

# BRICK BY BRICK

The Haven Newsletter



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## A Night at The Haven: How it Came to Feel Like My Home, Too

*A priority need for The Haven as opening day approached was identifying volunteers to work through the night, and I considered applying. I wondered, though, if I could offer residents anything helpful, and if I could handle situations that might arise. At the information meeting I attended, Director Chris Nolan and Assistant Director Jennifer Kerr were reassuring. Chris said we would find the residents not that different from ourselves – in most cases, people who have been coping with difficult circumstances before being blindsided by some misfortune.*

We're told about the screening process for residents as well as volunteers, and the rules to which all agree to adhere. Our role as volunteers is to be respectful, welcoming and willing to listen. We don't need to solve people's problems or give them advice, and we shouldn't try. For safety, there are cameras to monitor inside and outside of the building. For emergencies, first responders can be summoned at the touch of a button from the main desk. Chris or Jen will be on hand for at least part of each evening to help volunteers feel prepared.

So I find myself entering the front door of the Haven just before 8 pm one evening during the second week of operation, ready to give overnight volunteering a try. Chris is already reviewing information with my partner for the shift, Rev. Mike Jordan of the First United Methodist Church. This is Mike's first night at the Haven, but he has extensive experience as a shelter volunteer in other communities. Chris observes that the Haven is lucky to have a number of volunteers who have worked in shelters before and who will be able to mentor the rest of us.

Chris reviews the list of residents who will be with us for the night. Both men and women will be staying at the shelter this evening, but no children. Residents must be pre-registered, and must check in at the facility between 4 and 7 pm each night unless they have arranged in advance to come in later in order to attend a goal-supporting activity like an AA meeting or a church program.

Chris shows us around. The washer and dryer, as well as extra blankets and paper supplies, are located in the small but well-equipped kitchen. There are sign-up sheets for the laundry and the showers to make sure everybody gets accommodated when the shelter is full. A sign on the wall reminds everyone of what Chris says are the two main rules at The Haven – be respectful of each other, and be considerate.

It's dark now; residents have mostly come inside and Chris has introduced us. One heads right to bed, but others lean against the counter or pull up folding chairs on the kitchen side of the large volunteer desk, so we can all sit facing each other and talk. We catch up on the activities of the day, and there is some gentle teasing among the residents. As the evening progresses, the talk turns more personal, about how they came to be here and where they hope to go. One resident had been sleeping in a car before applying here; one had been living in the woods. One talks about the journey which brought him to the North Carolina mountains from out west; another describes the urgency he feels to find work to support a child. Still another recounts how much the friendliness of the other residents has meant. "I feel at home here," the resident says simply.

By 9:30, Chris leaves for home, encouraging us to call him if we have any questions. At 10 pm, with no prompting from us, the residents get up and head for their sleeping quarters. One flips off the sleeping area light switch, and in no time, all is quiet.

Mike has brought work with him, and settles down in the small front office to get it done. I am starting to feel sleepy; I lean back in my comfortable volunteer chair, and put my feet up on the ottoman. I alternate reading my book with dozing. I'm occasionally awakened by people saying a few words in their sleep, or by some gentle snoring. It reminds me of Haven Board President Sarah Pouser's description of her overnight shift: "It's like taking a red eye flight from out west," she said, "everybody's just trying to get comfortable and get some rest."

About 1:30 am, with all quiet, I decide to follow Chris's suggestion to use a vacant bed to get some rest. As I lie down, I remember one resident talking about how when you're a tall person trying to sleep in a compact car, you wake up every time you move. I'm grateful that both this resident and I can stretch out in comfortable warmth this November night.



CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

At 6 am, the first resident gets up, goes into the kitchen, and puts on a pot of coffee (thank you!). Soon others are stirring. Mike turns on the lights at 6:30, and we wish everyone good morning; we are soon joined by Jen, who comes in to see everyone off. Residents, who must be out by 8:30 am for the day, seem eager to get on with progress opportunities they have planned. One has a lead on a possible apartment. Another has plans for job hunting. Someone who has only slippers to wear will be checking at Sharing House for some shoes. Another is about to embark on an educational program. As the residents prepare to leave, I find their hopefulness – and their courage – contagious.

I'm usually a person with a bad memory for names and faces, but the people I met this night, and details about their stories and their challenges, are vivid to me as I write this. They feel important to me, like family. So when Jen asks when she can schedule me overnight again, I pick a date. Can you be my partner next time? To volunteer, call (828) 877-2040 or visit [www.thehavenshelter.org](http://www.thehavenshelter.org).

#### MEET THE STAFF

Chris Nolan • DIRECTOR

Jennifer Kerr • ASSISTANT DIRECTOR



*On a frosty Halloween night, The Haven's Director, Chris Nolan, and Assistant Director Jennifer Kerr opened the shelter's doors to our first residents. A week later, we talk about their experience so far.*

COVER STORY AND INTERVIEW BY ANNETTE CAMPBELL

Both Chris and Jen are seasoned professionals who combine a deep passion for working with the homeless with a remarkable breadth of life experience. Both are creative and articulate, and it is an energizing experience to hear them play off each other's ideas about the promise of the Haven as a vehicle for transforming people's lives.

Chris has an easy directness about him that makes you feel he is prepared to meet people wherever they are, no matter how dark or insecure the place. Originally from Kentucky, Chris holds a Bachelor's Degree in Educational Psychology and Counseling and a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and over a decade of experience in that field. He was completing an internship in Asheville when colleagues who admired his abilities encouraged him to apply for the Haven position. His past professional life includes interesting forays into other lines of work, including a time in interior design, and success as an entrepreneur in a commercial cleaning business. Chris also brings another dimension – the direct experience of being homeless himself during a difficult period in his life. Chris credits the support of people who saw and appreciated him for who he was for helping him get back on his feet. He knows from first-hand experience what people need most when they are homeless, and he wants to bring that to the residents of the Haven. Chris moved himself and his two dogs to Brevard so he can live very close to the Haven and become a part of the community.

Jen, who is a native of Henderson County, spent many successful years in real estate and business development before the collapsing economy forced her to look in a different direction. After assessing her skills, she decided to attend A-B Tech to direct her affinity for connecting with people into a career in social work. On her first day on a

work study job at a homeless shelter, she found her calling. Assigned to work with a man just out of prison, she learned he had been out of contact with his mother and longed to return to her. Jen called all the typical sources, churches and service organizations, to help him get a bus ticket, without success. Frustrated, she decided to try something outside the box, and contacted a friend with the Christian Bikers, who came through with the necessary funds. Jen says the satisfaction of seeing that man on his way to a new life was so much richer than closing real estate deals that she knew this was what she was meant to do; she told her mother that night, "This was the best day ever!" Jen finished her associate's degree in social work and is now working on her bachelor's degree. She and her two daughters, who encouraged her in taking on this new and demanding role at The Haven, are all in college at the same time!

Chris and Jen both are pleased to be working in a shelter that has as its only agenda helping homeless people find a safe and supportive environment where they can chart a new course for their lives. Both speak with admiration of the vision and determination of the Haven board and its volunteers and supporters, and the remarkable achievement of having taken the project from an idea to a paid-for facility with its doors open in less than three years. Chris, whose experience also includes rebuilding luxury cars, confesses that he almost felt a need to look under the hood and kick the tires of The Haven to see if it wasn't too good to be true. After two months on the job, which includes bringing new perspectives and suggestions to some aspects of the organization's plans, both feel that what they saw is what they are getting, and are excited about the possibilities.

As Chris and Jen reflect on how the first week of operations has

gone, they relate with satisfaction how they have already seen people who came in withdrawn and exhausted start to become relaxed and communicative. There is a dynamic of kindness and consideration that seems to prevail among the residents, volunteers and staff. Residents are even starting to bring back stories of successes to share with them. Moments later, a resident comes to the door with exciting news – he has a lead on a seasonal job that may come with

living quarters provided. Do they think it's too late for him to call for an interview? They encourage him to use the Haven phone to try. Soon he is back – he's been invited to the job fair later in the week. He and Chris head for the kitchen to get a cup of coffee and strategize about transportation. I say good-bye to Jen, and as I leave, I think what a privilege it is to be a part of the Haven, with the staff, the residents, the volunteers and all of you who support it.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



### Who is eligible to stay at The Haven?

Men, women and families with children who are without adequate shelter will be candidates for The Haven. An evaluation will be completed by the professional staff with each prospective adult resident. Rules and regulations, which residents must commit to follow, are explained at that time. There will be a 24 hour evaluation period during which a background check and goals assessment will be completed. Because children will be residing at The Haven, certain kinds of criminal histories will make a person ineligible to stay here. Likewise, people cannot stay at the Haven if they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Residents must agree to alcohol and drug screening when the staff feels this is necessary. Unaccompanied minors age 16 and 17 will be considered for shelter on a case by case basis, with the Department of Social Services acting as liaison.

### How long can people stay at The Haven?

The hope is to support residents in moving on to a stable living situation within about three months. However, there is no firm cut-off date. The staff will be working with the residents and will monitor their efforts to meet mutually agreed upon goals. The Haven is designed to be safe, restful and welcoming, but it will not provide all the comforts of one's own home. Privacy is limited due to the close quarters. Entertainment like television is not available. The residents cannot remain at the facility during the day. When the facility is busy, residents will need to sign up for access to the laundry and the showers, and wait their turn. Residents will need to be patient with others whose temperaments, opinions and habits differ from their own. We anticipate The Haven will live up to its name for people in need, but that they will want to move on as soon as they are able.



## Holiday shopping on your mind? Consider a gift to the Haven!

- If someone asks what they can get for you, what about a financial donation to the Haven in your honor...or in honor of a friend? We are still seeking operating funds to carry us through our first year serving our people. If you have received but not yet answered our recent appeal letter, why not do it now?
- Donate your time in honor of someone – we will be happy to acknowledge your commitment of a day a month or more in a role where the Haven needs help.
  - Drop off supplies and food. Current needs are coffee, cleaning supplies, and twin-sized mattress pads. Prepared food for weekend dinners when The Bread of Life is closed are also a priority. The Haven can also use uplifting reading material for adults, and books, toys and games for children.
- An important reminder to our friends over 70½: This year may well be the last chance for taxpayers age 70½ or older to take advantage of an up-to-\$100,000 annual exclusion from gross income for otherwise taxable individual retirement account (IRA) distributions that are qualified charitable distributions. Such distributions aren't subject to the charitable contribution percentage limits and can't be included in gross income. This tax break is set to expire after Dec. 31. The provision allows a taxpayer who is 70½ or older to contribute a total of \$100,000 in IRA assets to one or more qualified charities. The payout can satisfy the required minimum distribution. The donor gets no deduction, but neither does he or she have to report the payouts as income. The gift must pass directly from the IRA sponsor to the charity, which sends a letter confirming the gift. Qualifying donations can be made to a broad range of schools, churches and public charities, but not to a nonpublic donor-advised fund or foundation. Contact your tax professional for more information.

## OUT & ABOUT The Haven in the Community



**Back on August 20**, “Rockin’ and Swingin’ for the Haven,” our major fund-raising event of the year, really did rock! Even our energetic event committee was overwhelmed by the outpouring of interest and generosity – the 150 participating guests far exceeded the target number, and business support continued to pour in right up through the week of the event. Everyone enjoyed the food and gracious hospitality of the Glen Cannon Country Club, the music of The Dangerous Gentlemen and Friends, and each other’s company. Over \$6,000 was raised through ticket sales and auction proceeds. We salute Committee Chair LaTrelle Renaud, and colleagues Mary Adams (designer of the awesome décor), Jane Adkinson, Renee Bruce, Marcia Millar and Amber Zachary. Believe it or not, the committee is already thinking about how to top this next year, and it won’t be easy!



**October 16** was a beautiful sunny Sunday, and a milestone for The Haven: our first Open House. Over 100 supporters dropped by to see the almost complete facility and meet the staff. A number joined the ranks of the volunteers.

**Later in October**, at the Brevard Halloweenfest, Board members braved blustery weather to talk to parents about the Haven and its aspirations and needs while children enjoyed their own activities.

**RED LETTER DAY! >>> OCTOBER 31** The Haven housed residents for the first time!

**November 12-13**, Members of Transylvania Home Builders Association provided materials, constructed and installed bunk beds which comply with special specifications and complement the mattresses given by the Brevard Music Center. Their generosity makes our residents’ rest safe and comfortable.

**November 12–20**, National Hunger and Homeless Awareness Week.

- Rosman Elementary School fifth-graders collected and donated over 3,000 rolls of toilet tissue to provide for the residents of the Haven!
- Rosman High School students organized spaghetti dinner and prepared desserts on November 17 to raise funds for The Haven and The Bread of Life. Student art work was auctioned as a benefit, and students also donated money and toiletries throughout the week to help this cause. Thanks to Beth Branagan, who served as liaison, and all the students who took this on as a project.

THE HAVEN OF TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY • P.O. BOX 25, BREVARD, NC 28712

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To help keep printing and mailing costs down, this newsletter will be available electronically. If you would like to receive it by e-mail, please notify us: [news@thehavenshelter.org](mailto:news@thehavenshelter.org).