



A Place for Everyone

THE INSPIRATIONAL STORY OF HORIZONS



THE STORY OF HORIZONS

This story is told through the eyes of those that work and volunteer at Horizons and would not have been possible, had they not so graciously shared their stories of impact and transformation. The common theme throughout this book is its people. Through the stories you will read, it is clear to see God at work in their lives to bring them to Horizons on His time., to tell His story.

Thank you to everyone who opens the doors of Horizons to welcome in your community, with open arms and open hearts. This is their story.

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THIS IS A STORY OF HOPE. IF PEOPLE TRULY REACH OUT TO GOD, GOD REACHES BACK.

- ERIC

A FOUNDATION OF PRAYER & UNITY

Mark Geissler, Community Outreach Specialist for Horizons, shared, "To track the growth of Horizons, it has to do with the foundation. The foundation of Horizons started long before Horizons actually existed. There was a group of pastors that got together and prayed that someday there would exist a ministry similar to this. That particular time of prayer and commitment took place in the dining room at St. John's Church, where Horizons would eventually get its start.

"There are two things that are foundational to the origin of Horizons. There was that tremendous prayer ahead of time. That investment spent in prayer, asking God to do a work and have churches working together in assembly. On top of that, when it finally did come, Horizons started not as a singular entity, but as a group of churches.

"I truly believe that when we prayed in unity, and worked together in unity, God poured out his favor upon it. When his people could agree, and did agree, they put aside their differences. They said that it was monumentally important to care for people and proclaim the gospel - together.

"We have seen this time and time again in scripture. When we read about the early church in the Book of Acts, when the first churches were in agreement and did everything together, you saw



St. John's Church, where Horizons began

thousands of people coming to know Jesus by the day. The early church grew at mind boggling, explosive rates.

"Unity in those two areas produced the foundation of Horizons. We built upon God's people being in agreement and putting aside their differences and said, 'Jesus, you matter the most. What matters most to you is taking care of people and seeing people come to you.'

"Horizons has never existed as a single effort. From its very first day, it has existed as a group of churches who have come together. It happened so organically with church after church, and group after group, coming on board. People love seeing God at work in that specific and tangible way and keep coming."

A KNOCK ON THE HEART OF ST. JOHN'S

Sarah Stephens, Executive Director of Horizons, remembers Horizons beginnings, "Years ago, The Salvation Army located the temporary breadline at St. Boniface School, across the street from St. John's Parish, as they made way for the new Kroc Center. People would come to the school for the breadline, and then come across the street to St. John's to ask for help with food and finding work. That knock on the door asking for help, was a knock on the heart of St. John's and they started serving one meal a week.

"It became clear that the need was great. St. John's joined forces with three other churches and started serving a weekly noon meal. In September of 2008, a leadership team analyzed the needs of the Quincy community and the current work of the soup kitchen. With this analysis and accompanying strategic plan, Horizons became incorporated as a 501c3 non-profit organization in November of 2008.

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THE ORIGINAL PURPOSE OF THIS BUILDING WAS TO FEED THIS COMMUNITY.

"There was an incredible response from the community churches - and Horizons grew. Today, we have support from over 30 churches in Adams and surrounding counties.

"Horizons grew, and St. John's was growing under their new leadership. Both St. John's and Horizons needed more space. St. John's had blessed Horizons with the use of their home for five years and it was time for us to find a home of our own. We began the search for just the right property.

"We knew from our own internal data and community data, the location for our new home would be critical if we wanted to reach the people with the greatest need. We found a vacant property for sale at 224 S. 8th Street. It had most recently been a carpet store, but the cool thing is, it was originally built as a Kroger's grocery store.



Krogers, built in 1950, photo provided by the Quincy Public Library

Finding Our Home

"I knew one of the owners of this building. She reached out during our search to say there were other interested buyers, and we needed to make an offer or risk losing the building. We made an offer late in 2014 and it was accepted. The building, in its then current state, was an empty shell. This was very good for our purposes. Five years of not having enough space had given way to big dreams for a space that would meet our every need. Mark spent a year designing the floor plan, carefully considering how to make the most of every square inch."

"We purchased the building in 2014 and with no experience, launched our capital campaign in 2015. The capital campaign started slow, but steady. We initially decided we would only spend the money we had on hand for renovations. But the money stopped coming and we hit a standstill.

"Space limitations at St. John's and the growing need in our food pantry forced our decision to open the food pantry without completing the rest of the project. We had the funds to complete the renovations, but we didn't have enough money to install the bathrooms in the new space. The board took a vote and decided to move ahead with the work, knowing that could mean borrowing money.



Renovations of the new Horizons location

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THE MOMENT WE HAMMERED THE FIRST NAIL - THE MONEY STARTED COMING IN.

"In that moment, God was saying, "Trust me. Step out in faith and I will meet you." And he did, all the way through the rest of the project. We raised over \$750,000 in less than a year and completed the renovations without borrowing a penny. Today we are debt free.

"We had our grand opening in August of 2016. Once in our new home, we began to grow organically."

Sarah's Story



Sarah Stephens, Executive Director of Horizons

In 2009, I was a stay-at-home mom, and loving every minute. A friend reached out to ask if I would be interested in interviewing for a ministry position. I wasn't really ready to go back to work, but because I admired and respected the person asking, I went for the interview. This friend was Debbie Fitzgerald, and interestingly enough, Debbie joined our Horizons team in 2020.

I met with Dr. Bill Barker, the executive director of Horizons Soup Kitchen and Food Pantry in 2009. I didn't even know there was a soup kitchen in Quincy. I had no idea as I lived life in a bubble.

Horizons was interviewing for a unique management position. They were exploring the idea of buying a local business and they needed someone to manage the business. The thought was Horizons would buy the business and use the profits to fund their non-profit - this intrigued me.

At the same time, I was involved in a women's bible study at my church. During this study the teacher said, "you never have to seek your calling, if you are following God, you will walk right into your calling." This opportunity felt like one of those moments. It seemed like everything was lining up. I could see how God was working in every detail of the journey!

Challenges with the purchase of the business arose and the acquisition began to look like it wasn't going to happen. I was at a bible study one night and we were reading a scripture about God testing Abraham. In that instance I heard, "And God tested Sarah, and she believed."

I thought to myself, "This has just been a test to see if I am ready to follow you God." I went home that night and there was a message on my answering machine saying the purchase was not going to happen. I was so disappointed. I just knew God had been orchestrating all the details. I had seen and heard Him so clearly. Then I began to wonder, if I was so wrong about what I thought God was showing me, what else was I wrong about? I started questioning myself and my relationship with God. God in his goodness began to let me wrestle with Him. I had clearly forgotten my thoughts about being tested!

A few months later during my daily devotion I came across a scripture that said, "Forget about the former things, today I am going to do a new thing." I thought, "You are right God, I have been wallowing in this too long, today is a new day, I am going to get over this and move on." That very day Bill Barker

called me and asked me if I would come to work as his assistant at Horizons.

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I HAD FINALLY DECIDED TO LET GO OF MY DOUBT AND TRUST GOD'S PLAN, AND THAT VERY DAY I WAS OFFERED A JOB WITH HORIZONS.

I would have never entertained the idea of accepting a position at a soup kitchen without having experienced the journey of the previous months. Not because I thought negatively about soup kitchens, but more so because I didn't know anything about soup kitchens. My prior work experiences would have led me to believe I didn't have anything to offer in the role. But, because of the way God introduced me to Horizons, I knew I had to say yes!

I have a good friend and prayer partner who said one day, "How creative of God to get you interested in Horizons in the way that he did!"

When I took the job, my husband said, "You will be the executive director in five years."

I thought, "I don't know that I want to be the executive director." Well, within 10 months I was executive director. And the rest is history.

Mark's Story

I got back from Afghanistan in August of 2009. Prior to working at Horizon's, I had a job lined up as a security guard that fell through. I was having lunch with Bill Barker, the executive director of Horizons at that time, and he called a car dealership here in town and asked if they were looking for employees. They said yes. He basically got me the interview.

I was a salesman at a time that was a really bad time to be a salesman, after the recession. But on top of that, it wasn't on my heart to do that. You come from a year of such a huge, monumental thing, of being in combat, and you come back and it's like, "What do I do now?"

Bill offered me a position with Horizons, mostly working as a cook. I was more interested in working on the ministry side than the kitchen side, but it was a job.

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Mark Geissler, Community Outreach Specialist

I STARTED WORK THE EXACT SAME DAY THAT SARAH STARTED WITH HORIZONS - VALENTINE'S DAY, 2010.

Mark's Story

SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND

I learned that I needed to minister to people in different ways at Horizons. I wasn't prepared. When guests were not respectful, I corrected them harshly. I finally stumbled upon that all I was really doing was trying to modify their behavior so that I was more comfortable. I was not seeking understanding.

Things started to turn around for me with a specific gentleman. Any time I would have devotional time, he would go out of his way to be loud and boisterous. I would tell him to stop and tell him to go outside if he wasn't going to respect people and listen. Occasionally, that worked, but most of the time it didn't.

Finally, one day, I realized this wasn't working. I made a point that every time I saw him, I would grab a tray and go out and eat with him. I sat next to him for months and months. It was absolutely awful and awkward to start. He didn't enjoy me being there. There were weeks of this.

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I CAN'T TELL YOU EXACTLY WHEN THE CHANGE TOOK PLACE, BUT IT HAPPENED.

We were building a friendship. It got to the point that I looked forward to eating with him and he looked forward to eating with me.

I started to understand his past and all of the things he had been through. All of the mistakes he made in the past alienated him. He was very angry. He didn't care who he hurt because that is what he was used to doing. That was the turning point for me.

I wanted to see change in people, but I wasn't going about it the right way. For a while, I didn't have any desire to figure out why people were doing what they were doing. That is one of the biggest things that we have here to this day - our intent and desire to build relationships.



Mark eating lunch with guests

BEING THERE FOR THAT MOMENT

I was the program manager before we came to our current location. I drew on previous skills that helped in drawing up the floor plan for this building. I was a part of how this property would work and how all of the systems would work.

As we move forward, and have more “things,” I am looking at how we can leverage this location to its fullest potential. If we can't get more people to help us with something, but it has to be done, are there systems in place that help multiply a person's efforts? I try to leverage technology in our property to assist us to be more productive. I do a lot more now with physical things - property and technology. I enjoy that part quite a bit.

I help lead bible studies on Thursdays. God usually rewards me when I put things aside and invest in relationships with our guests. There have been times when God has rewarded me with really amazing moments of transparency with people. He says, “See, if you would have stuck in your office you would not have been able to hear that.”

It is a blessing to hear someone's walls come crashing down like that. When they come to the end of themselves and discover that they are not going to take one more step further in life, in progressing, unless they hold on to Jesus and have Jesus. These are amazing moments.

Around here, you have moments where you have to strike while the iron is hot. When someone is at that moment, they are ready to listen. Or they are ready to be extremely transparent. They are tired of lying. They are tired of running.

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THEY ARE JUST TIRED OF THEIR OLD WAY OF DOING THINGS AND THEY KNOW THAT SOMETHING NEW HAS TO COME ALONG. THAT'S THE MOMENT.

There are plenty of those times I have missed the moment. But there are plenty of times where I haven't, and I have been there.

Regardless of the staff role - lunchtime is go time. The expectation is that we sit down with guests, find out what is really happening in their lives, and what they are wrestling with.

We have more people on staff here than we ever have before. For the longest time it was just me and Sarah. When we have invested in new positions, the expectation has always been built in that we dig deep and find out what is happening in our guests' lives. That is what Jesus did.

Debbie's Story



Debbie Fitzgerald, Director of Community Transformation

Previously, I taught community health nursing clinicals. Everywhere we went, we saw brokenness, people short of help, struggling, and discouraged.

I spoke with Sarah about trauma healing and community development. I know there are people in the community who see any food pantry and soup kitchen as contributing to, or keeping, people stuck in poverty.

We were talking about how we can serve the people we serve more holistically. How can we focus on community development?

Organizations were saying they needed help and when the Community Assessment came out, it just brought more fuel to that fire. I just kept wondering, where is the church in all of this, and how can the church really step up and help?

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I HAD A SINCERE LONGING TO BE BACK IN THE TRENCHES TO ADDRESS SOME OF THE BROKENNESS WE WITNESSED.

Debbie's Story

I really wanted to make a difference. That is when I started talking to Sarah. That is what brought me here. When I started here, the two prongs of my position were to try to serve the people that we serve here more holistically and to try to engage the churches in the community to serve.

GOD AT WORK

I have seen God working in my life in tremendous ways. I definitely felt that working at Horizons was a calling because I really loved my job before. When I look at my resume, I see that every few years I find new opportunities. Every single one of them has prepared me for something that came next.

I love teaching and having students. It was not an easy decision to make. I explored multiple ideas that would allow me to do both. Ultimately, I was faced with a decision. In the short time that I have been here, I feel that God has done amazing things in my life. First and foremost, He has taught me the value of showing up and taking whatever is the next step. It has been liberating to be able to speak freely to people about Jesus.

THE VALUE OF PRAYER

I've definitely been learning about the value of prayer. We started doing prayer groups on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to spend time with people and other leaders in the community.

As I studied my new role, I heard the expression, "What God wants to accomplish in His communities, He has already laid on the hearts of His leaders." We need to find out what He has laid on the hearts of His leaders, look for trends, look for where we can join, and where the church can go.

We have been praying for more than two solid years. We have a lot of people praying over a lot of things. Some of those individuals have started their own prayer groups in their own places. The more people out there praying, the better.

The Bible says, without plans, people perish. We do have to have plans, but we know to hold loosely to them. Who knows what God will do in this place. He does new things every day. I see Horizons continuing to be more and more an outreach of the churches.

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**I WOULD LOVE TO SEE CHURCHES
MOBILIZING ALL OVER THE CITY.
RESTORING THE CHURCH'S PLACE IN
THE COMMUNITY IS A VERY BIG HOPE
OF MINE.**

Horizons puts Jesus right in the center of everything we do here. The only other place I have seen Jesus so central to everything is the church. We are an extension of the church here at Horizons.

Raymond's Story

I have been at Horizons since the beginning of August 2021. I was working out at Titan Wheel before that. But I knew there was something different ready to happen. I kept telling my wife I was ready to move on. I knew we were coming into a season of transformation.

My wife came across a mass email sent out about a building manager and janitor position here at Horizons. I thought, you know what, I am going to fill this application out. I prayed about it and thought this was a place God was calling me to.

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I BOUGHT A PAIR OF WORKBOOTS AND I TOLD GOD, "I BELIEVE THIS IS GOING TO BE THE LAST PAIR OF WORK BOOTS I EVER BUY."

I had a vacation planned for the last two weeks of July. I interviewed at Horizons on a Wednesday. That Friday, I was at work and the whole sole of my boot fell off, so I duct taped it back on. I called my wife and told her, "I think I am going to go ahead and put my two weeks' notice in."



Raymond Steadman, Director of Recovery

She said, "Are you sure that is what you are supposed to be doing?" And I said, "I believe this is what I am supposed to be doing."

I went back in from break and talked to my boss and said, "Well, since I am already planning on using my two weeks of vacation, I am going to go ahead and put my two weeks' notice in." I put my notice in, and I was on vacation when Sarah called and offered me the position. She said that I could go ahead and give them the notice and I said, "I already did."

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THE TIMING WAS ALL GOD.

Before I came here, me and a couple of people from church would go to the Welcome Inn a couple of times a week and pass out food. On Friday nights we would go down there and do an actual meal with a service and worship. We got in pretty close with the management there and they gave us free reign. When I was on vacation the Welcome Inn closed and when I started at Horizons, I knew a lot of the people from Welcome Inn.

For a couple of months, I jumped in doing what I had been doing anyway and then everything played out. Addicts Victorious talked about coming up under Horizons. It was my background that led from being the janitor and building manager to the director of recovery for the Addicts Victorious program.

GOD FLIPPED THE SWITCH

I grew up in Northern Indiana. Both of my parents were ministers. You know what they say about pastors' kids? They go way out in the deep end. So, I went way out in the deep end. I ended up in a lot of trouble and spent a couple of years in prison. I lived both sides of life.

I wouldn't change a thing. It is a lot easier to relate to people if you have been there. I have experienced the side of drugs. I was an alcoholic before I graduated high school. Before I was 21, I already had two felonies. Maybe I had four felonies.

God flipped the switch. I went to a Christian discipleship rehabilitation center. The prosecutor was trying to get me seven years in prison because I was a repeat offender. I got into the program as part of my plea bargain. It really changed my life. I went through the program and stayed and worked there. I met my wife and when she was pregnant, she wanted to move home - to Quincy.

I fell away from the church for a while. We went on vacation to Mexico. I started getting back into my habits. I started drinking every day and everything was going downhill. My wife knew, and I knew, it just wasn't going to work. I had a realization one day when we were talking that there was only one thing that was going to fix this - getting plugged back into a church. Or we weren't going to be married.

Raymond's Story

We ended up going back to church and it was a hundred miles an hour. I was at the church for a little under a year and I was voted in as a deacon. That was almost seven years ago. I became an ordained minister in 2016. About five years ago I got plugged in with the Welcome Inn. We passed out Christmas presents to people in December of 2020. After that we brought food in until they were shut down.

FOCUSING ON THE GOOD & OFFERING HOPE

It is easy to get caught up in your current situation where you should focus on the day to day. This world is depressing. The only thing you hear are the things going bad in people's lives. I think it is important to focus on the good things and we tell people the good things that are happening. It encourages people and gives them hope.

The purpose of Horizons is to offer hope. To show the love of Jesus. To be there right next to somebody and pull them through the fire. Ultimately, it starts with food. Food gets people through the

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JUST LIKE GOD MADE AN IMPACT IN MY LIFE, I WANT TO DO THE SAME FOR OTHER PEOPLE - LET THEM KNOW THERE IS HOPE.

doors. We just want to do whatever we can to make an impact in people's lives.

Let them know that they don't have to stay where they are at. Who I was is what many people saw as impossible, because a lot of people saw me as an impossible situation. What many people call the "installment plan." Meaning, you are going to be in and out of jail or prison your whole life. Just because I spent a couple of years in that cycle and every time, I got out I would be right back in. So, no matter how good things looked on the outside, I would end up right back in trouble. That's a lot of people who come through these doors. If God could do it for them - he could do it for me.

When I was growing up, I depended on my parents' relationship with Jesus Christ. I didn't have my own relationship with Jesus. I saw church and religion as rules and regulations and do's and don'ts. I thought, "I am going to live my life the way I want, and nobody is going to tell me anything."

In my own life, I had to be taken out of the whole environment. I couldn't prosper in that environment. No matter where my mind was, I always seemed to go back. You have to come to a point in your life where you realize you need a change, and you want to change, and you will do what is necessary for that change.

Eric's Story



Eric Thoren, Director of Food Service

I came from a home of drug use and alcoholism. I had a rough upbringing. About the age of 10, I started dabbling with alcohol. By the age of 16, I had tried every drug there was on until I was about 30 years old. I tried to hide my hurt and pain from what I saw growing up by numbing it with drugs and alcohol.

Two weeks before my 30th birthday, I went in and talked to my then boss at the car dealership. For some reason, I just spilled my guts. I had two DUI's and I was getting ready to lose my license. I told him that I was a drug addict, an alcoholic, and all of the things going on in my life. I laid it all out there and the conversation ended very awkwardly. A couple days went by and nothing was said. I was just waiting for the ax to drop.

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MY BOSS CAME INTO THE OFFICE AND HANDED ME A BIBLE. HE SAID, "I HEAR WHAT IS GOING ON, I KNOW WHERE YOU HAVE BEEN, AND I THINK THIS IS WHAT YOU ARE SEARCHING FOR."

He sent me from Jacksonville, Illinois, over here to Addicts Victorious in Quincy. This was 2011. I went through the Addicts Victorious course. The first couple of days I was just going along with it because I wanted to keep my job. There was no real heartfelt movement in it.

Wednesday night, one of the directors of the course invited me to come to church. It was one of those uncomfortable situations where you feel like the minister is talking directly to you. Through that service I felt like I was being called out in a room full of strangers. The pastor gave an altar call and I said, "You are right. I am done trying to do this myself." This led me to doing Addicts Victorious classes back in Jacksonville. I had my pastor to help guide me, but they turned over the reins. They said, "We believe that once you turn over your life to Christ, that you are a new creation, and you are a new person."

I married my wife in 2015. I worked with her before and knew who she was, but I never once thought about dating her. When I became a Christian, I started praying for God to show me a wife. He was like, "Right over there!" We dated for eight months and then were engaged for two years. She graduated college, we got married, and then moved over here to Quincy.

I worked at that dealership in Jacksonville until we moved to Quincy. My boss is still a spiritual father to me. He had all girls, so I am kind of like his adopted son. He comes over, he visits, and my children are like his grandchildren.

GOD'S PLAN

I worked at a hospital for almost six years in food and nutrition: stocking, as a lead, and a supervisor. I was very comfortable, and I would probably have ridden it out to the end, but again, God, doing God things, had a different plan.

After my wife and I got settled, we found a church and I met Raymond. We started doing bread ministry. We went to public housing and handed out bread. It was an opportunity to pray for people and build relationships. I really enjoyed it.

My wife and I started praying because we had a dream and a hope that someday we would be able to open up a pregnancy shelter. After the Madonna House closed down, it was really heavy on our hearts. We were getting pretty in depth with it and then my wife got pregnant with twins, and we put everything on hold because everything was moving so fast. We quickly realized that our vision was no longer our vision and instead what everyone else wanted and needed. It didn't feel right.

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**AT THAT POINT WE STARTED PRAYING,
"LORD, OPEN DOORS THAT NO MAN CAN
CLOSE AND CLOSE DOORS THAT NO
MAN CAN OPEN."**

Eric's Story

We prayed for that for about two years. As I was working at the hospital, set in my ways and feeling pretty good, there was a gentleman at church who had just taken over at a retirement community who needed an executive chef. I went to culinary school in 2005. He asked me to come in and talk to him about it.

I knew what an executive chef was, and it was not a family friendly job and required long hours. I told him I wasn't interested. He called me with corporate on the phone and the amount they offered kept going up significantly. Three different times I shut the door. They called back a fourth time. My wife and I were praying about it, and we said, "We have shut this door three times, pretty solid. Is this what we need to do?"

I took the position. It was exactly what I thought it would be. I was working sixteen-hour days and five to six days a week. It was not family friendly. I prayed over it and talked to God about it. I really felt at peace about going in and giving my resignation. I woke my wife up and told her I was resigning. That did not settle well!

I resigned. I prayed and fasted for three days. I read my Bible. I went to church that Sunday morning. Raymond had just started at Horizons in August; this was late September. He came up to me and said, "You have been on my heart all week long." And nobody knew what had happened with my job.

Raymond continued, "You wouldn't happen to be looking for a job, would you?" I wrote up my resume and gave it to Raymond, and Raymond took it to Sarah and then Monday morning I promptly got a phone call from Sarah asking if I could come in for an interview. I came in for the interview and Sarah is just grinning ear to ear. She already had it in her mind that I was getting hired. When I came in, Sarah told me she was looking for a "food champion."

I would have never left the hospital to come here. I worked hard to get to where I was. God orchestrated it. When you feel lost and don't know what to do - rest assured God has a plan, and it will be fulfilled.



Eric, talking with a Horizons guest

Jessica's Story

My first big concrete Horizons moment happened when this building was being built. Sarah had asked me to come and sing for the ribbon cutting. Before that, my kids have always done food drives for Horizons on their birthdays, so we have gotten to be a part of the donation process. Two years ago, when I was a stay-at-home mom, Sarah asked me to come in and chat with her.

I was really not looking for a job at that point. I knew, clearly, that God had called me to be at home with my kids and had really paved the way with my employer at that time for that to happen.

I spoke to Sarah about an open position in the food pantry. I felt a lot of hesitation with that. Motherhood doesn't come as naturally to me as working does. I had been working really hard to protect my time with my kids. We ended the conversation with, "I would love to be here, but now is not the time."

They said they would keep me in mind and then waited about 30 more seconds before they were ready to talk to me again! I came back and talked to them. The conversation had shifted to how this could be an opportunity for me and my kids. They painted the picture really well.



Jessica Cornwell, Pantry Manager

They made a whole area with desks for my kids and even had name tags made for them. They let me know that when I am here my kids can always be here and they are always welcome. My kids are always running around, helping in the dining room, wiping tables, and stocking shelves. My oldest daughter, who is more of a social butterfly, loves to shop through the food pantry with whatever adults are volunteering and the guests that are being helped. All of a sudden, working here became very easy.

All I know is that I am called here, but I am never sure what that means exactly. I love to organize and talk to people, so this was a really natural fit as it requires constant organization. The more blessed we are, the more needed that skill becomes.

I'M SUPPOSED TO BE HERE

I was feeling a lot of unrest. I was feeling ineffective. I had a really good solid faith and I knew how God was working in my family and home. I knew my purpose within the four walls of my house but I felt very ineffective in the community in general.

Working at Horizons was an immediate way to put feet to it. Instantly that day I knew exactly what I was doing. I am feeding people today. I am ministering to people today. In my own way. We all do it so differently. The longer I am here the more I see that we don't need to mold and shape into the way other people minister here. There is a really



clear reason that Debbie ministers to people the way that Debbie does, that Raymond speaks to people the way Raymond does, and the way I speak to people the way I do. You can tell that God ordained ministry that way.

Although my current role is in the pantry, I feel so open handed with it, that if God brought the perfect person in to be in the pantry, I would be okay to move somewhere else. I just know that I am supposed to be here some way or another. I don't really care what that looks like.

Lauren's Story



Lauren, Kitchen Manager

About four years ago I wound up homeless in Quincy. It was quite a treacherous journey being homeless for the first time in my life. I utilized the services here at Horizon's and came through the line. It was the only good nutritious meal I would get daily.

I found people here that prayed with me and connected me to the Well House (Christian transitional living for women) and stayed there for

eight months. That was where I really started to get some structure back in my life.

After about three weeks of staying there, Raymond and Eric mentioned there was a position open as a cook. I have been working in kitchens since I was 15. I graduated from Le Cordon Bleu in 2011 in St. Louis. Cooking has always been in my background. I always wanted to cook, but I didn't have a kitchen when I was homeless or a way to cook for friends.

I came here and volunteered for a week and then they hired me on. I was a little nervous at first as it had been a while since I worked, but I think I fit in really well. I have been working here for about eight months now. I recently just got a house. Eric and Raymond helped me get a car and now that I have a place of my own, my kids will come live with me again and go to school here.

I have always had a job where I had to be creative and come up with stuff. I love all the volunteers and people that I have met in the community. With all the different churches that volunteer every day, I have broadened my spectrum of support. Horizons helps me to stay on the right path and be the mother that I need and want to be for my kids. They have become my family here.

Tisha's Story

My story begins in 2012. I was drinking really really bad, and I got in trouble here in Quincy with a hit and run, but I lived in Missouri. Once you go over across the line they can't come get you unless you are convicted. So, I ran on it for four years. I was also still drinking. I got into more trouble in Missouri with four DUI's and one hit and run.

My aunt told me I couldn't keep doing this and I either wanted to live or I didn't. She said, "You are not just going to live behind bars here. When you get up to the good Lord - he knows what you are doing, and you will live in prison there too."

I stood trial in Missouri, and they showed me grace. They dropped everything down to misdemeanors. I didn't have any felonies. The good Lord blessed me. I knew I was going to have prison time in Illinois. My aunt said we are going to drive you to Illinois, and you are going to turn yourself in.

I told her, "I can't." I had been running from this for 12 years at this point. I was looking at seven to twelve years. She brought me over and I turned myself in. And low and behold, I didn't serve one day in prison. It was the grace of God. I think they also took into consideration that I went through a really bad divorce. I lost my kids and everything else in the process. I just gave up.



Tisha Reeves, Kitchen Manager

I walked into court one day and they court ordered me to go to The Well House. This was in 2017. I did not want to hear about God. The Well House is Christ centered. I was there for nine months. They truly had to totally break what was in me: the hate, the anger. I had to volunteer at Horizons and comply with what The Well House said, or I would go to prison.

When I first started coming to Horizons, I didn't want anything to do with the people. I told them to keep me off to myself. I didn't like people. That wasn't true. I totally like people; I just didn't want to be bothered by THEIR people. Horizons didn't Bible beat me. They just lived. They lived a good life. Over that time period God transformed my life.

I have been sober for three years. It would have been six years, but I had a fall. But even then, they loved me back to health. I saw what they had, and I wanted it. I got hired to work at Horizons in September of 2017.

The person I worked for at Horizons, who just retired, was a huge mentor for me. I had 500 community service hours. I was a determined worker. When I started getting involved with people, they saw I was truly a people person. I mainly deal with the volunteers now and Lauren does the cooking. She is the culinary manager.

I have just grown from there. It has been a journey. This is my best life ever here. I had a lady GIVE me a three bedroom trailer here. I do feel like God

rewards us. Now I talk to one of my kids. I now have a grandson. This is a new season for me. God continues to take me in different directions.

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I JUST WANT TO GIVE BACK. NOT JUST TO HORIZONS, TO ALL PEOPLE, LIKE GOD'S PEOPLE GAVE TO ME.

Horizons saved my life. They meet you no matter where you are at. They see you. They could say, “She’s not ready.” They never say that. They are going to love them to be ready. That is what makes Horizons special. Love them no matter what. Who is to say the words you say, won't make them ready. Here - it doesn't matter if you are ready or not. They stand on the fact that Jesus said feed my people. And that doesn't mean just by food. They love them into life.

“

AS THE SAYING GOES, "FROM FAITH COMES HOPE. WITHOUT HOPE YOU HAVE NO PURPOSE. WITHOUT PURPOSE YOU HAVE NO MEANING AND NO LIFE." I FOUND HOPE HERE.

Rhonda's Story



Rhonda Altbilbers, Horizons Volunteer

My heart is in a place to take care of people. During the pandemic I was in lockdown and hadn't been going to church, and when I went back to church a little voice said, "Go."

“

I ALWAYS EAT LUNCH WITH THE GUESTS IN THE DINING ROOM. GUESTS ARE FAMILY.

I had intended to volunteer at Horizons before the pandemic. The voice told me to "go" and I did, and I have ever since. I think it is so important that a judgmental society understands that we can't understand, until we have walked in someone else's shoes.

I believe that life is a path to God. God is still in the same place, all of us wander away. How can we judge people whose path is different from our path? It depends on where they came from and what happens in between.

I will do whatever is needed. Sarah asked what I would like to do as a volunteer and I said, "I would like to serve God. I will do whatever." I started out in the kitchen and then one day they needed a volunteer in the food pantry. It is definitely my passion. You get really up close with the people. It gives me the opportunity to have a glimpse of their life.

Everyone has a story. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share one of the many stories God has given me.



Sarah working with students at Baldwin to make bowls

Sarah remembered, "In 2017, we launched a fundraiser called Empty Bowls. It helped us tell the story of what was happening at Horizons. The idea behind the "Empty Bowls" event was to send everyone home with an empty bowl as a reminder of all of the people going hungry. Our biggest Empty Bowls event had over 1,000 people coming together to share a meal in community. The momentum for the work grew as the churches and community became more involved and aware of the need.

"We took the unpainted bowls into our community schools and painted the bowls as a combination art

and community project for the students. Then the process moved to glazing and firing the bowls. It was a very laborious process. One long winter I moved every bowl from my car to the art room at Baldwin School to use their kiln to fire the bowls. It was an exhausting process and I dreamed of having our own kiln.

"I researched the kiln they used at Baldwin. Once I discovered the kiln cost \$3,300, I decided to forgo the purchase. Horizons was scheduled to receive a grant award. At the end of the awards program the presenter announced there were two additional grants to be awarded. Horizons happened to be a recipient of one of those grants. The grant just happened to be an unrestricted award in the amount of \$3,300. The exact amount of the kiln.

"I wish we would have recorded all of the times stories like this happened. One time, Mark left to go buy hamburger buns. He came back to Horizons because he forgot his wallet. By the time he returned, someone had donated the exact number of buns we needed for our meal that day.

"Another day, our cook Donna was in the kitchen by herself. No volunteers had shown up to help on this particular day. She was really kind of frazzled and

didn't know what she was going to do. She said a guy walked in the door and said, 'I was just walking by and wondered if you needed any help.' He came in and helped, and then she never saw him again.

"We talk about our backdoor miracles all the time. We used to ask Mark to stop praying for things. We would pray for flour and then have too much flour! We experience at least one backdoor miracle a day. They might seem small, but when you put them all together—it is huge!"

GOD PROVIDES

Debbie shared where she has seen backdoor miracles, "We once received a call for a patient that needed food. The organization said the patient preferred fresh fruits and vegetables as much as possible. In a food pantry, we have mostly canned or boxed items. Jessica and I were in the pantry looking around trying to fill this box for her. We literally had one lime!

"I came into my office and sent an email to the person that had reached out to us and told her we didn't have much, but we were doing the best we could. I typed the email and then went back into the food pantry. Somebody rang the bell and the garage door came up and it was a huge donation of nothing but fresh fruits and vegetables.

"You see that God had been at work planting, growing, and harvesting those vegetables all before we knew we needed them. He works so far ahead of what we know we need, and He provides



Fresh fruits and vegetables being delivered

for us. God had already been making those provisions for months and months. He said, "You need food? Here is more than you could ever ask for!" It is not a small thing how He speaks to us in such specific ways.

"One day as I was giving some students a tour, I told them about the handmade scarves that were donated to us and how it was too bad they were all gone. Before we even left the food pantry, Brandon came over and said, "I don't know what this is, but someone brought this in." We opened it and it was another bag of scarves that someone had made.

"More recently, the hospital called us and said they had 150 coats they wanted to donate. It had been unseasonably warm up until that point. Almost immediately, the weather changed dramatically and got really cold. The coats were already and distributed to our guest before they were needed.

"There are so many needs that are so tremendous, so urgent, and so great, that it is easy to move on to the next thing--and you don't even realize the answered prayers."

Horizon's Mission

IN THE HANDS OF JESUS

Rhonda shared, "For me, the purpose of Horizons is to be the hands of Jesus and do what needs to be done. Do it with guidance, but without judgment. Come alongside people and show them where God is in hopes they will join Him.

"Horizons is here to meet people's needs, maybe not in the way they thought. For example, I became very concerned with the homeless issue when they closed the hotel. Raymond told me to keep praying. God wasn't saying anything. Raymond said again to keep praying. One day I was praying, and it was getting to be winter, and God said, "Blankets."

"I came back to Raymond and told him that God had said blankets. We collected almost 100 blankets through my son's jujitsu academy. We handed them out at Horizons. Just the other day I was reflecting back, because sometimes you get busy, and you aren't sure where God is, and I thought about how the blankets were a home. They were a roof for people, and they could take the blankets wherever they went."

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THE PURPOSE OF HORIZONS IS TO LOVE THE HURTING AND THE LOST, TO STAND IN THE GAP IN PRAYER, TO BRING PEOPLE TO JESUS, TO HELP STRENGTHEN, AND GIVE HOPE TO THOSE THAT HAVE LOST HOPE - THAT IS WHAT WE DO HERE. - LAUREN

RESTORATION

Eric said, "To sum up Horizons in one word - restoration. There are a lot of hurt and broken people that come through the doors for lunch. There are a lot of hurt and broken people that come to volunteer or do community service. The mission is to love. To love and restore the way Christ did - offer hope."

Looking Forward

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES

Mark said, "I know from the very beginning, Horizons has not tried to bite off more than it can chew. There have been other opportunities for other programs and other things to come along and we said no to a lot of things because we just wanted to remain excellent with food and food relief.

"We have learned that we have done our very best to establish trust with other agencies. Sometimes guests have fear and doubt creep in and they don't complete the task- they don't get to the place they need to go to help them in life. So, do you just do more to help them overcome that? Part of the answer is yes, but do you start to bring some services closer to them to help out?

"Examples would be our "Faith & Fitness" program and Addicts Victorious. We would like to bring in more agencies. When we walk with someone over to a table to talk to someone there is a lot more success there. We have invested so much time in building relationships and trust and walking people through really rough moments. We get to do

ministry when people are at their most talkative. We are afforded a unique opportunity because we get to be around a dinner table when people are so much more at ease. "

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GREATER IMPACT

Jessica shared, "One thing that feels really key right now is that we are at a stage where God is providing so many opportunities for us to create environments where discipleship is happening. The volunteers that we have now have a sense of ownership. Natural discipleship is working within our walls.

"I underestimated the power and impact this is making on the people working here. We knew the obvious impact on our guests. The impact on our staff and volunteers has grown tremendously as we have become more intentional and purposeful in what we are doing."

God is in This



Staff member, Kimberly, praying with lunch guest

Sarah said, "If you want to talk about building the plane while flying it, or inventing the wheel every step of the way, that's exactly what we have done with Horizons. It has really just been a matter of showing up and trusting. God has been so good to make up what I lack – what we lack. When I didn't have the knowledge that I needed to complete a

task, He connected me with someone who was an expert. He still does that to this day. I know a little bit about a lot of things, and enough to recognize when I need help.

"All of the amazing people that have come alongside me through this journey have been an incredible blessing. Sometimes as I drive through town, I'll go block by block and think about how I know this person, and that person, and instantly feel so blessed that I know all of these amazing people because of Horizons. It is so easy to see how God uses us together in community. It is amazing to see how God has brought us here and woven us together."

“

I KNOW GOD IS IN THIS. I KNOW THAT I AM KNOWN BY GOD. IT IS AN INCREDIBLE REASSURANCE FOR ME TO KNOW THAT.



A PLACE FOR EVERYONE

Raymond said, "This is a place for everybody. No matter where you are in life, no matter where you are in your walk with God, or no matter what your gifts or talents are - this place has a purpose for everyone. You could be a donor feeling the love through giving, or a guest who comes through our door every day using our services.

"I know all of our staff love this place. I know none of them regret being here. This is more than just services and food - it is a community. People come in here and volunteer and love being here just because of what they feel and experience here. It is something different. It is because God is involved in everything that takes place here."

“

WE HAVE AN AMAZING TEAM HERE. IT IS ALL GOD.



Memoirs
by
Maureen

Life Storyteller, Maureen Klues