

Good Works, Inc. – A Community of Hope



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Celebrating 40 Years!

Keith Wasserman, Founder/Executive Director

*"I made the WIDOW'S heart sing, I took up the case of the STRANGER, I was a father to the FATHERLESS."
(Job 29:12-13)*

October, 2021

Greetings with JOY and gratitude from the community of HOPE,

What is most important to me is that the people we serve and interact with know that they are loved. We continue to cultivate a community of gratitude as we persevere in loving and serving adults and children who are facing hardships, experiencing suffering, along with life altering circumstances. Of course, we do our best to demonstrate this through listening, making healthy meals, doing repairs at people's homes, welcoming people who are experiencing homelessness into a safe and 'home-like' environment, providing people with things they need through the Transformation Station.... and more. But what is critical to me is that people *feel* loved, understood, respected and are given dignity. We seek to do our best to communicate "we see you". Equally so, we work hard both at meeting the need to be needed (which we all share in common with those we serve), and creating a place for people to give and give back.

IN SO MANY WAYS, Good Works is a testimony of what results when a community comes together to support an organization or mission. While Good Works has *many* moving parts, we know that we are sustained by many different people, families, churches, organizations, and foundations who believe in us, and who believe in our mission and vision. Thank you!

I have written previously about my need to learn how to "die" to being thanked and appreciated. I often say when I am speaking around this subject that those of us who have raised teenagers understand this. Today I am struggling with how to endure the unhappy and accusatory reactions of those we must confront at the Timothy House (albeit gently) with the inconsistencies between what they are saying and what they are doing. My co-workers and I had to ask one of the residents who refused to turn in medication as required at the Timothy House, why they didn't turn it in (as required in our house rules), and why they gave some away. They reacted with a nasty and accusatory tone condemning us for what we asked. It became obvious to us that this person was not in recovery and was still conning and blaming. We left the conversation with a deep sadness. I share this because this happens often. We do want to love and accept people where they are. We just can't allow them to sabotage others in the house who ARE in recovery. The work we do is hard.

SO MUCH of what others observe on the surface does not reflect what goes on behind the scenes. Many people don't see how intentional we are at structuring things for volunteers before they come, how much time we take to document communication when someone calls The Timothy House or the Transformation Station, or how much intentionality we have in setting up each Neighbors Helping Neighbors visit. Oftentimes, people also don't see how much we grieve and even shed tears because we are on the front-lines of so much hardship and heart break. Those who know us know we really are doing our best, even though we also fall short. But God knows our hearts and examines our motives and empowers us to keep on loving.

TRUE STORIES

Carol was one of the first people who stayed in our home on Elliott Street soon after we opened Good Works in 1981. I remember her for two reasons (1) She said she was from a place I had not yet heard of called Appalachia and (2) she spoke so fast I had to ask her to repeat herself several times. Since those days, I have learned a lot more about

Appalachia, especially something about the people, beauty, values, needs and history. I have also learned more about how to help people slow down when they speak.

Some time ago, I had lunch with Kevin at Chipotle. We were sitting outside at one of the tables talking and suddenly he said, "I am homeless". I stopped eating, looked at him and said, "Kevin, you are not homeless". Puzzled, he looked at me and said, "well... I'm living in *your* shelter". I paused and said, 'Kevin, you are not homeless. You are a man who right now is without a home'. That event moved me even further into the conviction that we must separate what has happened to someone from their identity as a person. Words matter.

Back in the late 1980s and before we named The Timothy House, there were many days where I was the only staff at the shelter. I remember answering the phone and eventually doing a phone interview with a man who had been in prison for 35 years. I was around 31 years old at the time. Soon after the phone interview he arrived at the house. I invited him in only to learn that we were the first place he had come to after being released from 35 years in prison. I remember sitting on the couch across from him thinking that he had been locked up longer than I had been alive. It was an unusual and rare feeling that I have not had since. It was a combination of feeling like being with him was a privilege, and not knowing what to say. In my mind I thought 'the world has changed so much'. In my heart I remember feeling gratitude for the opportunity to talk with him.

We knew something was wrong but we could not figure out what it was. As I sat in the back office talking with one of my co-workers, we discussed what we thought was going on with this couple who had been staying for about a week. We just could not figure them out. Suddenly the phone rang. It was the city police. They were looking for this couple. They soon arrived from different directions in plain clothes with guns drawn to arrest them. After the couple left, we went up to their bedroom to discover that they had tied several sheets together in what we thought was a plan to exit the second floor by climbing down from the window.

A man in his 70s rang the doorbell. He did not speak English. He did speak French and fortunately (which is very unusual) one of our residents at the time spoke French. This resident translated the story. The man claimed to be a professor from Italy who was walking across the US from California to New York. We really did not know what to think. As you can imagine, we have heard lots of stories. Our staff at the time went out and got him a photo of Athens to take on his journey and he left the next day. Several months later I received a letter and a photo copy of an article from the New York Post. The headline was "Italian Professor reaches NYC".

IN THE NEWS

- *We had hoped to plan an event in Athens for DAY IN THE LIFE this year but because of our concerns about everyone's health and safety in light of COVID, we don't think this would be the right timing. Please visit www.goodworksdayinthelife.net to learn more about our vision for Day in the Life. In the right time, we still hope to bring together Good Works supporters for a time of **"Education, Inspiration and Motivation"** similar to the Good Works WALK (which we held for 17 years) in order to learn together again about how to best care for our neighbors struggling with poverty and homelessness.*

IN CLOSING this month, I would again ask for your prayers and words of encouragement. This hard and difficult time we are experiencing feels extended. I sense that this could be true for some of you. Let's keep encouraging one another!

Love is a verb,

Keith Wasserman



Neighbors Helping Neighbors



Friday Night Life includes "nine square"