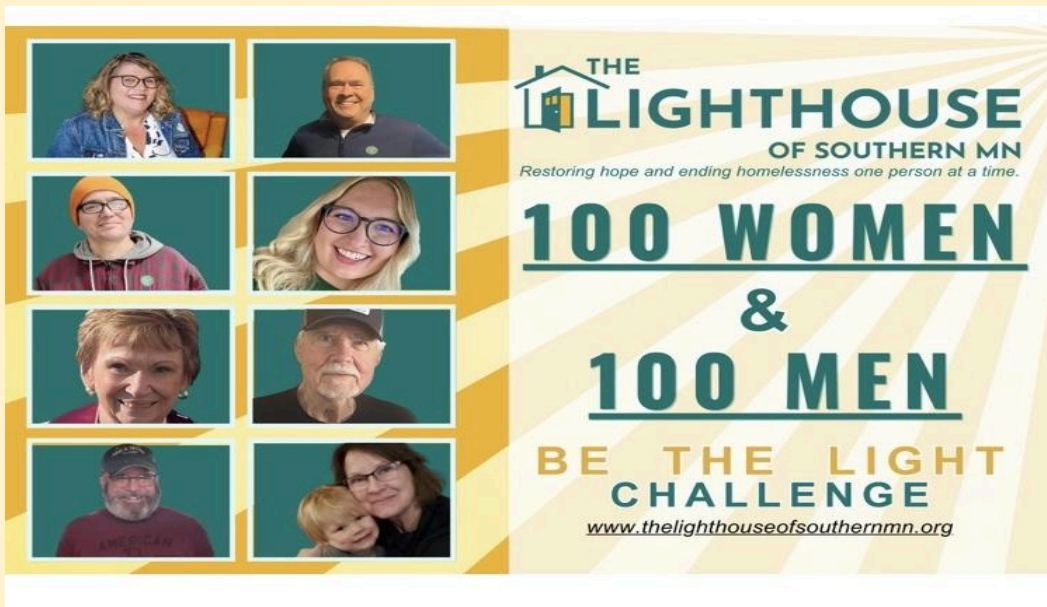
-Enlist as a supporter for the 2025 100 Women and 100 Men Be the Light campaign. We're seeking people to financially and publicly support us as we change the culture and stigma around housing insecurity. [Find donation options here](#). See more on page 7.

-Buy a t-Shirt and/or sweatshirt from our [secure web store](#) partnership/fundraiser. Visit the website to shop for garments and wear our logo and mission everywhere you go!

-Visit our [NEW website](#) to stay updated on all the latest events, needs, and activities at our busy organization!

Are you interested in volunteering in one of the programs, or have a question regarding volunteering? Please [click here](#), or go to our website under the "Volunteer" tab.

## Upcoming Events | Be the Light Challenge



### BE THE LIGHT

**OUR GOAL**– To Challenge **100 WOMEN & 100 MEN** to donate \$100 to support men, women and children experiencing homelessness. Together, we can raise **\$20,000** for **The Lighthouse of Southern MN** and make a lasting impact.

#### What Can Your \$100 Do?

Offer life-changing support, guidance, housing, and everyday essentials to those who need it!

#### HONOR THEIR IMPACT

Make a donation in the name of a man or woman who has made a meaningful difference in your life.

READY TO GET INVOLVED?

**CASH or CHECK**  
by Mail or In Person

The Lighthouse of Southern MN:  
P.O. Box 118, Owatonna, MN 55060  
Attn: 100 WOMEN & 100 MEN CHALLENGE

**Give Online**  
scan here →

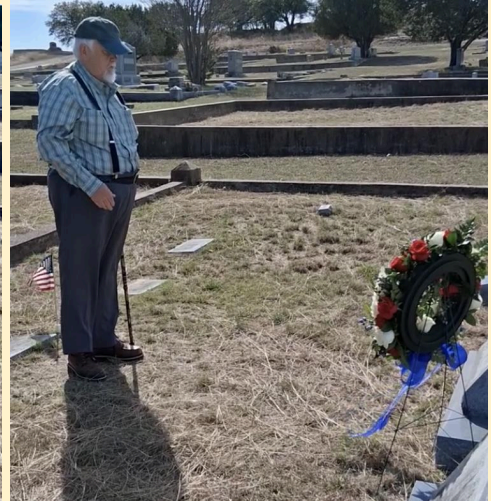


[secure.myvanco.com/L-Z6MPI/campaign/C-15GEN](https://secure.myvanco.com/L-Z6MPI/campaign/C-15GEN)

If you're ready to donate securely, [click here](#) to be directed to our secure, online portal (Vanco).

**Thank you!**

## Image highlights from Steven's Trip:



## Contact Us

- ★ [Donations](https://www.thelighthouseofsouthernmn.org/needs) or go to: <https://www.thelighthouseofsouthernmn.org/needs>
- ★ [Volunteer](https://www.thelighthouseofsouthernmn.org/volunteer) or go to <https://www.thelighthouseofsouthernmn.org/volunteer>
- ★ [General contact](https://www.thelighthouseofsouthernmn.org/contact) or go to: <https://www.thelighthouseofsouthernmn.org/contact>
- ★ Mail: PO Box 118 Owatonna MN 55060

Make a secure donation to The Lighthouse of Southern MN *anytime* through the “[give](#)” button on our website, or through other means as well (Thrivent, Employer Match). Please reach out if we can assist with answering any questions.

