



STAND IN THE GAP'S

Women in Transition





The Women in Transition Team

The women in Transition Team is made up of Rhonda Bear, Kathy Peacock, and Shaunte Gordon (see her story on page 16).

All of these women have been incarcerated and experienced the Women in Transition course, a post-release Stand in the Gap small group, or both. Their life experiences give them a unique voice when they go back into prison walls to facilitate the Women in Transition course, emphasize the significance of a post-release transitional living home, or promote the Stand in the Gap small group experience. According to Chaplain McCollum of Eddie Warrior Correctional Center, "In Stand in the Gap's Women in Transition class, [the facilitators] add the dimension of 'You can make it. I did.'"

Pictured: Stand in the Gap volunteer coordinator (and Women in Transition graduate), Terri Gordineer, Kathy Peacock, Rhonda Bear, and Shaunte Gordon

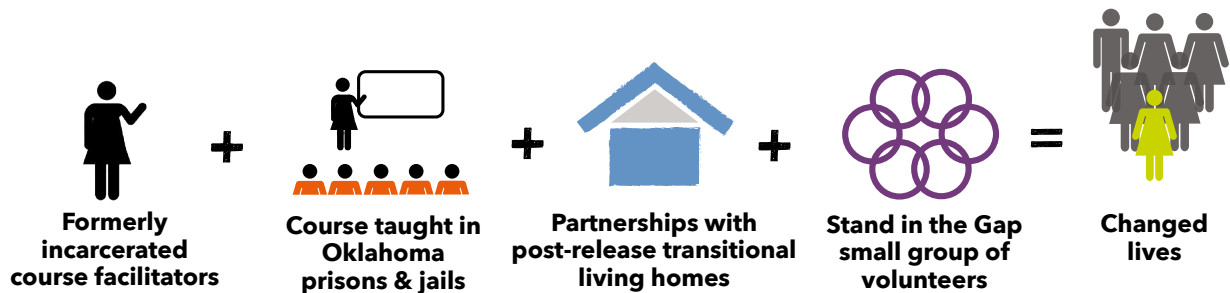
Women in Transition is a three-stage program.

First, SITGM Women in Transition staff (all formerly incarcerated women) teach our Women in Transition curriculum inside ten Oklahoma prisons, jails, and recovery programs. Our course facilitators share their personal stories as well as practical education.

Second, after a woman is released, our course facilitators provide one-on-one mentorship support to ensure that course graduates are willing to follow through on their commitment to life change.

Lastly, SITGM recruits and trains a small group of volunteers to come around a woman who is actively pursuing a healthy life after incarceration. Women in Transition volunteers commit to meet in their small group at least twice a month, for a minimum of one year. A Stand in the Gap small group walks with a woman through her transition process, offering encouragement, mentoring, and most importantly, providing prayer support.

A Stand in the Gap small group provides mentoring, as well as relational, emotional, and spiritual support over the course of at least one year. They model healthy and respectful relationships. Through these caring interactions, small groups empower women to make wise, healthy life decisions and transition to life after crisis. Key objectives include breaking the cycle of poverty, reunifying families, and remaining out of prison.



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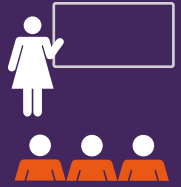
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WOMEN IN TRANSITION COURSE CURRICULUM TOPICS INCLUDE

- » LEARNING TO SET HEALTHY BOUNDARIES
- » CHARACTERISTICS OF CO-DEPENDENCY
- » DEALING WITH STRESS AND ADDICTIONS
- » COPING STRATEGIES FOR ANXIETY AND GRIEF
- » COMMUNICATION SKILLS
- » UNDERSTANDING AND EXPRESSING ANGER
- » USING GOALS TO GAIN SUCCESS
- » RE-ENTRY AND CHILDREN
- » PRACTICAL STEPS AND RESOURCES FOR RE-ENTRY

151

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.

SOURCE: THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

>60%

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

SOURCE: THE SENTENCING PROJECT

WHERE IS WIT?

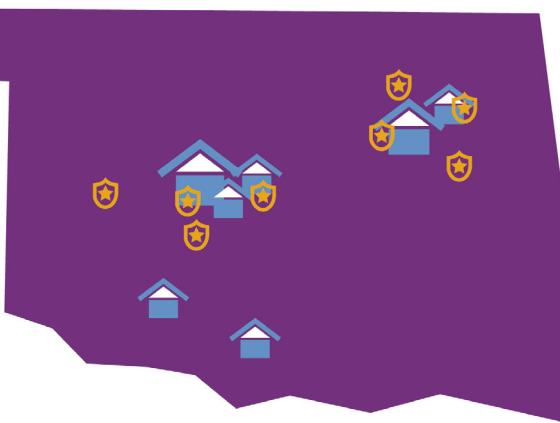
The Women in Transition course is offered in 8 Oklahoma prisons and jails.



WIT Course Partners

- Custer County Jail (Arapaho)
- David L. Moss County Jail (Tulsa)
- Eddie Warrior Correctional Center (Taft)
- Jordan's Crossing, drug rehabilitation program (Oklahoma City)
- Kate Barnard Community Corrections Center (Oklahoma City)
- Mabel Bassett Correctional Center (McCloud)
- Oklahoma Community Correctional Center (Oklahoma City)
- Oklahoma County Jail (Oklahoma City)
- Rogers County Jail (Claremore)
- Women's FirstStep Recovery Program (Norman)

* Denotes Oklahoma Department of Corrections Facility



Transitional Living Home Partners

- Branch 15 Transition Home for Women (Oklahoma City)
- Children's Hope (Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children) (both locations)
- Christian Helping Hands (Duncan / Comanche)
- Eagle Christian Ministry (Oklahoma City)
- His House Transition Homes for Women (Broken Arrow, Claremore and Edmond)
- Hope House (Oklahoma City)
- Jehovah Jireh Christian Recovery Program for Women (Oklahoma City)
- Jordan's Crossing (Oklahoma City)
- Naomi House Transition Home for Women (Ardmore)
- New Life Homes (Tulsa)
- Pearl's Hope (Tulsa)
- Women's FirStep Recovery Program (Norman)

Women in Transition partners with 15 transitional living homes to provide post-release support to course graduates.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3, 2018

Why Oklahoma Has the Most Women Per Capita in Prison

System admits more nonviolent offenders than others and imposes harsher sentences

By Elizabeth Winkler



Great Plains Correctional Facility in Hinton, Okla.; The Oklahoma Department of Corrections has requested more than \$1.5 billion for next year, tripling its current budget of \$485 million. PHOTO: SUE OGRONKI/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Oklahoma incarcerates more women per capita than any other state—about 151 out of every 100,000 women, double the national average.

The total prison population, including men, reached 28,850 in June 2016, according to an official report.

Voters passed two measures aimed at effecting change, and both went into effect in July despite lawmakers' efforts to repeal them. One reduced certain low-level crimes, including drug possession, from felonies to misdemeanors punishable by treatment instead of jail time. The second created a fund intended to allocate savings from the reduction to rehabilitation programs, including drug and mental-health treatment.

The Department of Corrections has requested more than \$1.5 billion for next year, tripling its current budget of \$485 million. More than half of the funds are needed to build two new prisons, said Joe Allbaugh, the department's director. The rest would go to operating expenses such as repairing old prisons, funding substance-abuse treatment, and giving pay raises to staff. A \$215 million budget shortfall makes it unlikely that the request will be approved. Lawmakers will make a decision during the upcoming legislative session.

The state's high incarceration rate isn't due to an unusually high crime rate. It is the result of extremely punitive laws, says Susan Sharp, a professor of sociology at the University of Oklahoma and

author of "Mean Lives, Mean Laws," a book about the state's female prisoners. Many states have cut their prison populations by reducing sentences for nonviolent crimes and investing in drug and mental-health treatment. In Georgia, which was facing a projected 8% prison growth in 2011, policy makers introduced reforms that led to a 6% decline by 2015, lowering costs for taxpayers.

But Oklahoma continues to admit more nonviolent offenders than other states—48% more than its neighbor, Missouri, which has a similar crime rate. It also imposes harsher sentences. In recent years, some counties have increased sentences.

Since 2011 the state's female prison population has grown 30%. Most are serving time for drug crimes. With prisons operating at 110% capacity, some inmates are now housed in county jails, waiting for a spot to open up. The state's female prison population is projected to grow 60% in the next 10 years. The total prison population is projected to grow 25% over the same period, according to a study by the state's Justice Reform Task Force.

Phyllis VanScoy, an inmate at the Oklahoma City Community Corrections Center, has been addicted to drugs most of her adult life. It started at 16, when she went looking for her mother. Raised by relatives, she had patchy memories of her mother, a methamphetamine addict who would visit her children in the interludes between prison sentences. She found her in Oklahoma City. "I wanted to make her pay for what happened to my brother," who committed suicide when he was 13, she says.

Ms. VanScoy, now 44, became addicted, too. She is serving time for larceny and possession of methamphetamine. She worries about her 21-year-old daughter, Shaylin, a heroin addict whose three children have been taken into state custody.

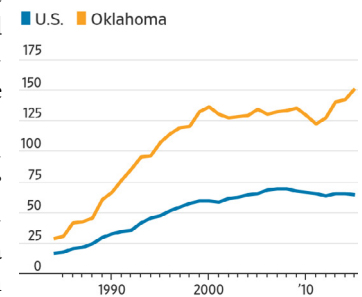
"We see this generational cycle repeat itself time and again," says Kris Steele, a former speaker of the House in Oklahoma who now runs the Education and Employment Ministry, a nonprofit that prepares inmates to re-enter society.

"For the types of crimes women are more likely to commit—nonviolent, low-level crimes—we give longer sentences than most places," says Ms. Sharp. In Oklahoma, having small amounts of illegal drugs is often classified as trafficking instead of possession, which means a harsher penalty.

Appeared in the January 3, 2018, print edition as 'Number of Female Prisoners Continues to Rise in Oklahoma.'

Behind Bars

Oklahoma has had the highest female imprisonment rate in the nation for the past few decades.



Note: Rate for every 100,000 female residents
Source: National Prisoner Statistics Program

Now Phyllis is out of prison and meeting with a Stand in the Gap small group!

IN THE UNITED STATES,

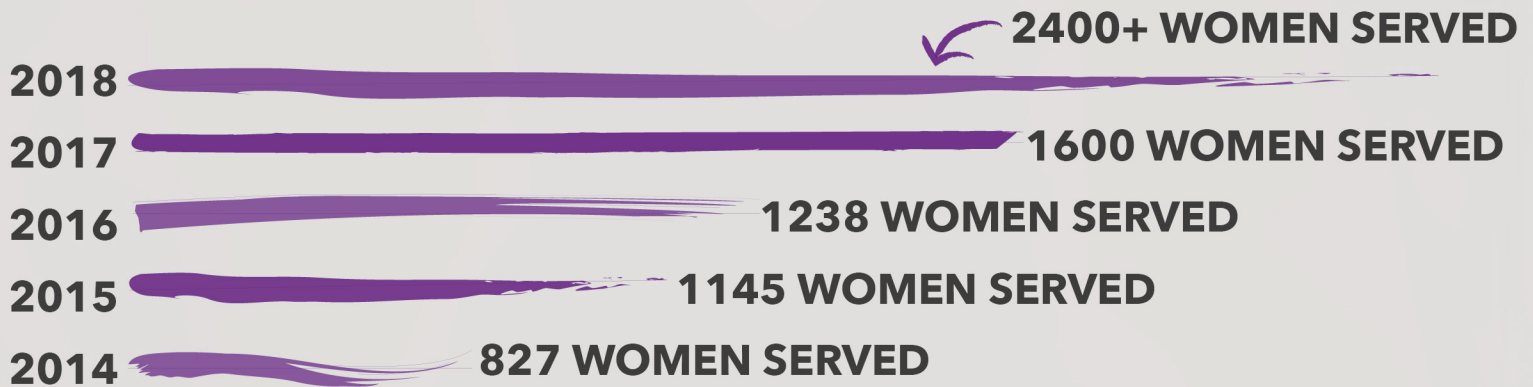
2 out of 3

**RELEASED PRISONERS
WERE REARRESTED
WITHIN 3 YEARS.**

**IN THE LAST 3 YEARS,
MORE THAN**

90 percent

**OF WOMEN WHO COMPLETED
THE ENTIRE WIT PROGRAM
HAVE NOT BEEN REARRESTED.**



90%

**OF SMALL GROUP GRADUATES ARE
REUNITED WITH THEIR CHILDREN.**

IN THE LAST 3 YEARS,



180

**KIDS WERE REUNITED
WITH THEIR MOTHERS
AFTER MOM COMPLETED
THE WOMEN IN
TRANSITION PROGRAM.**

**IF THOSE CHILDREN WERE IN
FOSTER CARE INSTEAD, THEY
WOULD COST THE STATE MORE THAN**

\$1,000,000

EACH YEAR.



Small Group Stories



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.



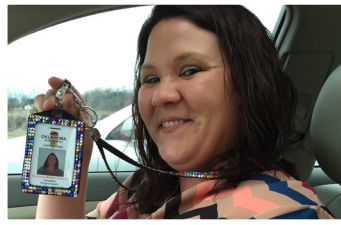
“The first time I smoked marijuana, I was ten-years-old”

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 with her DOC volunteer badge // Vanessa with her husband and Stand in the Gap "moms", Lisa Martin and Marsha Barnes // Vanessa (right) 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 lockdown, 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 enrolled at Roger's State University. 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. For about a year, with Rhonda at her side, Vanessa returned to Eddie Warrior for Stand in the Gap's Women in Transition course. She helped Rhonda facilitate the course and brought hope to women sitting where she had once been.

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."



VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Susan Esco

The five volunteers who make up Jena's Stand in the Gap small group represent three different churches. The small group gets together twice a month to talk about their needs, wounds, desires and hopes. Everyone in the group prays for each other, encourages each other and celebrates what God is doing in and through the lives of everyone in the group (not just Jena).

Here is Susan Esco's take on her volunteer experience:

Last spring, Jena humbly listened to the Lord and chose to be baptized at our church. Some of her "gappers" were able to witness this. I have to say it was one of my favorite experiences with our team. Jena had expressed how hard this decision had been for her but she knew the Lord was guiding her. We wanted to be there to support her. It was so sweet to see her step out in faith and obedience. When we saw Jena's tears, the rest of us cried too.

We also attended her graduation when she finished her step study with Celebrate Recovery. We celebrated her birthday with dinner and laughter. We have worshiped and enjoyed events together. Our whole group attended the wedding of one of our "gappers". We have become a family!

It is so simple to be a "gapper". We show up for Jena and for each other as a team. We seek God's plan, not our own. We love through prayer and a few hours of our time each month. We are investing in the most important commodity there is, people. The results are God's so the pressure is off. He transforms lives through the love He provides through others.

It is one of my greatest privileges to be on Jena's team. She is one of my heroes. This experience has changed me and strengthened my faith.

In our group we often remind each other..."He is a good good Father...That's who He is. And, We are loved by Him... That's who we are." It is pretty simple.



Susan Esco (right) with Jena (center) and another volunteer after Jena's baptism.

COLLABORATION

The University of Oklahoma

In 2014, Dr. Evie Muilenburg-Trevino, Research Specialist with the University of Oklahoma, designed a survey to assess the impact of our Women in Transition course on participants. The resulting survey is called "The Hope Survey." According to Dr. Muilenburg-Trevino's report, "there was a statistically significant difference in ALL pre and posttests indicating improvement" at the end of the course.

Results showed that "levels of positive coping skills increased, levels of negative coping skills decreased, and co-dependency scores significantly decreased" (Muilenburg-Trevino, 2015).



positive coping skills

//



negative coping skills

//



co-dependency

"The Women in Transition program has been one of the most compelling projects that I have evaluated in my 12 years working with nonprofits," says Muilenburg-Trevino. "The success of the program is remarkable. When women begin to hope, real change can occur." In summary, completing the Women in Transition course resulted in a quantifiable improvement in each woman's capacity to successfully re-enter society.

Transitional Living Homes



WHY TRANSITIONAL LIVING HOMES MATTER

When a woman is released from prison and returns to the same neighborhood, same relationships, and same lifestyle that she lived before her arrest, is it any surprise that she encounters the same obstacles that led to her incarceration? Post-release transitional housing is designed to provide a safe place to live and ensure that ex-offenders have a healthy support system to aid in their return to society. Choosing a transitional living home (instead of going home) gives women a fighting chance at breaking the cycle.

OUR PARTNERSHIPS

Stand in the Gap partners with fifteen transitional living homes throughout Oklahoma. Two of these most fruitful partnerships are with His House Ministries in Claremore and Branch 15 in Oklahoma City.

His House is managed and owned by Stand in the Gap Program Manager, Rhonda Bear. Actually a collection of thirteen houses, His House provides space for 30+ women to live after they are released from prison. Residents must participate in Celebrate Recovery, commit to refrain from romantic relationships for one year, and remain sober. When a woman demonstrates her readiness, she is matched with a Stand in the Gap small group of volunteers who provide mentorship and support as she transitions to a life of real freedom.

Branch 15 offers similar support for 36 marginalized women. Residents have the opportunity to apply the skills they learned in the Women in Transition class. When class graduates live in a community setting where positive life skills are being modeled and communicated on a daily basis, they form a solid foundation for healthy independent living and reunification with their children. Residents are matched with Stand in the Gap small groups.

Our partnerships with transitional living homes like His House and Branch 15 are integral to the development of healthy Stand in the Gap small groups with a strong chance of success.



Women pose with WIT Program Manager, Kathy Peacock (second from left), at Branch 15. Kathy also owns and manages a SITGM partner transitional living home. // Residents chat in the backyard at Branch 15.

PORTRAITS OF HOPE

"THEY WILL BE CALLED OAKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, A PLANTING OF THE LORD FOR THE DISPLAY OF HIS SPLENDOR." ISAIAH 61:3

WOMEN IN TRANSITION CLIENTS, PICTURED WITH THEIR CHILDREN.



Rhonda

Employed as Program Manager for Stand in the Gap's Women in Transition program // Devoted wife, mother, and grandmother // Owner and Manager of His House transitional living homes for women // Owner of She Brews Coffee House // Received many community honors including YWCA "Woman of the Year" // Active advocate and volunteer for incarcerated women in Oklahoma

Kelsey

Recently married // started career as a Peer Recovery Support Specialist at Grand Lake Mental Health // Getting ready to purchase her first house



Tammy

Employed by Prison Fellowship to lead a new women's program called "The Academy" at Kate Barnard Corrections Facility // Featured speaker at Celebrate Recovery and SITGM // DOC approved volunteer // Grandmother, mother and wife in the center of many family photos

Chantel

Graduating from her SITGM small group and plans to volunteer for SITGM // Received full custody of her 5-year-old son // Works as a custodian at First Baptist Church // Making A's & B's at Rogers State University // 26-years-old and an amazing example for those around her



Jodey

Women in Transition graduate // Restored as full-time parent to her daughter // Overcame major obstacles to maintain employment and housing

Kristal

Volunteers in a SITGM spiritual family // Works at Pelco Structural, LLC and is an Assistant Manager at local hotel chain // House Manager of His House Outreach Ministries // Leading a women's 12 step group through Celebrate Recovery, sponsors multiple women in CR // Restored to her son and family



PORTRAITS OF HOPE

"THEY WILL BE CALLED OAKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, A PLANTING OF THE LORD FOR THE DISPLAY OF HIS SPLENDOR." ISAIAH 61:3

WOMEN IN TRANSITION CLIENTS, PICTURED WITH THEIR CHILDREN.

Kathy

Employed as Program Manager Oklahoma City, teaching Women in Transition course at Mabel Bassett, Kate Barnard, and Oklahoma County Jail // Ordained Minister preaching in prisons since 2011 // Restored relationships with children and grandchildren // Owner and Manager of Jehovah Jireh transitional living home



Danielle

Reunited with her children and has healthy family relationships // Owns her own home // Earned various promotions at her job // Graduated with Associates Degree from Tulsa Community College // Happily married

Melissa

Delivered from heroin addiction // Restored relationships with all of her children // Home schools her children // She and her husband are active in the Emmaus ministry and local church // The family is purchasing their first home



Jeryka

Married with an infant son // Employed at Leisure Time RV // Active in ministry // Purchased a home in 2016 // Sober since 2014

Sheila H.

Restored to her children and her mom // Started her own business called Providence Power Washing and has a couple of employees



Amber

His House Manager // She Brews Coffee House Manager // Hearing Aide Specialist // Restored relationships with her children // Purchased her first car without assistance

PORTRAITS OF HOPE

"THEY WILL BE CALLED OAKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, A PLANTING OF THE LORD FOR THE DISPLAY OF HIS SPLENDOR." ISAIAH 61:3

WOMEN IN TRANSITION CLIENTS, PICTURED WITH THEIR CHILDREN.



14



Willie

Recently "graduated" her Stand in the Gap family after almost three years // Employed for three years // Completed some college classes // Restored to her amazing daughter Lillie

Debbie

Director of Operations & Outreach for Muddy Paws // Served on several Stand in the Gap families // In the process of purchasing her first home // Describes Stand in the Gap as "being my springboard to re-enter back into society"



Brandy

Volunteers in a SITGM spiritual family // Celebrate Recovery leader // Happily married // Supervisor in an assisted living program for three years // Has been promoted at work // Work responsibilities include training and assisting in the hiring process // Restored to her two children and never misses their activities anymore // Homeowner

Cerissa

Volunteers in a SITGM spiritual family // Restored to her two daughters // Held two jobs for over two years // House Manager for His House Ministries and sponsors multiple women // Has "amazed" the court system in Rogers County with the changes in her life



Sara

After losing custody of her son, her job, car, home and self-respect, Sara moved in to Branch 15 transitional living home // Created a plan to regain custody of her son and worked towards it diligently // Today, she is restored to her son and working at a major home mortgage company // Remains in relationship with her Stand in the Gap support system

PORTRAITS OF HOPE

"THEY WILL BE CALLED OAKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, A PLANTING OF THE LORD FOR THE DISPLAY OF HIS SPLENDOR." ISAIAH 61:3

15

WOMEN IN TRANSITION CLIENTS, PICTURED WITH THEIR CHILDREN.

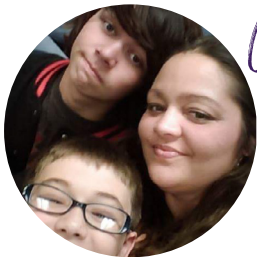


Laura

Attributes her spiritual growth to her Stand in the Gap small group of two years // Employed at the Oklahoma Blood Institute for four years // Drug free

Vanessa

Peer Recovery Specialist in the mental health field // DOC approved volunteer // Married and raising two children // Serving in her local church // Earned her associate degree at Roger's State University // Purchased her first home



Crystal

Preparing to lead a Stand in the Gap small group // Manager of a local hotel chain // Employs many Women in Transition participants // Restored to both of her sons // Recently bought her first new car

Connie

Living in recovery after multiple incarcerations // Restored marriage // Restored to children and grandchildren // Children living in recovery // Moved into management position at a reputable hotel chain

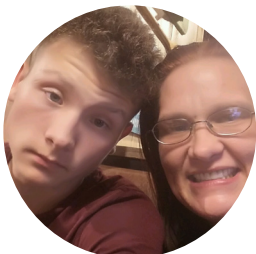


Cristin

Sober // Reunited with her two daughters and living as a family // Homeowner // Promoted to Assistant Branch Manager at a bank // "Outstanding Employee" Recipient // Still in relationship with her Stand in the Gap small group

Sophia

Former drug trafficker has been restored to her daughter // Marketing Manager for She Brews Coffee House // Widely respected in her community



Veronica

Assistant Director for a faith-based treatment center in charge of court reports and filings // Stand in the Gap small group graduate // Restored relationship with her son // In recovery from addiction // Follower of Christ

Small Group Stories



Shaunte's Story

The first time Shaunte went to prison, she was fifteen years old. Two years before that, she gave birth to a child after repeated sexual assaults from her stepfather. Shaunte and her daughter lived together in foster care while Shaunte's life revolved around three things; her daughter, her anger, and cocaine. Always in search of her next high, she earned money in the only way she knew how. The charges that landed Shaunte in juvenile detention and eventually prison were tragic, violent, and true.

Throughout her first twelve years in prison, Shaunte was widely regarded as one of the most difficult, angry, and aggressive prisoners in the Oklahoma women's system. Consistently, she chose to fight. She received countless misconduct reports and was placed in segregated housing multiple times, her longest stint lasting two years and fourteen months. Her anger was the driving force behind every action.

Then, in July of 2006, at 27-years-old, Shaunte was released from prison.

A first taste of freedom was not wasted on Shaunte. But anger about her lost childhood compelled her to self-medicate in almost every destructive way imaginable. She had another child. This daughter was born addicted to four different drugs and was immediately removed from Shaunte's custody. One and a half years after her release, Shaunte was in handcuffs, in the back of a police car, riding back to prison.

That was the moment that Shaunte relinquished control of her life. "That was the end," she says. "I said, 'Jesus, save me.'"

Seven years later, Shaunte cries while she remembers, "Right away, I experienced peace that passes all understanding. That was the point where this God that I had heard about all my life, the God who parted the Red Sea and sent his son, revealed himself real to me."

By the time she arrived back at Mabel Bassett Correctional Center, news had spread of the radical change in Shaunte. Guards and prisoners clamored over each other to see her. While she served another six years, she never got in trouble. Instead, she took courses and her college entrance exam. She attended church services and distributed scriptures. And she says, "Every day that God walked with me through that sentence, I was able to say, 'This is what happened to me. It's Jesus.'" According to Shaunte, "God didn't waste all those misconducts from before, all those days in segregation, all those times of being strapped down, he never wasted it" because her "before" story gave her "after" testimony an undeniable weight.

“It makes me feel like the daughter that God came for me to be.”

In 2014, Stand in the Gap’s Women in Transition course was not yet offered at Mabel Bassett. But the Women in Transition Program Manager, Rhonda Bear, had another way into the facility. The two women had first met while they were incarcerated together during Shaunte’s first sentence. At that point, Shaunte says, “Rhonda was a church girl. We had nothing in common.” When Rhonda volunteered at the prison’s Kairos weekend, she saw Shaunte again.

Shaunte said, “I told Rhonda that I gave my life to the Lord and she said, ‘It’s about time. I’ve been praying for you for a long time.’ God used her in my life in a way that was huge. She had been in my shoes and she kept telling me, ‘You are going to make it. You are going to come to my transitional home in Claremore when you get out. I’m going to surround you with a team of mentors’ and I was like, what is she talking about?”

Ten months after her second release from prison, Shaunte is sitting in a room with her Stand in the Gap small group. She is living in Rhonda’s transitional home. She works three jobs and is attending Tulsa Community College, studying advanced manufacturing. She regularly attends Celebrate Recovery and First Baptist Church of Claremore. Shaunte talks openly about her life before Christ. And as she remembers the charges that first landed her in prison and the way she behaved there, it is nearly impossible to reconcile those stories with the respectful, smiling, empathetic, teachable, joyful young woman who is talking. Over the course of their time together, Shaunte’s Stand in the Gap small group has given her practical advice and assistance. They helped her prepare for her driver’s test, develop plans to open her business (an odd-jobs service), understand and create a personal budget, and care for her mother as she moved into a nursing home.

When they sit at the table, talking about their times together and Shaunte’s life before they knew her, they laugh and cry with equal ease. Each of the volunteers can say, “We look at her like a daughter.”

After many hours of practicing with her Stand in the Gap small group, Shaunte passed the test to receive her driver’s license. While she was waiting to have her photo taken at the tag agency, Shaunte’s phone buzzed with a Facebook notification. It was a message from her oldest daughter.



Shaunte (right) with her mother, daughter, and granddaughter.

Shaunte drove herself and her mother to see her daughter for the first time in 21 years. In the car ahead of her, two of her Stand in the Gap volunteers, Bill and Emma Lou Ray, pulled a couch, a gift from Shaunte to her daughter. In the car behind, the rest of her Stand in the Gap team, Larry and Georgiann O’Mealey, prayed for the new relationship of this family that had been separated so long.

Emma Lou remembers that afterwards, as they drove away, “I think we all felt that God was washing away the empty years and filling in the spaces.”

Within this budding family relationship, there have been difficult conversations, but there have also been Christmas gifts, the joy of a three-year-old grandchild being loved by her grandmother, and a whole lot of prayer. “There’s a generational curse that has been broken,” says Shaunte, “we just have to walk it out.”

For Shaunte, it’s difficult to describe her relationship with her Stand in the Gap small group and even harder to put into words the impact they have had on her life. When she tries, she says, “When we meet together and I feel that love that is unconditional, and we are working out these problems with the practical knowledge they have of living life, and my life that has never really been lived, it’s like it makes me whole. It makes my heart whole. It makes me feel like the daughter that God came for me to be.”

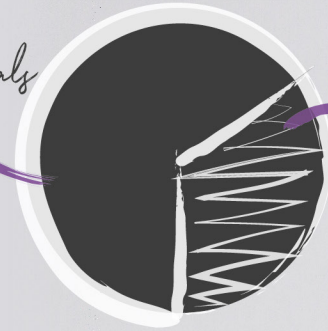
By the Numbers...

\$250,000

Approximate
YEARLY BUDGET

FUNDRAISING BREAKDOWN

65%
individuals



35%
foundations

IF TIME IS MONEY

**164 VOLUNTEERS
REPRESENTING 47
CHURCHES CONTRIBUTE
\$116,000 WORTH OF
THEIR TIME EACH YEAR.**

DIVISION OF LABOR

In 2015, 2016 and 2017, **QUIKTRIP**
printed a one-year supply of
WOMEN IN TRANSITION
course manuals, saving Stand in the Gap
\$2,500 *each year.*

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printing of **\$4,000** *worth of*
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WHO IS INCARCERATED.**

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**OF THOSE CHILDREN
WILL SOMEDAY
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