



2016

HOPE REPORT  
STAND IN THE GAP MINISTRIES

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*"A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,  
is God in His holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families.  
He leads out the prisoners with singing..."*

*Psalms 68:5-6*

Our mission at Stand in the Gap is to bring hope back into the lives of widows, orphans, and prisoners by connecting them with volunteers from the local church who provide relational, emotional and spiritual support.

We can't do this work without the volunteers and churches that put this mission into action, the donors who generously invest in our vision, and our passionate staff of advocates and dreamers. At the end of another year, what a joy it is to report on all the transformations, all the relationships, and all the hope we witnessed this year.

Allow me to highlight a few notable accomplishments. Our Life Launch program for at-risk youth was featured in the *Tulsa World* and the *Daily Oklahoman* and we completely revamped our Life Launch volunteer training to more effectively prepare volunteers for relationship with at-risk youth. An editorial focused on widows by Buddy Stone was published in the *Tulsa World* and over 2,000 widows were impacted through 50 church partners across the state. Over 1,200 incarcerated women participated in our Women in Transition courses and 35 children were reunited with their mothers after mom completed our program.

Several years ago we recognized that to better steward the ministry and our impact we needed greater donor diversification in addition to increased funding. In 2016 we continued to grow our donor base of individual donors while contributions from Foundations continues to make up a smaller percentage of total donations (approximately 35%). This increased diversification strengthens our sustainability.

Thank you for the role you played and for choosing to Stand in the Gap.

*Francois Cardinal*  
Francois Cardinal, Executive Director

# MISSION

Stand in the Gap Ministries (SITGM) is a prayer-based, small-group empowered movement that fills the gaps in the social service system, in the ministry of the local church, and in the lives of Oklahomans in need.



# VISION

At Stand in the Gap, we do not offer handouts. No money is exchanged. Instead, through healthy relationships, education and prayer, Oklahomans in need are empowered to break unhealthy patterns in their lives and achieve self-reliance.



# STRATEGY

The idea is simple. At Stand in the Gap, we connect people in need with people who care.

In the course of our 19-year history, we've realized our passion for three specific populations: orphans, prisoners, and widows. For each of these "need categories," we offer specific support programs, but the overall methodology is the same. We surround our "Neighbors" experiencing a major life transition with trained, committed, volunteers who care. These volunteers commit to be present in our client's life (for a minimum of one year) in a mentorship capacity.



*Stand in the Gap  
volunteers serve orphans,  
prisoners and widows  
by committing to be in  
relationship with God  
and each other.*



*Through Stand in the Gap for Widows, volunteers help local widows with routine home maintenance.*



Stand in the Gap's 2016 Fall Event in Oklahoma City.

## EXPANDING OUR REACH

4,500+ FACEBOOK FANS  
ON SITGM AND SITG FOR  
WIDOWS PAGES



ONE  
NEW AND IMPROVED  
WEBSITE



700+ PEOPLE  
IN ATTENDANCE  
AT FALL EVENTS



THREE ARTICLES  
PUBLISHED IN LOCAL  
NEWSPAPERS



HIGHLIGHTS CALENDAR

*January* CHARLES DODSON, A LIFE LAUNCH VOLUNTEER AND SITGM BOARD MEMBER, RECEIVES AN "OUTSTANDING MENTOR AWARD" FROM THE OKLAHOMA FOUNDATION FOR EXCELLENCE.

*February* GOVERNOR MARY FALLIN PARTNERS WITH SITG FOR WIDOWS TO RECOGNIZE FEBRUARY 14<sup>TH</sup> AS WIDOW RECOGNITION DAY STATEWIDE.

*March* THE NEW AND IMPROVED WWW.SITGM.ORG LAUNCHES AND VANESSA JOINS RHONDA AT EDDIE WARRIOR (SEE PG. 12).

*April* SITGM HOSTS SUCCESSFUL "FRIENDRAISING" EVENTS IN TULSA AND OKC.

*May* WOMEN IN TRANSITION PRODUCES AN ORIENTATION VIDEO FOR PROSPECTIVE VOLUNTEERS.

*June* MORE POSITIVE RESULTS FROM THE "HOPE SURVEY" ARE REPORTED AND THE TULSA WORLD PUBLISHES AN ARTICLE ABOUT LIFE LAUNCH.

HIGHLIGHTS CALENDAR

*July* TJ WARREN JOINS THE STAFF AS PROGRAM MANAGER FOR LIFE LAUNCH-TULSA AND TAMMY FRANKLIN BEGINS FACILITATING A WOMEN IN TRANSITION COURSE IN A NEW FACILITY.

*August* RHONDA SOKOFF JOINS THE STAFF AS PROGRAM MANAGER FOR LIFE LAUNCH-OKC AND THE OKLAHOMAN PUBLISHES AN ARTICLE ABOUT LIFE LAUNCH.

*September* STAND IN THE GAP RECEIVES A \$15 "TITHE" CHECK FROM A WOMAN TAKING OUR CLASS IN PRISON.

*October* SITG FOR WIDOWS KICKS OFF IN BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS.

*November* STAND IN THE GAP HOSTS OUR ANNUAL FALL EVENTS FEATURING THE TESTIMONIES OF SITGM CLIENTS AND MICHAEL FRANZESE.

*December* TAMMY FRANKLIN'S FIRST WOMEN IN TRANSITION CLASS GRADUATES AND JACKIE COOPER NISSAN STAFF DONATES CHRISTMAS GIFTS TO LIFE LAUNCH YOUTH AND WOMEN IN TRANSITION FAMILIES.

# WOMEN IN TRANSITION

*“He leads out the prisoners”*

It is no secret that Oklahoma has the highest female incarceration rate in the United States. These women are the mothers of thousands of Oklahoma children. Because most women leave prison without a healthy support group, they often return to the “scene of the crime” and repeat the same behavior patterns.

By breaking these patterns, educating and empowering women to live healthy, whole lives and return to their children, Stand in the Gap is a solution.

Women in Transition (WIT) begins with curriculum taught inside seven Oklahoma prisons and jails. Formerly incarcerated women facilitate the course and teach skills necessary to live healthy, whole lives post-incarceration.

SITGM provides the most comprehensive WIT post-release support to women who actively demonstrate their desire to change. Qualifying WIT graduates are matched with trained Stand in the Gap small groups who share wise counsel, brainstorm solutions and encourage new approaches to problem solving.

## 142

OUT OF EVERY 100,000 WOMEN IN OKLAHOMA ARE INCARCERATED. THAT IS MORE THAN DOUBLE THE NATIONAL AVERAGE AND THE HIGHEST (PER CAPITA) IN THE UNITED STATES.\*

## >60%

OF WOMEN IN STATE PRISONS HAVE A CHILD UNDER THE AGE OF 18.\*

\*SOURCE: THE SENTENCING PROJECT

### 2016 HIGHLIGHTS

#### FAMILY RESTORATION

A KEY INDICATOR OF WOMEN IN TRANSITION PROGRAM SUCCESS IS THE RESTORATION OF FAMILIES. IN 2016, 35 CHILDREN WERE RESTORED TO THEIR MOTHERS AFTER THEIR SUCCESSFUL PARTICIPATION IN STAND IN THE GAP.

#### GRADUATE FACILITATORS

IN 2016, TWO NEW INSTRUCTORS WERE TRAINED TO FACILITATE THE WOMEN IN TRANSITION (WIT) COURSE. BOTH ARE COURSE GRADUATES. ADDITIONAL FACILITATORS WILL ALLOW STAND IN THE GAP TO OFFER WOMEN IN TRANSITION AT MORE FACILITIES.

#### NEW PARTNERS

STAND IN THE GAP DEVELOPED SIGNIFICANT PARTNERSHIPS WITH TRANSITIONAL LIVING HOMES. THE STAND IN THE GAP SMALL GROUP MODEL IS NOW OFFERED TO WOMEN AT BRANCH 15 (OKC), NAOMI HOUSE (ARDMORE), AND CHRISTIAN HELPING HANDS (DUNCAN).



Jennifer (center) with her children and her Stand in the Gap small group. (Her quote below.)

*“My relationship with my Stand in the Gap family is different from any relationship I’ve ever had.”*

## VANESSA'S STORY

Vanessa is sitting at a table at She Brews Coffee Shop in Claremore, Oklahoma. Her two step-children, Bethany and Jason, are, at various moments, hugging her, listening to her, sitting next to her, and circling around her with the uninhibited energy of children at the beginning of summer vacation. Nearly every one who walks in the door knows Vanessa. They talk to her kids, comment on her hair (highlighted blonde for the summer), and ask about her classes at Rogers State University.

After talking, we step outside to take a photo of Vanessa and her family. In this photo, a snapshot frozen in time, Vanessa's life could not look more different than it did six years ago. In 2010, Vanessa was an incarcerated felon, drug addict and dealer.

"The first time I smoked marijuana, I was ten-years-old," Vanessa says as she watches her eight-year-old stepdaughter talk to the She Brews barista. Vanessa's first experience with drugs led to a relatively casual use of marijuana and methamphetamine. But her addiction escalated after her father's death six years later. "I looked up to him," Vanessa says, "and he was a drug addict." Following her father's footsteps, Vanessa got involved with a gang in Stillwater, Oklahoma. She sold drugs to an undercover Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation worker that led to a warrant for her arrest. "When I found out about the warrant, I ran. For a year, I was always looking over my shoulder." The first time Vanessa went to jail, she was 19.



*"The first time I smoked marijuana. I was ten-years-old"*

A post-incarceration relationship and desire to finish high school moved Vanessa to Oklahoma City. About five months into the relationship, Vanessa discovered that her boyfriend was using crack cocaine. She introduced him to meth, and the relationship went downhill. She snaps her fingers to describe the decline; "instantly". The couple was arrested for robbing a house in search of money to buy drugs. When they were released, they reunited and got high.

Between 2008 and 2010, Vanessa was "on the run" from charges in Payne and Oklahoma Counties. Each time she landed in jail, she was sentenced to probation instead of rehabilitation or prison time. Each time she got out of jail, she returned to the destructive addictions and relationships that had landed her in trouble in the first place.

"In March of 2010," Vanessa remembers, "I got in trouble for stealing a pair of shoes." Although Vanessa was only in her early twenties, she called herself "drained". She went to jail in Payne County and was offered probation again. "I said, 'I'm a destructive person and probation is not working for me. I either need rehab or prison.'" There were no available beds at the rehabilitation facility, so Vanessa was sentenced to three years in prison.

Vanessa reported to Eddie Warrior Correctional Center with high hopes. She believed that the Department of Corrections was going to "correct" her and looked forward to the opportunity to change. But after some time inside, she wasn't changing. She was getting in fights, selling prohibited items on the yard, and although she wasn't using drugs, she had little to no hope that, when her time was up, she wouldn't settle back into her destructive lifestyle.



Vanessa and her Stand in the Gap "dad", Keith Martin, walk down the aisle on her wedding day // Vanessa (right) with Women in Transition Program Managers, volunteer, and neighbor after introducing Women in Transition to Governor Mary Fallin

In April 2011, Vanessa "hit rock bottom". For perhaps the first time in her life, while sitting in a holding cell on lock-down, she prayed. "Lord, if you are real, I need you to show up." The next day, Vanessa was told that she was being sent to Payne County to address other charges against her. Because of her history, Vanessa assumed she would face an additional sentence of five to six years. Days after her prayer, in court, she was sentenced to one more year in prison and six months of probation. "That was my sign that God was real." In total, Vanessa served about five more months, "but I was changed."

Her prayer life continued to grow. After praying for a Christian "bunkie", Vanessa was assigned to bunk with Tammy Franklin, one of the most outspokenly faithful women in Eddie Warrior at the time. Tammy introduced Vanessa to Rhonda Bear, who was teaching her first Women in Transition class at Eddie Warrior. Vanessa remembers sitting in the Women in Transition course, hearing Rhonda tell her story of addiction, incarceration, faith, and Stand in the Gap. "I knew that if she could change, I could change. And that gave me hope."

After her release, Vanessa moved into Rhonda's His House transitional home in Claremore. She began attending First Baptist Church and Celebrate Recovery. Within a few months, she was matched with a Stand in the Gap small group to help mentor her as she transitioned to life after addiction and incarceration. Lisa and Keith Martin and Marsha and Will Barnes formed her Stand in the Gap "family". "By that time, I knew God worked through prayer," says Vanessa. With the

Martins and the Barnes, Vanessa prayed that she would get her driver's license, an education, and, when the person and time was right, get married and have children.

Vanessa not only got her driver's license, she also received a car that had been donated through His House Ministries. Although neither of her parents had more than an eighth grade education, Vanessa completed her GED and is enrolled at Roger's State University pursuing her associate degree in sociology. When she married Josh Crouch in March 2014, she asked her Stand in the Gap "dad" to walk her down the aisle. She and her husband received full custody of his two children in June of that year. Vanessa called Lisa, a nurse, about "every little bug bite." She credits her Stand in the Gap family with teaching her how to be a Godly, responsible, and fun parent to Bethany and Jason.

*"It was the best high I've ever had."*

In her booth at She Brews, Vanessa lights up while she talks about going back to prison. Each week, with Rhonda at her side, Vanessa is returning to Eddie Warrior for Stand in the Gap's Women in Transition course. She's learning to facilitate the course from Rhonda and will eventually offer the course herself in various prisons and jails.

The first time she went back to the prison, she shared her story the way she'd heard Rhonda share hers six years ago. "I was nervous about going back," she says. "I thought maybe a guard would recognize me. But I knew God was working. So while I was telling my story, I knew there was a girl out there hearing me and her mind was changing. She was changing her thought process. I was so grateful for the opportunity to give them hope. When I came out of there, I was just high on Jesus. And it was the best high I've ever had."

# LIFE LAUNCH

*"A Father to the fatherless"*

We believe the orphans of our time are youth aging out of the foster care system. The Life Launch goal is to interrupt the cycle of poverty and, through loving relationships, invest in the lives of these at-risk youth, so they develop healthy self-esteem, begin to have hope in their futures and seek to be self-sufficient. Potential Life Launch youth first undergo an assessment by a Program Manager. As much as possible, Program Managers determine a youth's stability, commitment to independence, and willingness to be vulnerable in a group setting.

Following training, 2-4 volunteers are matched with a youth. Volunteers initially focus on developing a relationship and building trust. Eventually, this relational foundation gives volunteers the platform to encourage youth to set attainable goals and support them through personal setbacks and successes.

Volunteers connect youth to community resources, generally meeting education, employment, housing and transportation needs. But primarily, volunteers invite youth into their lives by going out to eat, playing sports, and spending intentional time together.



Kyla (center) with her son and her Stand in the Gap small group. (Her quote right.)

## 60%

ACCORDING TO A PEW STUDY OF 2009, WITHIN THREE YEARS OF LEAVING FOSTER CARE, 6 OUT OF 10 YOUTH WILL BE HOMELESS, INCARCERATED, OR DEAD.

### 2016 HIGHLIGHTS

#### NEW TOOLS

THROUGH OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA'S CENTER FOR NONPROFIT RESEARCH, WE HAVE IMPLEMENTED TWO ASSESSMENT TOOLS (HOPE SURVEY AND READINESS FOR CHANGE SURVEY) IN ADDITION TO EXIT SURVEYS WE DEVELOPED FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS, TO POSITION LIFE LAUNCH FOR FUTURE GROWTH AND SUCCESS. ALSO, THE VOLUNTEER TRAINING PROCESS IS NOW INTEGRATED WITH VIDEO CONTENT FROM SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS, PROVIDING MORE ROBUST TRAUMA TRAINING FOR MENTORS.

#### NEW PARTNERS

SEVERAL NEW OR RENEWED PARTNERSHIPS WITH GROUP HOMES INCLUDING KEYSTONE, TULSA HILLS YOUTH RANCH, BETHESDA GIRLS' HOME, MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION'S WALKER HALL AND SEVEN LIFE.CHURCH CAMPUSES INDICATE THAT WE ARE GROWING THE LIFE LAUNCH BRAND AND PRESENCE IN THE FOSTER YOUTH CARE ECOSYSTEM.

#### ENHANCED COMMUNICATION

IN 2016, WE INTEGRATED A TEXTING SERVICE FOR COMMUNICATING WITH VOLUNTEERS. AS A RESULT OF REMINDERS SENT BY TEXT INSTEAD OF EMAIL, WE HAVE SEEN MUCH IMPROVED ATTENDANCE AT SCHEDULED TRAININGS AND INCREASED INTERACTION BETWEEN PROGRAM MANAGERS AND VOLUNTEERS.

*"The difference between then and now?  
I know where I belong."*





## MALIK'S STORY

*“Most kids hate DHS for taking them out of their home. I was different. My situation at home was so bad that I tried to get in to DHS custody.”*

Malik is a 19-year-old young man. He speaks calmly and openly about an illness that tore his family apart. “I think my mom was paranoid schizophrenic,” he says. “When I was 14 or 15, we got displaced. Within a year and a half, my mom moved my sister and me probably 40 times. She was extremely paranoid.”

After years of sporadic homeschooling, Malik had only completed the eighth grade at age 16. When his mother moved her family to Tulsa, Malik enrolled at Tulsa Hope Academy. It was there that Malik first found a safe community of caring adults. Anticipating another relocation, Malik began the process to trying to emancipate himself from his mother’s custody.

The family was staying at the Salvation Army, but Malik’s desire for independence led to a series of difficult confrontations with his mother. “It was early morning,” he remembers. “I told her I wanted my own place and she went crazy. She said we were going back to Dallas.” In Tulsa, Malik had found a community of support. “But there was nothing in Dallas for me.”

So Malik walked away. He called the Chaplain at Tulsa Hope Academy crying. “I said, ‘I don’t know where I’m going.’ He told me to walk to Safe Place. That’s when DHS got involved.”

Malik spent the next several months bouncing between Youth Services of Tulsa and wherever his mother was staying.

Once, on Super Bowl Sunday, Malik’s mother arrived at Youth Services to pick him up. “She pulled me out of there,” he remembers, “a safe place where I had shelter and everything I needed, to take me and sit in a van all day. She had no place for us to go.”

The last time Malik and his mother parted ways was one month later, over spring break. “We were staying in a Days Inn and she said we were going back to Dallas. I said there were people willing to help me in Tulsa. I felt like I could get on my feet here. I packed up my three trash bags of stuff and walked across the street. When she went back to Dallas, I was able to claim abandonment. I was 17.”

While Malik was living at the Laura Dester Youth Shelter, he was introduced to Life Launch. His small group, comprised of three caring adults from Life.Church, began meeting a few months later. Ronda and Keith Davis and Pam Bontrager were Malik’s official Life Launch team. Malik’s eventual foster mom, Susan McClarty, also regularly participated in the group’s gatherings. When Malik needed support, he knew that he had found another safe community in Life Launch.

After graduating from high school, Malik began to apply for post-graduate education.

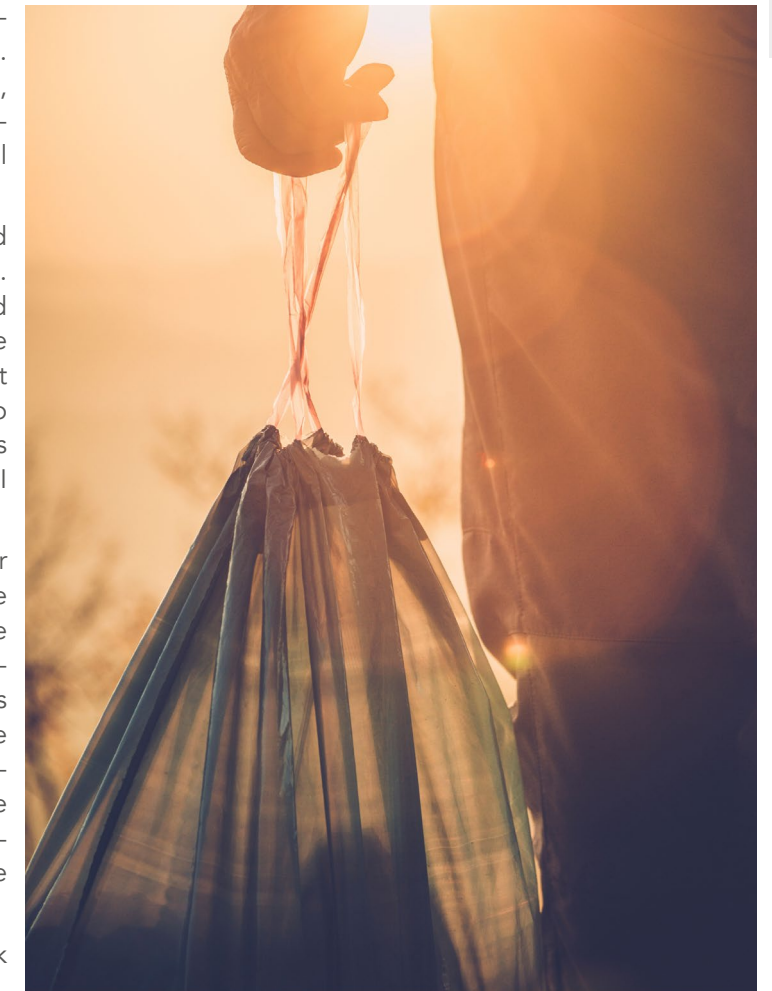
In early 2016, he began a one-year degree program in Surgical Technology at Tulsa Tech. Malik had worked for several years (and been steadily promoted) at Taco Bell in order to save up for independent adulthood. As a result, he had enough in savings to buy a car and take time off from work while he got accustomed to his schoolwork.

As the time to begin his courses approached, Malik recognized that he was suffering from intense anxiety. “I worked all the time and was living on my own,” he recalls. “I became a recluse. Then I kind of had a breakdown,” he says. “And I called [one of my Life Launch small group members] Ronda.”

Ronda helped Malik make a doctor’s appointment where he received mild anxiety medicine. Malik was able to start school and is excelling in his classes.

Malik wears two accessories around his neck. The first is his Tulsa Tech student ID. The second is a silver cross. “I’ve always believed in God,” Malik says. “But my anxiety drove me to God. Over the last few months, I have been relying on him.”

In addition to his faith and his community at Tulsa Hope Academy, Malik says “Life Launch is a support system.” In his unique case, Malik’s hard work, determination, and maturity drive him to make wise life choices, but when the fears and insecurities of his youth creep up, Malik knows where to find a family.



# STAND IN THE GAP FOR WIDOWS

*"A defender of widows"*

## 1 IN 3

WIDOWS ARE CLINICALLY DEPRESSED WITHIN ONE YEAR OF HER HUSBAND'S DEATH.\*

## 75%

OF A WOMAN'S FRIENDSHIPS ARE LOST WITHIN ONE YEAR OF HER HUSBAND'S DEATH.\*

\*SOURCE: WIDOWCONNECTION.COM

There are over 150,000 widows in Oklahoma. In spite of this, there are very few support programs aimed specifically at this population. By empowering the local church to offer emotional, spiritual and practical support to widows, Stand in the Gap is a solution.

SITGM staff asked 800 widows what types of support they needed and were not receiving. Consistently, we found that widows need to socialize with people who understand, sources for practical help, to feel remembered, and to walk through grief in deep relationship with others. Stand in the Gap for Widows was designed to address these needs.

Stand in the Gap for Widows is offered to churches for free. The program includes a tactical plan, research, implementation and marketing tools. The Stand in the Gap small group methodology is central to Stand in the Gap for Widows, however this program also offers the church additional "best-case practices" including a home maintenance manual created by an Oklahoma City architect, estate-planning documents compiled by a Tulsa estate attorney, and a tactical plan for church volunteers to communicate regularly with widows in their congregation.

## 2016 HIGHLIGHTS

### PARTNERING OUR PARTNERS

CHURCHES IN ADA, OK AND DUNCAN, OK HAVE WORKED TOGETHER, USING OUR SOCIAL MINISTRY GUIDES, TO IMPACT WIDOWS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. AS A RESULT OF THEIR JOINED EFFORTS, HUNDREDS OF WIDOWS HAVE BEEN SERVED. SMALL-TOWN CHURCHES ACCOUNT FOR 40% OF ALL WIDOWS SERVED IN OKLAHOMA. (SEE PG. 20)

### MORE TOOLS IN THE TOOLKIT

THANKS TO THE INGENUITY OF OUR WIDOWS AND VOLUNTEERS, WE ADDED THREE NEW "BEST-CASE PRACTICES" TO OUR TOOLKIT. FREEZER SOCIAL MEALS, WIDOW SATURDAY, AND CAR CARE ARE NEW PRACTICES DESIGNED BASED ON WIDOWS' NEEDS. THE UPDATED TOOLKIT IS AVAILABLE TO ALL OUR PROGRAM PARTNERS.



*"We've brought life back into each other's houses. Stand in the Gap for Widows has been a life saver."*

Phyllis (right) with some of her Stand in the Gap for Widows support team. (Her quote right.)

In 2010, Debbie Wall Ross stood on an isolated hillside in her nightgown for two hours. She was cold. But her anger was beginning to boil over. In the solitary company of her husband's ashes, Debbie had a conversation with her Creator.

"You took the wrong person," she lamented. "I want you to strike me right now. I don't want to live anymore." Debbie describes her time on the hill as "wailing." It continued until she felt a response come across her thoughts, "God said, 'Bobby's life was complete,'" she remembers, years later, with tears in her throat, "'but yours' is not complete."

Debbie met Bobby Wall when she was 14-years-old. The couple started dating and "never broke up." They were married when Debbie turned eighteen. "It was a true love story," Debbie says.

While raising their children, the Walls lived all over the country, "from California to Virginia." When health issues forced Bobby to retire, the couple moved to a ranch near Ada, Oklahoma. In that isolation, Bobby and Debbie became even closer. They were together practically 24 hours a day. "We were best friends," Debbie says. "In fact," she pauses to consider her words, "probably we were each others' only friends."

Debbie enrolled in nursing school at age 45 so she would be able to take care of Bobby in his declining health. "I was going to rescue him if anything happened," she says of her decision. "But God made it where there was no rescue to be had." After the couple's 40th wedding anniversary, Bobby passed away.

Although her family was extremely supportive, Debbie says, "after about three months, people get back to their lives." Debbie had searched for a support group in Ada to help her handle the grief, but couldn't find a fit. She described herself as "broken."

It was "brokenness" that led Debbie to the hillside that night. Her encounter with God did not immediately yield to any shift in perspective or lessening of grief. In fact, she says her initial thought was "What do I have to do to go home?"

Debbie went to Houston to stay with her daughter. There, she attended thirteen weeks of Grief Share sessions through her daughter's church. At the end, she could acknowledge that maybe there would be a "light at the end of the tunnel" of her mourning. "It was still a tunnel," she says, "but I could see that maybe God had a job for me."

Returning to Ada, Debbie began facilitating Grief Share at her church, First Baptist Church of Ada, eleven months after Bobby's death. Through Grief Share, Debbie met other widows who could empathize with her feelings of brokenness, anger, and loneliness.



Debbie Wall Ross

"Widows need each other," she said. "We would go out to eat together at least three times a week. We'd get through with our meal in ten minutes and talk for two hours."

Debbie became her church's representative to widows. "I made it my job in life," she says. "I took calls at two o'clock in the morning, it didn't matter. When you get ambushed by grief, you just need somebody to get you through that minute or fifteen minutes."

In spite of all she was doing for widows at her church, Debbie "could see the need for more." A pastor in her church, Harold Ware, invited Stand in the Gap for Widows Program Manager, Buddy Stone, to introduce the ministry to First Baptist in Ada. Debbie was inspired.

Based on Stand in the Gap for Widows research and experiences working with other churches, Buddy suggested that widows need social interaction with other widows. Debbie was also inspired by another Stand in the Gap ministry partner in Duncan, Oklahoma, called Beautiful Day. Beautiful Day volunteers began hosting monthly dinners for widows in 2015.

Debbie wanted to host similar dinners in Ada. Her vision was to partner with other churches to make these social events as large, as regular, and as welcoming as possible. She formed a team of volunteers and began presenting the idea to local churches of all denominations based on her own experiences as a widow in the community.

In January 2016, the inter-denominational group hosted their first monthly dinner for widows. Eighty-two widows attended. At the time of this writing, more than 200 widows in Pontotoc County have attended at least one dinner.

Each month, a different church hosts the event by providing the food, the facility, and door prizes. Twelve churches, representing seven denominations, have agreed to participate each year. Participating churches include: Cross Cut Cowboy Church, First United Methodist, Asbury United Methodist, First Baptist, Union Valley Baptist, The Refuge Four Square Church, Crosspointe Church, Morris Memorial Baptist, St. Joseph Catholic, and more. Debbie has seen her community "come together with Stand in the Gap to provide a structure to help the widows."

The dinners are primarily social events. The goal is "to create an atmosphere where [widows] can talk to each other and feel special." As a result, Debbie has seen guests move from isolated grief to being ready to "reach out to their community" by initiating service projects or canned food drives.



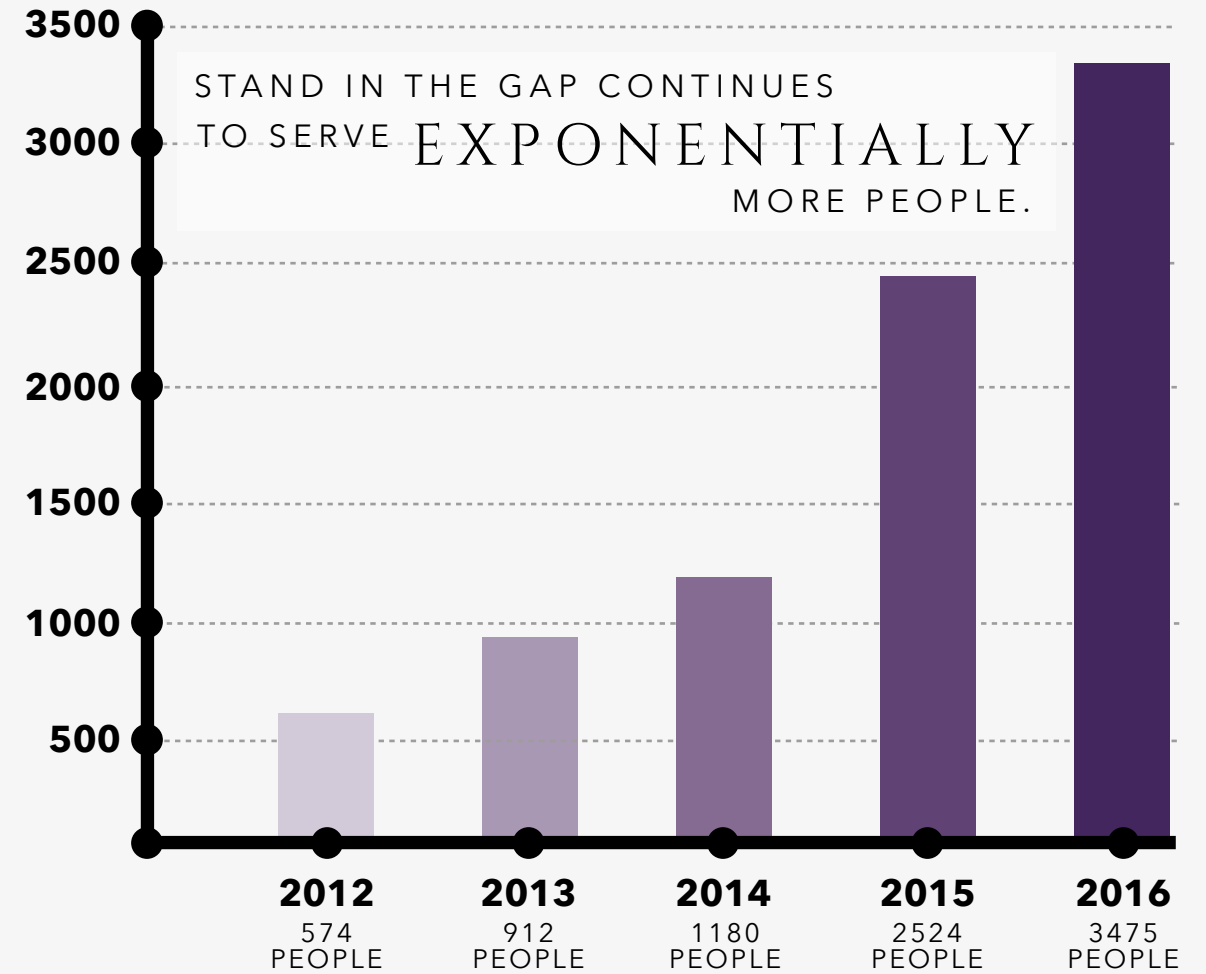
Over 200 widows have attended monthly dinners in Pontotoc County.

Outside of her kitchen window, a tree died in Debbie's yard. She had it trimmed down to about ten feet and hired a wood carver to sculpt the word "purpose" vertically out of the trunk. Now, looking out of her window, she is reminded of one word, her night on the hillside, and the assurance God gave her.

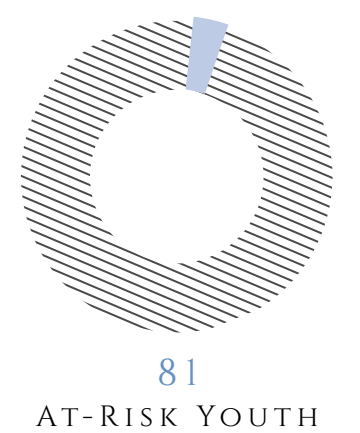
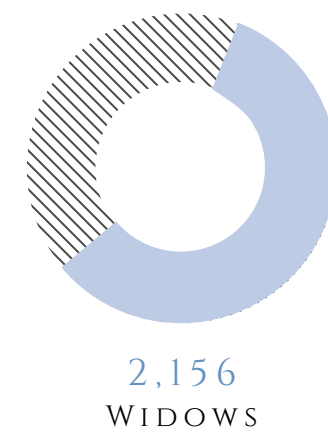
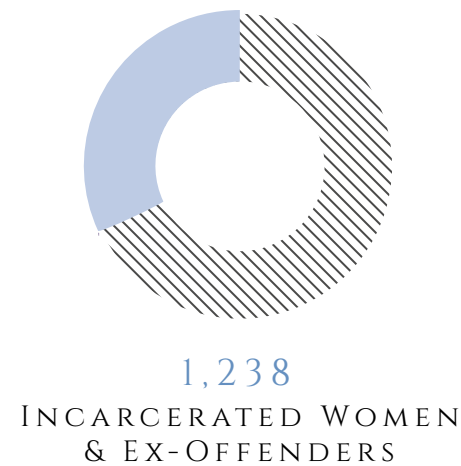
In the six years since Bobby's passing, Debbie married Dean Ross. She says that Dean "understands that this is my passion, this is my purpose in life." The couple is building a home closer to Ada. She calls herself "extremely blessed and extremely happy." Her cell phone "is lit up all the time" with widows expressing their appreciation for the monthly dinners and camaraderie they've found there.

Debbie is relishing the purpose that God placed in front of her and the relationships that her purpose brought to her life. "Out of this horrible circumstance of grief," she says, "God has brought so much good."

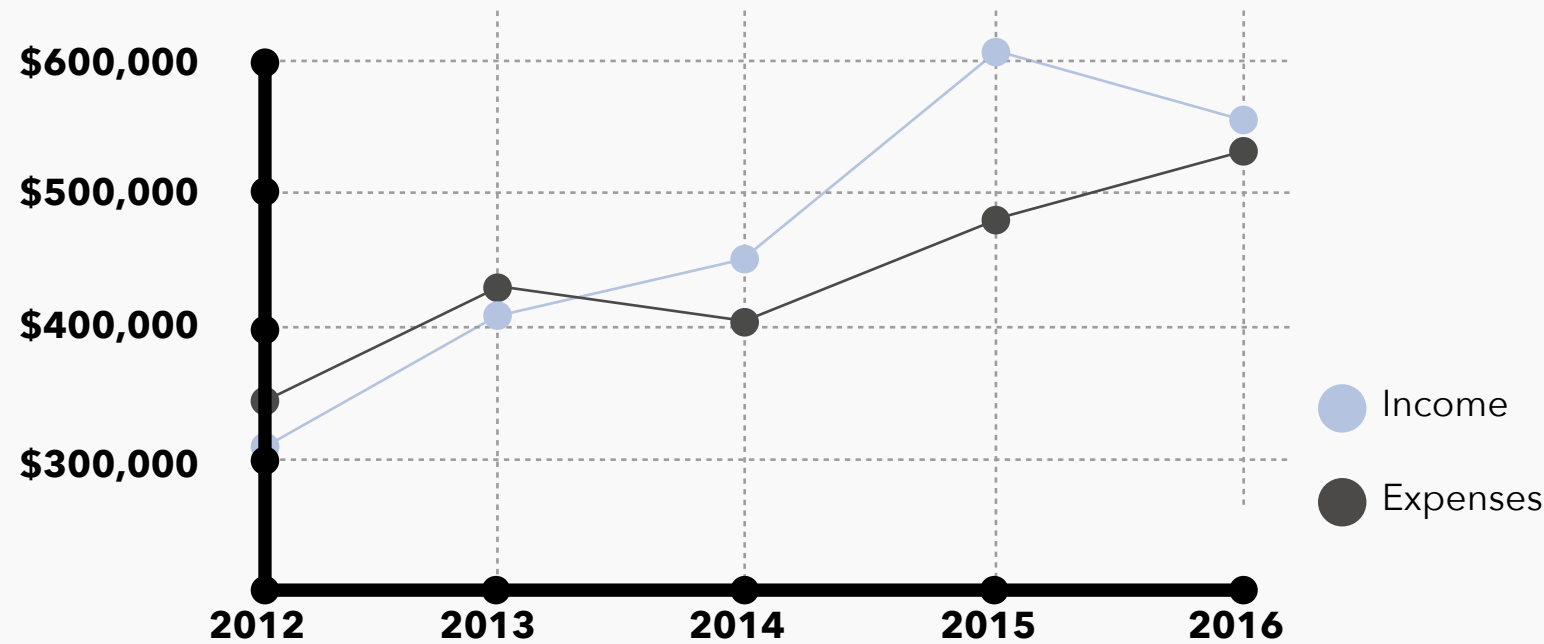
2016  
by the  
members  
numbers



\$213 COST TO SERVE ONE CLIENT FOR ONE YEAR



INCOME VS. EXPENSES



DONOR DIVERSITY

35% of Stand in the Gap income comes from foundations. The remaining 65% is raised through other sources, primarily individuals.



VOLUNTEER IMPACT

IN 2016, **1,024** VOLUNTEERS SERVED  
**22,428** HOURS THROUGH STAND IN THE GAP.  
 THAT TIME IS VALUED AT **\$505,740.**

These donors contributed \$500 or more in 2016.

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