



rockford rescue mission
rescue + recover + restore

8 People You Should Know

Rockford Rescue Mission



Rockford Rescue Mission shares hope and help in Jesus' name to move people from homelessness and despair toward personal and spiritual wholeness.



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A Message From Mission CEO Sherry Pitney

8 People You Should Know - 2022

I am overjoyed to introduce you to eight special people. Here at Rockford Rescue Mission, every person's story is unique. Yet, in these experiences of rescue, recovery and restoration, we do see a few common themes.

This booklet represents another set of stories we've gathered, originally for a weekly series of ads in the Rockford Register Star. You will meet John, Charles, Gené, Mike, Naomi, Dave, Andre and Carol. At some point in their lives, each of these dear friends felt utterly hopeless.

But then they humbled themselves and did the hard work of recovery. Most importantly, they let God transform them, heal them and give them hope beyond what they could ever have asked or imagined.

May these stories remind us, or tell us anew, about the great hope we all can share.

Partners in Hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sherry Pitney". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sherry Pitney
CEO



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John

As lead coordinator for the Men's Crisis Center, my job at Rockford Rescue Mission is to give assurance to men who are scared, and don't know where to turn... to tell them they are not alone. This comes naturally for me — because I was once in exactly the same place.

I'll never forget the day I came to the Mission in 2005. I was 37. My addictions were out of control and my life was a mess. I needed to know I was in the right place, doing the right thing. I needed hope, and the staff here pointed me to God.

With a lot of hard work, I graduated from the Life Recovery Program and my life has never been the same. Today, when I talk to guys in our Crisis Center, I understand their apprehension and anxiety. I tell them, "You have a chance to succeed. I know because I feel I succeeded. I can't tell you exactly how recovery will look for you, but I can tell you how I did it."

So many people come and go here — people whose lives we touch in some way. We don't always know when we plant a seed, how it grows and matures. We have to have faith that once we plant that seed, it's going to grow somewhere. So we pray for those whose lives we have touched — just as people continued to pray for me.

Part of the joy of serving God is, we never know where He's going to lead us. I never dreamed in 2005 that I would be doing what I'm doing now. There's an excitement and a challenge, and the reward that someday Jesus will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." No matter what we did yesterday, we have an opportunity to make a different choice today.



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Charles

Several years ago, I looked around the cheap hotel room where I was living and thought: This is my life? Really? I thought my full story was already written — a rough childhood, a prison term, broken relationships and decades of heavy drinking.

I wanted help, but only on my terms. Out of desperation and on the advice of a friend, I came to Rockford Rescue Mission. I knew it was a faith-based program, but I didn't realize how faith-based it was. That made me angry. I had walked away from God after something terrible happened to me in prison. I didn't want to hear about Him again now. One day, a staff member, Mike, said to me, "I don't think you believe in yourself enough that you can do this."

Believe in myself? Didn't he know that God was the one I had trouble believing in? But about that same time, a Christian song came into my head — Through It All. It's about how God comforts us through life's trials. I hadn't thought about that song since I was a kid. This was weird. And then every day, I was hearing stories from Mission residents and staff about how God had rescued them and transformed their lives. All of those conversations seemed to blend into one. I couldn't deny that I was here for a reason.

That's when I gave myself back to God—and I took Mike's challenge to finish the Life Recovery Program. I can't thank the Mission enough for having patience with me, especially during my rebellion. They helped me walk back to God.

Today, I have a great job at J.L. Clark in Rockford, and I look for opportunities to help others. I love being able to give people the same blessing and hope that the Mission gave me.



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Gené

I used to be one of those Christian kids who could recite Bible verse after Bible verse. I learned them to earn points in my Christian school... but I didn't really know them as God's truth in my life. When times got scary, I didn't turn to Him.

The Roseland community on Chicago's south side was not the safest place to grow up. My grandmother raised me in a Christian environment, but I kept losing the strong roots that had helped me walk through my faith. My beloved pastor got called to Africa for missionary work. Counselors would get sent back home after they had earned their master's degrees by working in my neighborhood.

I felt alone in the stuff I was dealing with: Cycles of violence and abuse. Terrible family secrets. Worse, I felt like God didn't understand. After my grandmother passed, I fell into alcohol and drug abuse. Years later, I moved to Rockford to escape an abuser, but I didn't escape abuse. During that time, a home invasion threatened my four kids and me. The only way I dealt with it all was by using more drugs and alcohol.

The day the state took custody of my kids, I made them a tearful promise. "Mommy loves you! Mommy will come back for you! Mommy won't give up, but Mommy needs help."

I ended up coming to Rockford Rescue Mission's Women's Crisis Center, and then the Life Recovery Program. It felt like home—back when none of that crazy stuff was happening. I felt safe. My life has turned around here, and I'm on track to get my kids back. I am also learning patience. When I arrived, I wanted to "microwave" things for a quick solution, but what I needed was to open up and get genuine with people. Thank God, the Mission has helped me to do that.



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Mike

“Dad, you’re nothing but a crackhead. I don’t ever want to see you again.”

My son was 15, and he was right. He and my ex-wife had come to my apartment and found me getting high, again.

I’d been a functional addict for more than two decades, serving in the U.S. Navy before working as a machinist. Now, after hearing my son tell me the hard truth, I went off the deep end. I quit going to work. All I wanted to do was get high, to numb the pain.

On the morning of my 38th birthday, I woke up in my drug dealer’s van, where I had been living after getting out of jail. I thought, I can’t live this way anymore. I decided I was going to get clean or die trying. That day, I walked across town to the Salvation Army, which offered a recovery program.

The lady who checked me in, Rosemary, looked at my ID. “Do you realize today is your birthday? What a wonderful present you’re giving yourself.”

Then she asked me what I thought about God. I told her if there was a God, He never did anything for me. I went off on a 20-minute tirade. Finally she said, “Are you done?” And I’ll never forget what she asked me next.

“Mike, how can you be so mad at someone you don’t think is real?”

That night, I went into the chapel, looked up at the lighted cross and prayed: “God, if you’re real, do something.”

Here I am, 13 years later, and I haven’t had a drink or drug since. I work at Rockford Rescue Mission as Homeless Services Director — serving people who look just like I did, and telling them about a better way. Telling them about Christ. I know recovery takes hard work, because I’ve lived it and I’m still living it. I’m so grateful to God. I’m happily married, reconciled with my family and living a life I never thought I could have.



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Naomi

Everything good happened for me when I walked into Rockford Rescue Mission and made the decision to change my life. I had been in drug addiction for five years, bouncing back and forth between Rockford and Beloit. As long as I had a few dollars to give someone, they would let me sleep on their couch.

Finally, because of my addictions I lost my two kids—and it felt like my life was over. Homeless and pregnant with my third child, I came to the Mission, stayed two weeks... and left. I just wasn't ready. But I came back a year later, pregnant again and with my toddler on my hip. This time, I put everything I had into the Life Recovery Program. I stayed 22 months—longer than most—because my sister came into the program the year after I did. I walked her recovery with her.

My sisters and I were brought up in the church. Dad was a youth minister and mom sang in the choir. But when I finally decided in desperation to seek Christ for myself, it was a whole different understanding. You can watch somebody else's life change, but to actually live through it, consciously aware of what He's doing in your life, it's completely different.

Today I live in Tucson, Arizona with my three daughters. My sisters are both here, too. I work at Whole Foods. And my daughters and I do what we call "Be a Blessing." Every day, we come up with 10 random acts of kindness we can do for people around us. Like recently, a neighbor lady passed away. We ended up doing this huge origami mural for her grandkids. We do a lot of artwork that we give away.

And I'm a grandmother! My beautiful grandson was just born to my son, who still lives in Rockford. I continue to attend City First Church online.

Life is an absolute blessing, and I look back on my experience at the Mission as a rebirth. I am so grateful.



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Dave

If you don't have a friend in the world, you can find one here. That sign used to hang outside Rockford Rescue Mission, and it was a big reason I came here for help. I'm a military brat. We bounced around a lot when I was a kid. Whenever I would make connections with people, they were soon gone.

When my dad retired, we settled in Florida and he drove a beer truck. For me as a 16-year-old, that meant incredibly easy access to alcohol. I went from having no friends to being the life of every party with a car trunk full of beer — unbeknownst to my dad. That was how my addictions started.

My dad found out and took my car away. Then, my mother died of cancer. Later I got married and had two kids, and then my wife died of cancer. I continued to drink and use drugs to numb the pain. Then I was arrested for a fourth DUI and got sent to prison for a year. My kids went to live with relatives in northern Illinois... so when I got out, that's how I was introduced to Rockford Rescue Mission.

I'd like to say my story changed overnight, but it didn't. I'm 61, and I've been in the Mission's Life Recovery program several times. God had a reason for that. I didn't know it at the time, but I know now.

Today, as I finish the program, I also serve as a peer group mentor in the Men's Crisis area. I volunteer in that position because I do not want to forget what God has done for me, where I came from and how I can give back. When guys here come and talk to me, I look at them and I see myself.

If I can do my little piece, somebody else can do their little piece and this world will turn around.



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Andre

When I went to prison for armed robbery, certain people caught my attention because I knew them from the streets. They had changed. Now they were talking to me about God and about the Bible. “Whatever,” I told them. But to myself, I wondered: *I have all this time on my hands. Maybe this can change me, too.*

So I opened a Bible for the first time. I thought, *Whatever I turn to, I’m going to read.* And I happened to open to 1 Corinthians 13. All this time, I thought I knew what love was. I think I read that chapter about 50 times. *Love is patient, love is kind, love keeps no records of wrongs.*

Before that, my life was addiction, crime, homelessness — both in Chicago, where I grew up, and in Rockford, where I got into even bigger trouble. When I got out of prison, first I went home to Chicago, then to a halfway house, and then it seemed like God was telling me to come back to Rockford. So I did.

That was 2009. I needed a job, and jobs were hard to find — especially for someone with a record. My sister-in-law worked at Rockford Rescue Mission, and told me I should apply. I interviewed with Sherry Pitney, the CEO, and she said, “You’d be perfect.” That felt so good. I had so many doors slammed in my face. When Sherry believed in me when no one else would, it completely changed my life. Today I work with the men in the Mission’s Crisis Center, and Sherry was right. It’s a perfect fit.

I know what it’s like to be homeless and hungry. I know what it’s like to be in addiction. I know what it’s like when people turn their backs on you. So walking into this role, to be able to assist somebody else, is a privilege. I treasure it. I know exactly what they’re going through, because I lived it.



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Carol

I was the woman people would look at and say, “She has everything.” Nice home, great Christian family. But I had a secret. I was a victim of sexual abuse between the ages of 4 and 8. I carried that secret for 40 years — but eventually, your secrets make you sick. In my 40s, I started to struggle with sleeplessness, anxiety and depression. My doctor prescribed medications, and they were a relief at first... until I got addicted.

Over the next six years, my life unraveled. I lost my marriage... my kids' trust in me... my driver's license... my home. I tried 30-day rehab programs, but not much changed. A relative who had volunteered at the Mission kept telling me, “You should look at the Rockford Rescue Mission.” I thought I was above that. I was full of pride.

In 2012, I woke up in a hospital room after an overdose. It was then I knew God had a better plan for my life. I finally submitted myself to go to the Mission. They didn't have a room for me, so I stayed in their Crisis Center for three weeks. Then I spent eight months in the Life Recovery Program. For the first time, I could work through those childhood hurts, understand forgiveness and develop the tools to find recovery.

One of my roommates at the Mission told me, “Carol, you never cry.” I had suppressed my emotions — but today, I cry tears of gratitude. I tell other women: Don't hide. Reach out your hand and ask for help. When you go into true recovery, it's not just going to change your life. It will change the lives of those around you as they witness the change in your life.

Today, I manage hospitality for Maranatha Bible and Missionary Conference in Michigan. It's a special place for me, and I love my life. I'll always remember what my son told me during my time at the Mission: “Mom, I think you lost everything you had to find that God is all you need.”

An Overview of RRM

Meals For All

At RRM, a nutritious breakfast, lunch, and dinner are offered free of charge every day for any hungry man, woman, or child in the community.



Homeless Services

Our Crisis Centers for men, women and families provide safe shelter, food, clothing, guest advocacy, community resources and medical services. Check in is offered 24 hours a day.



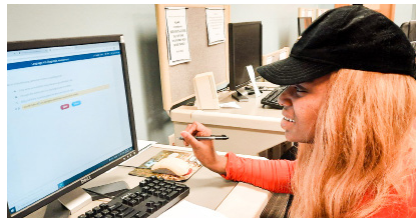
Hope Clinic

Hope Clinic keeps our guests, residents and community members healthy through a well-rounded program of free medical, nursing, chiropractic and dental care.



Works! Center

Works! Center offers education and job training for Mission participants and individuals in our community who are seeking to improve their employment opportunities.



Life Recovery Program

The Life Recovery Program is a free residential program offering comprehensive help and hope for men and women in desperate circumstances such as chemical dependency, domestic violence, or destructive relationships.



Volunteer

We have the best volunteers in the world! Whether serving a meal, tutoring in the Works! Center or sorting donations at our Thrift Store, you can make a difference. Hundreds of people selflessly serve each year, and we couldn't do what we do without them.

We currently need volunteer drivers, office assistants, kitchen helpers, Thrift Store assistants and much more! Please contact our Volunteer Supervisor for more information: volunteer@rockfordrescuemission.org / 815-965-5332, ext. 151, or submit an application at www.rockfordrescuemission.org.



Thrift Store

Thrift Store offers gently used items including clothing, household goods, antiques, furniture and accessories. Thrift Store is an ultra-clean, friendly place to shop. You never know what you'll find!

Thrift Store provides a low-cost shopping option for the community, and also helps meet the needs of our guests and residents at Rockford Rescue Mission. All Thrift Store proceeds directly benefit the Mission. As a result of the nearly 20,000 cars that pass through our donation drive-thru annually, we are able to fully stock our store as well as send excess clothing to those in need around the world.

All Thrift Store proceeds support the life changing work of Rockford Rescue Mission.

